

**NWIFCA Quarterly Meeting:
16th June 2017: 11.00 a.m.**

**AGENDA
ITEM NO.
13**

SCIENCE AND SURVEY UPDATE:

11th February – 30th April 2017

Purpose: To provide an update on science and related work

1. Introduction

This report is for information. No decisions from members are needed at this time.

2. General

Another busy quarter for the science team, with a wide and varied workload. More detail and an update of key areas of work is provided below. The announcement of the General Election introduced a period of purdah for government agencies, which has led to delays in being able to progress certain aspects of work.

3. MARINE PROTECTED AREAS IN THE NWIFCA DISTRICT:

a) Marine Conservation Zones

Tranche 2 - West of Walney MCZ – Recover Objective. No further updates. Awaiting information from JNCC and Natural England via Defra. Fishing activity data within the NWIFCA District has been collated.

Tranche 3 – three estuarine sites Ribble MCZ, the Wyre / Lune MCZ, and the Solway MCZ. Discussion on-going with Natural England over knowledge of occurrence and distribution of smelt in these estuaries, with NE working with Rivers Trusts and EA to progress surveys for smelt. NWIFCA Small Fish Survey data will be fed into this if smelt are found.

b) Review of Fishing Activities in European Marine Sites

Work has continued on completing the Review of Fishing Activities in European Marine Sites; below is an update and summary of the number of assessments which have been carried out and number left to be completed.

- One document for each European Marine Site has been completed containing a list of activities not occurring within the site, for the audit trail;
- Eight documents have been completed containing activities that only occur on a recreational basis within the European Marine Sites. If the status of these activities change and the activity becomes commercial then the activity will be assessed;
- Thirteen assessments have gone through to the Test of Likely Significant Effect and have been completed and signed off by Natural England;

- Of the original activities screened into the Review, twelve assessments have gone through to Appropriate Assessment. Eleven of these have been completed and signed off by Natural England, and one is in progress (Dee Estuary – shrimp and light otter trawling);
- All assessments for the Solway Firth had been completed or were with NE for sign off;

However due to the boundary of the proposed Solway Firth Special Protection Area (pSPA) being much larger than the current SPA, a further two assessments have to be completed with activity that did not occur within the old boundary (trawling and potting). The netting HRA is being reviewed to take the new boundary into account with specific activity data from industry.

c) **Bait Collection Habitats Regulations Assessments**

The Senior Scientist has been in discussion with Defra and Natural England about a perceived change in course of action over assessing the impacts of bait collection in EMS. She has tabled this issue for the next IFCA TAG meeting in June to ascertain how other IFCAs are dealing with it. A December 2018 deadline has been set for management of damaging bait collection activities from both recreational and commercial gathering. Only baitworm digging and pumping, and crab tiling are to be included. IFCOs have been recording sightings of these. The HRAs will be completed site by site in due course. No management from current known activity levels is envisaged.

d) **St Bees Head SSSI – Netting and Bird Entanglement and Disturbance**

Members will recall previous reports from both the current Senior Scientist and Cumbria SFC on concerns over breeding seabirds nesting on the St Bees Head SSSI cliffs becoming entangled in nets set around the cliffs. Officers have been working with Natural England to progress management, and have convened two meetings, with licensed and unlicensed fishers. Natural England is also engaging with other users of the area in relation to other forms of disturbance. A full report and recommendation will be taken to the next TSB.

4 **COCKLE AND MUSSEL FISHERIES**

- a) A full report with survey results was tabled at TSB in May on the status of cockle and mussel fisheries in the District. Beds with potential for commercial fisheries are being monitored and re-surveyed throughout the summer. Members should be aware that current stocks suggest potential for commercial cockle fisheries at Leasowe on the Wirral, Penfold North on the Ribble, and Pilling Sands and Flookburgh in Morecambe Bay. There is evidence of ephemeral stocks of seed mussel developing at Heysham Flat, and a small area in the north of the Bay on the Falklands bed. Size mussel may develop into the autumn on Foulney in Morecambe Bay.

The closed season for cockles began on 1st May until 31st August so all beds remain closed.

b) **BIVALVE MOLLUSC WORKING GROUP**

A meeting was held on 19th April, the notes from which were provided to Members by email prior to TSB. Another meeting will be convened to discuss mussel stocks in early July.

c) **Bird Food Model and Assessing Bird Feeding Requirements**

Officers have been working with colleagues from Natural England, the RSPB and Cumbria Wildlife Trust to agree a practical and pragmatic way forward in ensuring the NWIFCA management of cockle and mussel fisheries takes full account of bird feeding requirements. Work is underway in the development of a 'live' stock status spreadsheet for all the beds in the District, and on an estimation of the amount of this stock that needs to be available for four species of SPA birds at any time of the year. Once agreed this approach and the figures will be presented to BMWG for industry to discuss. Officers will take the final proposal to TSB for approval.

d) **Balancing commercial seed mussel harvest and shorebird conservation PhD**

Officers continue to work with Al Feather from Bangor University in the furtherance of his PhD, which will result in a new bird food model approach for Morecambe Bay.

e) **Lancaster student projects**

Officers are also working with two degree students at Lancaster University who are carrying out projects to assist in understanding of cockle movements in Morecambe Bay. Specifically:

- an investigation into the temporal variations of Morecambe Bay channel movements and the relative influence of this upon cockle bed settlements;
- a desk study of cockle movements and influential factors.

