

**NWIFCA Technical, Science and Byelaw
Committee**

8th August 2017: 10:00 a.m.

**AGENDA
ITEM NO.
10**

SMALL FISH SURVEY PROGRAMME DEVELOPMENT

Purpose: to update members and provide clarification on the development of the NWIFCA SFS programme

1. Concerns were raised at the June Authority meeting over the NWIFCA Small Fish Surveys. The Senior Scientist was not present to answer the queries, hence this report to members to clarify the situation.
2. The concerns raised focused on the resolution made by the Authority at the December meeting 'to approve the development of a Small Fish Survey Programme' and whether or not this had been forgotten and that the work was 'happening regardless'.
3. The last line in the Science Report to the June meeting does state "Surveys will begin on suitable tides", and this regrettably will have caused some confusion.
4. To clarify: the work being carried out at the present time is in order to develop the programme as agreed at December Authority meeting. The Senior Scientist is clear that this will take some time, and that the NWIFCA have to be realistic about what resources can be committed to it. It is a programme of work that could prove very valuable, but is not familiar to any of the current members of staff, and therefore a learning process needs to be gone through.
5. The first step of developing the programme is to find out what is doable and what isn't, and what skills exist between staff and if there is any training / improved experience required. The gear and the sites are all unfamiliar, and the initial action needed is to get out and use the equipment to discover what can and cannot be done realistically, and with which officers.
6. A good example of this has been when using the zodiac to run out the seine net. It has been trialed twice in the Ribble at Lytham. The first time it soon became apparent that the winds were too strong for the zodiac to manoeuvre sufficiently (blowing against the tide) and the attempt was abandoned. This is helpful to know, not just for the SFS work but when planning other work with the zodiac. The second attempt was more successful, and all of the equipment was tried out and some in-field fish ID training accomplished.
7. The same applies to the sites. From discussion with Adam Waugh at EA, the Mersey would be an excellent choice to focus surveys, and fill a gap left by EA. However, it may prove not to be practical. Foot reconnoitres have been carried out on the three sites. The next stage is to put out the fyke net at one site to see how it works and what the constraints are. This will need to be carried out at the other two sites, and likewise for the seine net from the zodiac.
8. Once it is possible to see how these trials have gone, and whether the sites are suitable or not, the Senior Scientist will start to put some thought into drawing up a document to table at TSB, detailing a schedule of surveys (most likely starting spring 2018), and showing the practical resource and time implications.
9. Questions have arisen about how the data will be used, and other IFCA's have been consulted on how their surveys assist in fisheries management. Six other IFCA's are known to conduct

SFS - Southern, Kent & Essex, Northumberland, Eastern, Devon and Severn and Sussex who are leading on the work for TAG.

EIFCA support the local Wildlife Trusts and Rivers Trusts which run fish surveys. Sussex use their data to compare with the breeding success of terns and to support the extension of an SPA, to monitor the colonisation of a managed realignment site, to monitor the overall health and value of certain areas and to monitor populations of commercially important species, bass in particular. Their data supported the recent Defra revision of Bass Nursery Areas, a piece of work NWIFCA was not able to contribute to due to lack of data. Their data is supplementary to the WFD sampling that EA do. It is also shared with Cefas and several students have used it for projects. Their own analysis is usually limited to number of species, relative abundance and Simpson's index of diversity.

10. In looking for assistance in practically getting our surveys off the ground, Steve Colclough from the Institute of Fisheries Management has offered and will be contacted in due course. He usually assists on at least one of Sussex's surveys a year. He is ex-EA and very knowledgeable and supportive of IFCAs' SFS work.
11. The Senior Scientist also considers that there are other advantages to carrying out this work, in terms of professional development of science officers, an important area that should not get over-looked and is included in the Defra High Level Objectives for IFCAs.

Mandy Knott
Senior Scientist
12th July 2017