

North Western IFCA Quarterly Meeting

28 September 2012: 11.00 a.m.

**AGENDA
ITEM NO.
9**

SCIENCE REPORT

1ST MAY TO 31ST JULY 2012

GENERAL

The science team have been extremely busy with planning and developing the Foulnaze Cockle fishery and South America seed mussel fishery this quarter. Project work and several consultations have had to be put on hold or pushed down the priorities list while being heavily involved with the finalisation of Byelaw 3 draft for consultation and the Ribble Fishery. A new junior science officer, Abigail Leadbeater, started in early July and will hopefully enable the science team to be brought back up to full speed and to further the NWIFCA's High Level Objectives.

Cockle stocks continue to remain at low densities across the North Wirral and Penfold Channel, with a viable stock being known only at the Foulnaze Bank. First reports of spat have been received from officers and the industry within the Penfold channel. Mussel spat has been reported on all beds within the District and in places, particularly Morecambe Bay, settlement has been dense.

SURVEY AND FISHERIES WORK

Foulnaze Cockle Surveys, Fishery Planning and Development

Officers conducted cockle density surveys at the beginning of May 2012 using one of the IFCA's zodiacs and then on foot for three days and for one of the days with trial use of a hovercraft as a survey platform. The use of the hovercraft was an effective tool for offshore or difficult to reach beds, allowing gear to be carried easily, good use of officer time and ability to get a larger number of stations sampled within one tide. A Habitat Regulations assessment had to be conducted for the use of a hovercraft and was completed by a science officer and agreed with Natural England. The results of these surveys were presented at the NWIFCA meeting 12th June 2012.

The Science team have been heavily involved in the planning and development of the fishery proposed on the Foulnaze bed. A large amount of time has been dedicated to the servicing of the multiagency meetings held at Fylde Council. Four were arranged and attended during this quarter with amendments and action points completed by science and other IFCA officers. The science team has been liaising with the environmental health departments during mid-July in helping to arrange additional sampling of the North Penfold cockle bed.

A Habitat Regulations appropriate assessment is required prior to the opening subject to agreement with Natural England. A few meetings were held with Natural England to discuss the issues around bird food requirements and potential mitigation measures during this time and written formal advice was received on 26th July.

Lytham North Run Cockle Survey

The three science officers, accompanied by four Wildlife Trust Marine Graduates, conducted a cockle survey on the North Run bed at Lytham on 19th July. Adult densities were low. However a spat settlement was evident, particularly in the wetter muddier areas. Officers will monitor the survival of

the spat, as due to its location there are concerns that it will wash out quite rapidly. We will also monitor for further settlement and carry out further surveys when necessary.

Flookburgh and Leven Island Cockle Surveys

Science and IFCA officers surveyed the Flookburgh and Leven Island cockle beds on 3rd and 4th July. There were no signs of significant spatfall as yet. This would be expected later in the season and beds will be inspected for first signs during the monthly sample runs. Adult cockle densities were low, with the occasional small dense patch.

Dee Mussel Inspection

Officers visited the Dee Mussel beds, in particular the West Kirkby bed, for an inspection. There is still a good stock present at this site with mussel mud starting to build up.

Morecambe Bay Mussel Beds

There has been a substantial mussel settlement all around Morecambe Bay this year and various inspections and surveys have been carried out.

Wyre End – the skear has seen a very dense settlement of mussel spat covering areas along the eastern edge of the Wyre Estuary and extending round into Pilling Sands. It is understood that this area is not historically fished for seed but left to grow to size, and officers intend to monitor the survivability of the mussel here.

Heysham Flat – inspections earlier in the year revealed a good settlement here and a thorough survey was carried out by science officers and the four Marine Graduates on 23rd July. There are two distinct areas, estimated to total 8ha, of very dense mussel growing on. For the most part this is well dug-in, although ‘clumping’ is occurring occasionally and local fishermen report some scouring already. There is interest from the industry this year for a hand-gathering fishery for seed mussel here and therefore officers have begun the process of Habitats Regulations Assessment with Natural England. The survey concluded at Conger Rock, as this has been used as a demarcation line in the past to protect the *Sabellaria* reef from trampling damage. Surveys of the *Sabellaria* are to be conducted in August when further assessment of the mussel in this area can be made.

Foulney – science and IFCA officers carried out a survey of mussels at Foulney on 7th June. Again there was evidence of a heavy spatfall having occurred on the southern region of the bed, along with some mussel remaining from relaying by the mussel dredge operators for the hand-gatherers last year. An inspection was made of the oyster trestles at Roosebeck on the same tide, which were found to be heavily colonised by spat mussel along with the surrounding skear.

