

**NWIFCA Quarterly Meeting:  
6<sup>th</sup> July 2021: 10.00 a.m.**

**AGENDA  
ITEM NO.  
12**

**SCIENCE QUARTERLY REPORT 1st February 2021 – 30<sup>th</sup> April 2021**

**FOR INFORMATION**

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

**Recommendations:** Members approve the report.

This quarter has been busy with training new members of the science team. Training has involved both external and in-house training with the priority of getting officers trained for surveys and writing survey reports. The 2021 survey program has been condensed with cockle surveys taking place earlier in the year alongside the mussel surveys.

There has been an increase in the number of dispensation applications, marine consent applications as well as a range of other consultations. The increase is likely due to the disruptions in 2020 due to the pandemic and the predicted easing of restrictions.

**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) MPA Management**

Defra are currently looking at the management of MPAs to ensure all sites are progressing towards or are achieving effective management. Officers have provided information on all the sites within the NWIFCA district showing whether all commercial fishing activities have been assessed, where there are still outstanding assessments, what the risk of fishing is and if there is likely to be any additional management required. Most assessments have been completed and those which are outstanding have been assessed as low risk. Other than the netting assessment in the Solway Firth SPA which as previously reported will be completed over the following months.

**c) St Bees Closure 5<sup>th</sup> March – 25<sup>th</sup> July**

The St Bees Voluntary Netting Closure was implemented on 5<sup>th</sup> March. The closure was earlier than previous years due to early bird activity.

**2. NWIFCA RESEARCH PROJECTS**

**a) Razor Clam collaborative research**

Bangor University Shellfish Centre electro-dredge study – Amended HRA and MMO dispensation in place and Bangor University scientists are looking at potential survey dates over the next few months to start surveying on industry vessel.

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

There has been effort to process the backlog of samples which were collected in 2020. Size of maturity (SoM) analysis has started and it is hoped to provide a report on the work carried out since 2019 at the next TSB meeting. The aims are to better inform management within the potting byelaw and identify further sampling which may be required.

c) **Plastics in mussels**

Cumbria University project will re-start with a new student taking over. Mussel samples have continued to be collected and stored and will be provided to get the project up and running again.

**3. TAG meeting – 18<sup>th</sup> February 2021**

a) TAG discussed the following:

- AIFCA business plan
- The continued use of a document / information sharing platform
- MMO Fisheries Management Plans
- EA Citizen science fish survey
- Members update on research activities

**4. 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. The group met in March and has started to develop a draft package of information as a source for all IFCA's to use when deciding if management is required for hand gathering activities.

**5. 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/>

**6. BASS AND RAY ECOLOGY IN LIVERPOOL BAY**

Bangor University have provide a report at Annex A on bass and thornback ray ecology in Liverpool Bay. The project was EMFF funded and was additional to a project looking at evidence based sustainable management of the two species in Wales with the potential likelihood of shared stocks. The report highlights a potential bass nursery area and possible local spawning locations of the juvenile bass caught in the Wyre Estuary. Catches of bass were biased towards females indicating potential local spawning. For thornback ray the report

compares the  $L_{50}$  (length at which 50% of thornback rays are mature) of fish taken from commercial catch in Liverpool Bay with the minimum size for thornback ray in CSFC byelaw 9.

## **7. MERSEY ESTUARY WFD MONITORING**

A meeting was held by the Environment Agency to investigate the options of restarting WFD on the Mersey Estuary. As the Mersey Estuary is a highly developed and busy site, officers made representation of the potential benefit of restarting monitoring in the Mersey as a long term data set. Officers shared knowledge gained from trail sample conducted in 2017.

## **8. NWIFCA BIOSECURITY PLAN 2021-2024**

Work has started to update the NWIFCA biosecurity plan originally published in 2014 for the period 2014-2019. The plan has been updated previously, in 2019, but this was not completed or published. Officers have reviewed available data to update the key non-native species and any further species that have been found in the district that were not included or mentioned in the plan. The relevant legislation has been updated to reflect recent changes in protocols and reporting routes for stakeholders and the public should invasive non-native species be found. A draft of the Biosecurity plan for 2021-2024 will be provided at a future meeting for comment.

