

**NWIFCA Technical, Science and Byelaw
Sub-Committee**

31st October 2014: 10:00am

**REPORT
NUMBER**

6

**AUTHORISATION TO DREDGE THE AREA KNOWN AS BOX 1 IN
NORTH MORECAMBE BAY AS APPROVED BY TSB ON 13 OCTOBER: FURTHER
CONSIDERATIONS**

Aim of the paper: To report progress with the authorisation and further information received relating to the Box 1 area

Recommendation: TSB considers the information reported and decides if changes to the authorisation are needed

1. Further to the resolution of the special TSB on 13th October, officers have made considerable progress towards preparation of the authorisation for dredging of Box 1 (see Fig 1 below). Subject to approval of the Habitats Regulations Assessment by Natural England, authorisations will be issued to the same 3 vessels as previously authorised to fish starting Thursday, 30th October. This is the first suitable tide.
2. The paper below reports further information relating to Box 1 which was not available on 13th October and which may have affected the decision. It includes:
 - i. Recent GPS tracks showing that the northern part of Box 1 is accessible from the intertidal and could be fished by hand;
 - ii. Evidence from hand workers (uncorroborated by industry but IFCOs confirm the fishery is active) that the northern part of Box 1 has been fished for size mussel by hand over the last 12 months;
 - iii. Questions over the data presented by Mr Jones to the TSB on 13 October which leads to uncertainty over his assertion that the area was entirely inaccessible to hand workers.
3. Crucially, there appears to be a discrepancy between the low water line that was presented in the report and map that Mr Jones tabled at the meeting, and co-ordinates from a walk over inspection of the low water line on a 0.3m tide, carried out by the industry and provided to the Senior Scientist on 10th September 2014.
4. The Officers' report to the Special TSB meeting included a map of the area which used the co-ordinates provided in person by Mr Woods (an employee of Deepdock mussel grower in North Wales) following his foot survey on 10th September. It shows that the low water line does extend into Box 1 (blue line, points G to H to western perimeter of Box 1) as illustrated in Fig. 1 below.
5. The mapping provided in Mr Jones' report tabled in the meeting on 13th October, shows a distinct buffer or gap between the low water line and the northern boundary of Box 1, which Officers understood was the basis of the industry description of the Box 1 area being 'sub-tidal'.
6. The NWIFCA does not have the co-ordinates for the line in Mr Jones' map. The Senior Scientist has requested the raw data for both sets of co-ordinates so that if an error has occurred in the mapping this can be rooted out and the discrepancy resolved. However the

industry has not yet provided these although the requests have been acknowledged. The original request was made by email to Mr Jones on Wednesday, 15th October 2014 at 14:52 and repeated on Tuesday, 21st October 2014 at 09:58. The same request was also made of Mr Wilson on Thursday, 16th October 2014 at 12:02 and repeated on Tuesday, 21st October 2014 at 13:27.

7. Although it has not been possible to obtain GPS co-ordinates from Byelaw 3 permit holders of where they have hand-gathered size mussel as they do not log their positions, they describe the area they worked was all around point 'C' and further south from this northwest corner of Box 1 as shown on Fig. 1 below.
8. The red triangles in Fig 1 are waypoints taken by the Senior Scientist on a quad bike inspection of the area on a 0.6m tide on 10th October 2014. It can be seen that the area around point 'B' (north east corner of Box 1) was also accessible on foot. Officers arrived in the area one hour before low water and had to wait around 15 minutes for the tide to ebb enough to cross a narrow channel to reach this point, although it was visible above the water level on arrival. It would have been possible to have traversed this channel by quad or tractor.
9. As Members are aware the low water mark is constantly changing around the Bay. An OS base map has been used in Figure 1, which is clearly now out of date.
10. From GIS mapping an estimate of distances from the low water line (blue line) to the northern boundary of Box 1 has been made. Points E to B = 194m; Point F to the northern boundary = 128m.
11. Since Byelaw 3 permit holders became aware of the TSB decision to authorise the dredge fishery Officers have received a large amount of correspondence objecting to the description of the area in Box 1 as sub-tidal.
12. Fishermen assert that size mussel was hand-gathered from the northern end of the Box 1 area in December 2013 and provided a good income. Larger sizes of mussel fetch a higher price than small seed. The mussel here was described as some of the best mussel in Morecambe Bay.
13. Byelaw 3 permit holders assert that not only will the dredging remove mussel that could potentially persist to larger size but that as mussel moves around, dredging anywhere near intertidal areas, even from sub-tidal zones, could remove a resource that would naturally move on to the intertidal over time. They claim that since the northern area was removed from the authorisations to dredge (2012 onwards) mussel has spilled over on to the intertidal beds.
14. They maintain that dredging will have a direct and severe impact on next year's fishing for hand-gatherers, who have unlimited orders for any size of mussel.
15. Local fishers in the area assert that since dredging of seed mussel stopped in the northern area there has been an improvement in stocks of other fisheries. They claim that a lot of different species of fish have reappeared after many years of nothing. Tractor shrimp fishermen are getting good catches, and plaice stocks are good.
16. The claim that this is due to a change in environmental circumstances due to cessation of dredging has not been corroborated by the Science Team.
17. Officers comment that NWIFCA and previously the NWNWSFC would not normally in the past have permitted dredging so close to the shore. The hand working community of North Morecambe Bay has always had a concern that the impacts of large scale sub-tidal removal of seed mussel by dredging has a long term negative impact on mussel stocks in the area. The closer to the shore dredging is permitted; the greater the impact on intertidal stocks could be expected. This is difficult to prove and scientific studies have not been

