

**NWIFCA Quarterly Meeting:
16th September 2021: 10.00 a.m.**

**AGENDA
ITEM NO.
10**

SCIENCE QUARTERLY REPORT 1st May 2021 – 31st July 2021

FOR INFORMATION

Purpose: To provide an update on science work in the last quarter;

Recommendations: Members approve the report.

This quarter, training has continued with new science staff. The majority of the workload has been completing an extensive survey schedule. The prioritisation of surveys, completion of HRAs, Authorisations and Permit Conditions for potential fisheries as well as being down one member of science staff has meant a continued reduction in some of the other work streams. Therefore the science report is relatively short this quarter.

The number of dispensation applications, marine consent applications as well as a range of other consultations has decreased back to normal levels since the high number last quarter.

1. MARINE PROTECTED AREAS IN THE NWIFCA DISTRICT:

a) NWIFCA MPA Monitoring and Control Plan

The rolling programme of review of HRAs for all activities in all sites continues to ensure HRAs are still fit for purpose and management is appropriate.

b) HIGHLY PROTECTED MARINE AREAS (HPMAs)

The government response to the Benyon review of HPMAs has been published (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/government-response-to-the-highly-protected-marine-areas-hpmas-review/government-response-to-the-highly-protected-marine-areas-hpmas-review>). On the whole the government accepted the main recommendation set out in the review and will begin introducing HPMAs by identifying a number of locations with English waters as a pilot. The identification of a shortlist of sites is expected in 2021 with designation in 2022.

c) St Bees Closure 5th March – 25th July

The St Bees Voluntary Netting Closure was implemented on 5th March and came to an end on 25th July. There were no detected breaches of the Voluntary Code of Practice.

2. NWIFCA RESEARCH PROJECTS

a) Razor Clam collaborative research

No change from previously reported – HRA and IFCA/MMO dispensations are in place. Awaiting for details on starting the survey.

b) **Whelk Fisheries in the North West**

Analysis of the data has been put on hold until after the cockle and mussel surveys and work to open fisheries has been completed. It is hoped to provide a report on the work carried out since 2019 at the November TSB meeting. The aims are to better inform management within the potting byelaw and identify further sampling which may be required.

2. WHELK WORKING GROUP (WWG)

A further meeting was held online in June of this multi-agency/ multi-area group. Various IFCAs are involved in reviewing their potting byelaws, regional size at maturity research and management options for whelk. Collaboration has been agreed to centralise useful data collected by the various organisations. Whelk Management Group (WMG) and SEAFISH have launched a Whelk Questionnaire that aims to gather information regarding anecdotal differences in whelk populations noted by fishers.

The Marine Conservation Society had previously invited submission of information on whelks for their Good Fish Guide and the consultation has now closed. New ratings will be published on the MCS website. Fisheries Management plans were discussed as a priority following on from the release of D&S IFCA's plans that were recently published on their website, including one for Whelk.

3. FUTURE INSHORE STRATEGIC HAND GATHERING IMPLEMENTATION GROUP (FISHGIG)

An IFCA based group has been set up with a representative from each IFCA to discuss the management of both recreational and commercial hand gathered fisheries. FISHGIG provides a strategic working group to focus upon shared solutions to future management, through both non regulatory and regulatory means and allows for the sharing of resources and ideas. A further meeting was held with attendance of the Angling Trust and Natural England. The final draft of the package of information is being completed and will be distributed internally to all IFCAs for comment.

4. OFFSHORE WIND LEASING ROUND 4

There have been six proposed new offshore wind projects in the latest round of offshore wind leasing. Three of these areas are within the Irish Sea. All of the proposed areas are outside of the district. Crown Estate are currently undertaking a Plan-Level Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) to assess potential impacts to European Marine Sites prior to awarding seabed rights. Further information can be found on the Crown Estate website with links to the process and maps of the proposed areas: <https://www.thecrownestate.co.uk/en-gb/media-and-insights/news/2021-offshore-wind-leasing-round-4-signals-major-vote-of-confidence-in-the-uk-s-green-economy/>

5. MERSEY ESTUARY WFD MONITORING

The third online environmental workshop for the Mersey Estuary Tidal Barrage project. This is led by the Merseyside Environmental Advisory Service (MEAS) who have been appointed by the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority to undertake some evidence-based environmental work to support the development of a Mersey Tidal Power project.

The workshop was attended by representatives from wide ranging environmental agencies both statutory and non-statutory with knowledge and expertise in the area of potential influence from the proposed barrage. This area stretches from the Ribble Estuary down to north Wales and out into Liverpool Bay, centering on the Mersey.