## **9. NORTH WEST MARINE PLAN IMPLEMENTATION TRAINING**

Officers attended online marine plan implementation training organised by the MMO. The training was to assist all public authorities taking authorisation or enforcement decisions that affect or might affect the UK marine area must do so in accordance with the appropriate marine policy documents under section 58 of the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 (MCAA). The training explained the 'Explore Marine Plans' digital service and how to access the data contained within this service, including data on marine licences, environmental designations and policy information.

## **10. CHINESE MITTEN CRAB SURVEYS**

Regulators have been asked if there is still value in providing quarterly reports on Chinese Mitten Crab surveillance as previously done. In one response the regulator highlighted why they could not use the reports, highlighting research into the life cycle of Chinese Mitten Crab and saying that the surveys are unlikely to find Chinese Mitten Crab. A copy of the research is awaited. The wider lack of responses suggests that the surveillance reports are not being used. Due to the time it takes to complete surveys and process the samples, surveying for Chinese Mitten Crab has been paused.

## **11. COCKLE AND MUSSEL**

At the NWIFCA March Authority meeting members discussed the 2021 close season in the context of the EU post Brexit ban on undepurated live bivalve exports from class B shellfish beds to EU countries. As agreed by the Authority a consultation with Byelaw 3 permit holders was carried out asking opinions on a delay to the start of the cockle close season until the end of May.

The consultation from 1<sup>st</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> April 2021 was advertised via the byelaw 3 permit holder's text message service and posted on the website. 13 responses were received with 12 stating the beds should close on 1<sup>st</sup> May as usual. 1 stating it could be of benefit for the beds to remain open but they would rather see an early opening to the 2021-2 season. After reviewing the responses, the beds closed on 1<sup>st</sup> May 2021 through the Byelaw 3 close season as usual. Responses also included mixed opinions on opening cockle beds early after the close season.

Any further decisions on the opening of cockle beds in 2021 is dependent on stock surveys of both mussel and cockle, HRA considerations, changes in allowing live bivalve exports to EU countries and changes to bivalve hygiene classifications.

Due to the cancelation of the TSB meeting and therefore no agreement on the recommendation, officers continue to collect the data necessary for a decision to be taken on the potential opening of cockle beds early, with surveys taking place in May and early June.

A full survey report will be provided to extraordinary TSB on 30<sup>th</sup> TSB. Due to the time of the meeting it is not possible to report the outcome of the extraordinary TSB meeting.

**12. MMO MARINE LICENCE AND OTHER CONSULTATIONS FOR THE QUARTER:**

Cumbria B5300 Emergency Works Crosscanonby 2021	MMO Marine Licence
Port of Fleetwood Revetment Project Neptune	MMO Marine Licence
Liverpool Marine Maintenance Dredging Disposal	MMO Marine Licence
Lytham St. Annes Sandwinning EIA Scoping Report	MMO Marine Licence
Canal & River Trust Ribble Link Dredging	MMO Marine Licence
Deganwy Marina, Conwy Shellfish Farm	MMO Marine Licence
Wallasey Embankment Toe Protection 2021	MMO Marine Licence
Parton to Harrington Sea Walls No 3	MMO Marine Licence
Eskmeals Firing Range Weapons Testing	MMO Marine Licence
Shellfish Farm - Front of Walney Island	MMO Marine Licence
Central Rhyl Coastal Defences	NRW Consultation
Gwynt y Mor Offshore Wind Farm Met Decommissioning	NRW Consultation
Deganwy Marina, Conwy Shellfish Farm	CEFAS Consultation
Conwy Marina Shellfish Farm	CEFAS Consultation
Shellfish Farm Front of Walney Island	CEFAS Consultation
Hull Marine Laboratory	Dispensation
AECOM - Mersey Gateways Bridge Environmental Monitoring Surveys	Dispensation
Maryport Aquarium Lobster Hatchery	Dispensation
CEFAS Nephrops Catch Sampling 2021	Dispensation
Wyre Rivers Trust Bioblitz 2021	Dispensation
Cefas Endeavor Survey 2021	Dispensation

**13. MEETINGS, WORKSHOPS AND TRAINING ATTENDED THIS QUARTER**

- Mersey Estuary WFD Fish Monitoring 2021
- Future Inshore Strategic Hand Gathering Implementation Group
- North West Marine Plan Monitoring Survey Interview
  
- MMO Marine Plan Implementation Training
- Mapchester MapInfo Training
- Emergency First Aid

**NWIFCA Officers  
18<sup>TH</sup> June 2021**