South America and Falklands – earlier reports from the industry suggested another heavy spat settlement in these areas. A survey was carried out on 6th June, when the science officer was due to travel out to the bed by hovercraft owned by an Authority member. However the weather prevented access to the bed by this method. One of the operators travelled out by RIB to the bed with representatives of Natural England aboard. The science team received a thorough report, GIS data of the tracked bed and photographs. The area of settlement was assessed as being very similar in size, density and location as in 2011. At the same time the area was screened for the non-native Chinese Mitten Crab as a precautionary measure due to a recent report of a finding of an adult CMC in the Duddon estuary. No CMCs were found.

A further survey was carried out on 6th July, where a NWIFCA officer accompanied a Natural England rep aboard an industry chartered helicopter. A science officer conducted a ground survey at the same time, this time accessing the bed by RIB. Screening for CMC again took place with none found. Spring and early summer had been characterised by high winds, and it was evident that some of the

mussel had been scoured out as well as sand having been shifted across and on to the mussel bed. Much of the mussel although still extremely dense, was still 'hard-in' and well behind last years stock, when fishing had begun in early July. The area was estimated at around 60 ha, with average 50%, giving a biomass of around 15,000 tonnes.

There is significant interest in fishing the area and a Habitats Regulations Assessment has been completed. Authorisations will be issued should further surveys on 3rd and 4th August provide evidence that the mussel is ready for fishing. Otherwise we will delay issuing them until we have evidence that the mussel is ready to fish in order to avoid damage to the stock. It is hoped it grows on fast enough to become fishable before the autumn storms set in and wash it out.

SEA ANGLING 2012

The Sea Angling 2012 project has now finished its second quarter and is now well into Quarter 3, with surveys scheduled on both weekdays and weekends until the end of September. The project has run successfully, with 13 surveys conducted between May and July (25 total) and 57 anglers encountered, covering both shore and boat angling activity.

Early teething problems, with extremely low boat encounters, have been largely resolved through a combination of adjustments to the site selection protocol and better weather and daylight hours in the summer months.

The response from fishermen encountered this quarter has been almost entirely positive, with around 90% approached agreeing to be interviewed. The interviews with the anglers have been highly useful not only for completing the survey, but also for NWIFCA local knowledge of sea angling practices and activity around the district.

MORECAMBE BAY HYBRID FISHERY ORDER APPLICATION

The application is still with Defra. Ongoing work and negotiations centre on the issue of fishery rights and land-ownership. It is anticipated that once the present queries have been settled that Defra legal team will draft the Order for formal consultation.

PROJECT WORK

Razor Clam Fishery Development

Officers have tried to further the development of the fishery. A large amount of literature around the topic has now been collected and areas of further work are becoming apparent. Due to the time restrictions, the extraction of information and completion of literature review has not been furthered as quickly as NWIFCA had hoped. Several meetings were held with Intershell and Natural England to discuss the plans and timescale of the development.

Byelaw 3 Development and RIA

The science team helped develop the final draft of NWIFCA Byelaw 3. A science officer was involved with a conference call with MMO regarding amendments and the drafting, providing necessary information as required. The RIA was also amended and updated following the feedback from MMO.

Sustainable Fisheries Review

Project Inshore – at the end of May officers were informed that Project Inshore had been successful in obtaining funding and would be going ahead. The new initiative led by Seafish was officially launched on Friday 8th June coinciding with World Oceans Day. Recognised by the Fisheries Minister, Richard Benyon noted that Project Inshore "...should help to ensure that our inshore fleet

can continue to flourish, that fish stocks are managed sustainably and our marine environment is given the protection it needs”.

This now allows Seafish, the MSC and the consultancy, Food Certification International (FCI - who secured the tender to work on Project Inshore), to start working with IFCA's to plan for the three stages of the project over an estimated 18 month timeline.

Project Inshore will use assessments based on the Marine Stewardship Council Standard for sustainable fishing to produce tailored sustainability reports for every fishery around the English coast— around 7,000 boats. These will provide a roadmap that highlights best practice and provides an independent evidence base to attract targeted investment in further scientific research.

For some of the fisheries, this project may offer the opportunity to enter full assessment for MSC certification. For others they will have a clear plan to enable – in time – all English inshore fisheries to work towards the benefits of third party certification offered by the MSC.

The three stages of Project Inshore are as follows:

- **Stage One:** Project Inshore will look to analyse all inshore commercial fisheries (0-6nm) and their markets,
- **Stage Two:** To undertake an MSC pre-assessment of stocks regulated by IFCA's,
- **Stage Three:** To produce sustainability reviews, highlighting any gaps in data deficiency and ways in which the fisheries could be better managed (if needed).