At the moment, the project is in the initial scoping stage where the aim is to take on board comments and questions from stakeholders in order to guide the direction of the next stages. In terms of fish/ fisheries, they are looking at carrying out multi-year duration surveys with an initial focus on some sectors and the potential to extend the scope later on. They are welcoming comments on commercial aspects to be taken into account, and the species that should be included. Their aim is to make all their data open source. They will be looking further into finding key survey periods and have listened to different strategies on how to focus this part of the study. After this initial stage of seeking input, they will move on to produce a more solid evidence plan. They are currently in the process of recruiting an EIA survey lead.

6. NWIFCA BIOSECURITY PLAN 2021-2024

A first draft of an updated NWIFCA biosecurity plan has been produced. Any further work on the plan will wait until after the new senior scientist is in post to allow for input.

7. COCKLE AND MUSSEL

A full survey report for Morecambe Bay was provided at the extraordinary June TSB meeting. A survey report on the rest of the surveyed cockle and mussel beds across the district and any further updates on Morecambe Bay stock were provided at the August TSB meeting. All surveys reports are available on the NWIFCA website. Information on fisheries that have opened and potential future fisheries are provided below:

Seed Mussel

Black Scar – Although black scar had received a settlement the layer of sediment under the mussel is not currently at a sufficient depth to permit dredging. As the season progresses it is looking less likely to develop into a fishery but the bed will continue to be monitored.

Perch Scar – The fishery opened as a seed mussel dredge fishery on 16th August 2021 and has been fished for one day by one vessel.

Heysham Flat – The fishery opened as a seed mussel hand-gathered fishery on 18th August 2021 and has not been fished. This is likely to the export issues with mussel from Morecambe Bay and the confirmed sighting of Chinese Mitten Crab in 2020.

South America – Opened as a seed mussel dredge and hand-gathered fishery on 30th July 2021. It has been fished for a total of 10 days by 2 vessels and has not been fished by byelaw 3 permit holders. Further inspection on 24th August 2021 concluded that the fishery would no longer be HRA compliant, due to the change in sediment depth under the mussel and exposed hard substrate. The change in condition of the mussel bed is to be expected with the weather, time of year and that the area had been fished. The fishery closed on 27th August 2021.

Size Mussel

Duddon Estuary (Hard Acre) – There is potential for a hand-gathered size mussel fishery. Further inspections will be carried out on the bed. NWIFCA has provided assistance in completing the Cefas bivalve mollusc production area application and commented on the

proposed hygiene classification sampling. Work will start on completing a HRA for the fishery in preparation.

Cockles

Newbiggin and Pilling Sand - After the resolution to open Pilling cockle bed as soon as possible and to consider Newbiggin on 1st September subject to HRA, a HRA was submitted to Natural England on the 5th July.

As this is the first year of reduced cockles stock in Morecambe Bay since cockle fisheries reopened in 2016, and due to the adult and juvenile stock composition, the HRA was escalated within Natural England for further discussion. At the time of writing, 6 September, formal advice from Natural England on the HRA is awaited.

The TSB vote to open the fisheries was subject to this advice, therefore these cockle beds were closed 1st September 2021 under NWSFC Byelaw 13A to protect the low stock. Once NWIFCA has received formal advice from NE a decision will be taken on whether a fishery would be HRA compliant and can be opened.

Ribble Estuary - There is evidence of a settlement on both sides of the Ribble. The cockle spat varies in density and is patchy but covers a large area on the Southport side of the Ribble. The beds will be inspected in early 2022 to assess if the spat has survived the winter.

8. MMO MARINE LICENCE AND OTHER CONSULTATIONS FOR THE QUARTER:

Heysham 1 Repair of CW Intake Wall Structure	MMO Marine Licence
Hesketh Out Marsh Habitat Enhancement RSPB 2021	MMO Marine Licence
Penketh an Whittle Brook Tidal Outfall Works	MMO Marine Licence
Barrow Docks Crane Relocation 2021	MMO Marine Licence
Deployment and operation of Floating LiDAR buoys	MMO Marine Licence
South Walney Channel Aquaculture Application	CEFAS Consultation
Cefas Endeavor Survey 2021	Dispensation
EDF Monitoring Sampling 2021/22	Dispensation
EA WFD Monitoring 2021	Dispensation

9. MEETINGS, WORKSHOPS AND TRAINING ATTENDED THIS QUARTER

Future Inshore Strategic Hand Gathering Implementation Group
Whelk Working Group
Mersey Tidal Power Project

Sea Survival Course

NWIFCA
2nd September 2021