conducted to this level of detail. However, there is a risk that the concerns expressed by locals have some validity. The Authority has a duty to ensure sustainable exploitation and it is much harder to be confident that large scale dredging is sustainable compared with the impact of intertidal hand working.

Senior Scientist and CEO
24nd October 2014

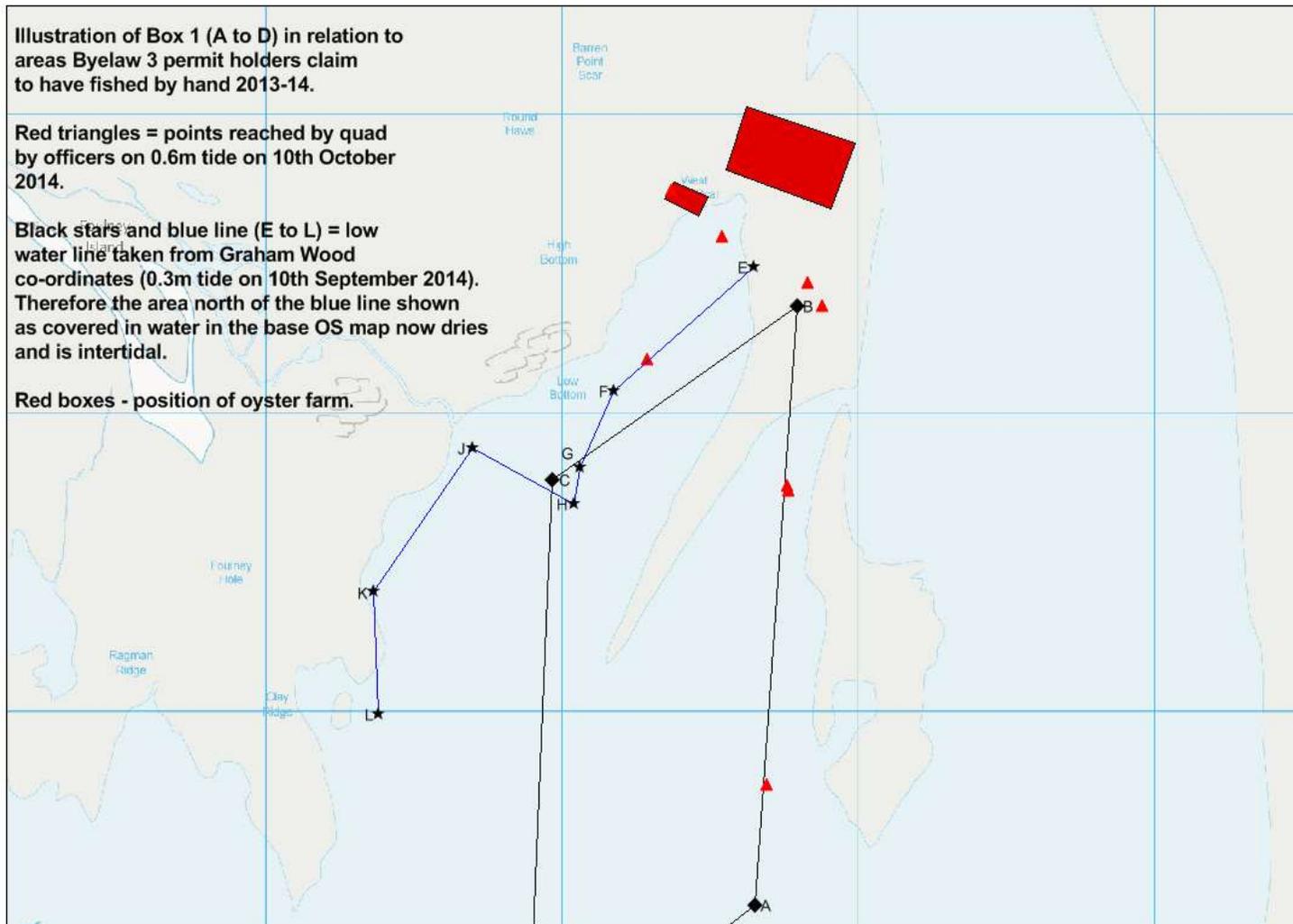


Fig. 1 Mapping to illustrate the areas of contention. Points A to D correspond to Box 1 dredge box. Blue line E to L corresponds to low water line provided by Graham Wood. Red triangles are waypoints taken on foot by Senior Scientist on 10th October. Red boxes are approx. positions of oyster frame