5. RECREATIONAL ANGLING STRATEGY

The draft Strategy has been sent out to a number of clubs and individuals in the angling community, with a request for feedback. IFCOs continue to hand out business cards to anglers whilst on patrol. The angling@nw-ifca.gov.uk email address is starting to be used more and has received emails and requests for information about fishing in the district.

Angling email: angling@nw-ifca.gov.uk

6 SMALL FISH SURVEYS (SFS)

Officers have been trialing and familiarising with the fyke and seine nets with IFCOs. Further discussion with EA has confirmed that the Mersey has not been sampled since 2009 and NWIFCA SFS would be useful to plug gaps in data, particularly in relation to anthropogenic influence in such a heavily modified water body. Three out of the EA nine sites were chosen due to their relatively higher diversity, and site visits carried out. Surveys will begin on suitable tides.

7 CEFAS C-BASS PROJECT - POPULATION STUDIES IN SUPPORT OF THE CONSERVATION OF THE EUROPEAN SEA BASS

Officers have been working closely with Cefas Bass Tagging project to facilitate tagging work in the District. The project aims to gain better understanding of the biology of European sea bass, including distribution, migrations and behaviour in UK waters, and now specifically in the north east Irish Sea. It will involve new electronic tagging and mark ID studies working with commercial fishers and recreational anglers.

Officers attended MMO meetings with the commercial sector in Barrow and Blackpool over the new bass regulations. Victoria Bendall from Cefas gave a presentation on the project which was extremely well received, with a great deal of interest and support from fishermen. The Senior Scientist would recommend that TSB invite Ms Bendall to a future meeting to present to Members.

Electronic Tagging: three commercial rod and line bass fishermen have been identified who are willing to catch bass for the tagging project. Tagging will take place either aboard the fishing vessel or on the Solway Protector and will be undertaken by Ms Bendall from Cefas.

T-Bar Tagging: Ms Carroll continues to work with recreational anglers to identify key individuals to attend a training session to learn how to tag bass. Anyone interested please email Abi Carroll on a.carroll@nw-ifca.gov.uk.

8. Moorside Nuclear Power Station – NuGen

Officers have continued to attend EIA meetings with other regulators to discuss and provide comment on baseline reports containing data which will feed into the EIA. Due to the amount of documents that have been produced, Officers have focused on reviewing the following Marine Ecology documents produced by NuGen:-

- Commercial Fish Baseline
- Subtidal Ecology Baseline
- Marine Fish Baseline

However, it has recently been announced that investors in the new-build have pulled out and the project is on pause while new investors are found. This news also affects the North West Coast Connections National Grid routing of 400KV cables from Moorside nuclear power station. Science officers will reduce the amount of time spent on these projects at the present time until they have been officially re-started.

9. HEYSHAM POWER STATION VISIT AND FISH SAMPLING

Members will recall that concerns have been raised on many occasions over the cooling water intake at Heysham Power Station and the number of fish that are entrained in it. EA have provided their sampling data from the bins carried out during 2010-12. Natural England invited NWIFCA to join them and MMO in a visit to the power station. This issue was discussed, and on-going monitoring was proposed and supported by EDF Energy, NE and NWIFCA. Adam Waugh from EA Estuarine & Coastal Monitoring & Assessment Service also considers it worthwhile, not least because it will serve well as a training opportunity for small fish identification. NE are taking this forward with EDF, and working to progress the necessary security checks to allow admission.

10. MMO LIAISON MEETING NEWCASTLE

Officers sent a letter of concern on behalf of the NWIFCA to the MMO Marine Licensing Team over lack of early consultation with the fishing industry leading to cases of conflict during survey and construction activities of certain developments. MMO responded with an invitation to meet in Newcastle. Other MMO teams took advantage of our visit to add additional meetings including the Fisheries Management Team, the Fishing Vessel Licensing Officer and the Marine Conservation Team. It was a worthwhile day, improving understanding, communication and relations between the two organisations.

11 MMO Marine Licence and other consultations this quarter:

MMO Marine Licence consultations

Network Rail CP5 42 & 43 Cumbrian Coastal Protection Works
Cleveleys Emergency stabilisation of existing coastal defence groyne
Ormonde Offshore Wind Farm (OWF) Licence Variation

Byelaw 1 dispensations

AECOM Mersey Gateway Surveys
Ocean Ecology - Year 3 post construction fish monitoring surveys at West of Duddon Sands
Offshore Wind Farm
CEFAS Irish Sea Nephrops Catch Sampling Programme

Meetings and Training attended this quarter

Lifting / slinging and crane training
Marine Protected Area management conference calls - monthly
NW Marine Plan meeting with MMO and Natural England
Northwest Tern Group meeting with RSPB, Natural England, Cumbria Wildlife Trust and
Morecambe Bay Partnership
Solway Firth Partnership Advisory Group meeting
ATV training
Estuarine fish sampling and northwest smelt - conference call with EA, Natural England, Wyre,
Lune and Ribble Rivers Trusts

**Science Officers
25th May 2017**