<http://www.msc.org/newsroom/news/english-traditional-coastal-fisheries-make-plans-for-future-generations>

The Co-operative Society Social Goals Fund – disappointingly our proposals for projects to be funded by the Co-op Social Goals Fund were not successful, despite the fact that several were found to be of great interest. However the successful project was in effect very similar to our own proposal on Skates and Rays. They are recommending a project put forward by the Shark Trust which will include Yorkshire inshore waters as well as Cumbria and Lancashire and work with fishers to help them properly ID what they are catching, analyse historical catch data and inform a Management Plan. They propose to work round Whitehaven, Maryport and Fleetwood and we have requested that they engage with the IFCA's should they get the green light for this project.

Now that contact has been made with this funding resource we will be informed of any potential future funding rounds that we might apply to.

Wildlife Trust Marine Graduates Scheme – in 2011 the NWIFCA provided survey experience for the four Marine Graduates on placement with the Wildlife Trusts, which proved a worthy venture. This year has seen the development of this partnership with a more formalised agreement of training, supervision, work plans and outputs. A full day's training course has been developed which was attended by our new science officers as a good introduction for them as well as the Marine Graduates.

AUTHORISATIONS AND CONSULTATIONS

Hygiene sampling for classification of Razor Clam bed – Intershell/Mersey Port Health Authority

Liaised with the industry and MPHA to look into the ability for hygiene sampling for classification purposes to be undertaken in preparation for the clam fishery trial. Officers started to prepare Habitats Regulations assessment with advice from Natural England

**Brown and May Walney 1 & 2 and West of Duddon Sands Monitoring Fish Surveys-
Dispensation request
Mersey Gateway Pre and Post Monitoring Authorisation Request APEM Ltd**

Reviewed application for authorisation to complete required monitoring as part of license to build the Mersey Gateway Bridge. Officer contacted MMO and Natural England regarding activity as well as liaising with APEM Ltd.

MMO - Liverpool Wastewater Treatment Works Consultation

Concerns were raised over the moving of a waste water pipe out into the Mersey Channel. The Environment Agency had deemed the current placement was causing detrimental damage to the Saltmarsh and impacting upon conservation features. Officers followed up on the query and looked into the current status of planning.

MMO - MLP/2012/00082 Seaforth Terminal – Pre application scoping request consultation

Proposed activity reviewed and responded that an EIA should be completed.

Preesall Underground Gas Storage Application – NWIFCA submission by 6th June deadline, viewable on the IPC website: <http://infrastructure.planningportal.gov.uk/projects/north-west/preesall-saltfield-underground-gas-storage/?ipcsection=reprs>

National Grid North West Coast Connections Consultation - from 11 May to the 19 July 2012 National Grid carried out a consultation on the details of the six 'Strategic Options' identified as the broad options for routing of the North West Coast Connections project. Officers, along with input from Authority members, responded citing our main concerns as the potential detrimental impacts on marine life of electro-magnetic fields. <http://www.northwestcoastconnections.com/default.asp>

MEETINGS, WORKSHOPS AND COURSES ATTENDED

MEDIN – Marine Environmental Data and Information Network – all IFCA's are being trained for adoption of marine data and metadata standards in accordance with the European INSPIRE Directive on geographic data.

IFCA Byelaw Making Workshop – London – Science Officer attended with CEO a workshop regarding IFCA byelaw review and how the byelaw making process will work between IFCA's, MMO and DEFRA.

NWIFCA Quarterly Meeting and NWIFCA TSB Meeting

IT Services – meeting with Lake District National Park on upgrading and changing NWIFCA IT
Barrow Borough Council Wildlife & Heritage Committee Meeting – fielding questions about Several Order applications around Walney

ADDITIONAL

Knowledge Hub Instructions for TSB – Compiling guide for Authority members to join the Knowledge Hub

Aiding in the induction and training of new staff, and re-organisation of science office

Development of data sets for MapInfo for mapping with NWIFCA

Creation of MMO Current/on-going consultations with the district

General data and information requests from industry and other sources.

General vehicle and equipment maintenance and renewal

Communications

Over the last quarter, communications officer duties have included writing and disseminating press releases, conducting a NWIFCA website audit, preliminary drafting of a Communications Plan and the design of new publicity and communication materials. The new material included flyers, posters and a pop-up banner, which describe the background and basic remit of the NWIFCA and can be used at a wide variety of events such as conference exhibits and small community engagement events. More specific publicity, focusing on particular NWIFCA functions, may be developed as necessary for future events.

In June, the NWIFCA was invited to take part in a World Oceans Day event organised by Liverpool University in Liverpool city centre, which was a useful opportunity to put the publicity material into practice and engage with wider public stakeholders and the other marine organisations also exhibiting. Feedback from the event was positive and it is hoped that further opportunities to engage with the public will be found in the near future.

Science Officers
August 2012