

**NWIFCA Technical, Science and Byelaw
Committee**

16th May 2017: 10:00 a.m.

**AGENDA
ITEM NO.**

7

COCKLE AND MUSSEL FISHERIES REPORT

Purpose: to provide an update to members on the District cockle and mussel fisheries

MUSSELS

1. **Solway Sub-tidal Mussels**

Two authorisations for carrying out scientific dredge were issued as agreed at February TSB. The third operator has not been back in touch following a request for further information.

2. **Solway Cockles – Middle Bank**

No authorisations for carrying out suction dredge for stock data collection were issued. The operator has not been back in touch following a request for further information.

3. **Duddon Estuary Mussels – Hardacre**

No mussel present, as the cobble in the channel is covered by sand ripples with some exposed cobble between the sand ripples.

4. **Morecambe Bay Mussels**

i. Seed Mussel Data – the authorisation to carry out scientific dredge to ground-truth acoustic ground discrimination data is currently no longer required. The operator will use floating camera sled to ground truth AGDS data instead. It appeared that the areas over which the dredge boat would survey were going to become contentious at BMWG;

ii. Seed Mussel Resource:

a) North Morecambe Bay - there have been at least two widespread settlements in the intertidal areas in the north of the Bay – Foulney, Foulney Ditch, and Low Bottom to the oyster frames. The mussel is in high abundance and in a range of size classes. These are very mixed and occurring in patches, changing from one zone / mix of sizes to another within a few metres. There is some size mussel and it is expected that Byelaw 3 permit holders will focus on this once the cockle beds close from 1st May;

b) South America / Falklands – a heliflight revealed that South America is even more heavily sanded over than the past two years. There is a settlement to the south on the Falklands area (Fig. 1) and no sign of starfish at present. A further heliflight will be scheduled for the end of May, and a RIB inspection in June, in order to assess survivability and the prospects of a dredge fishery;



Fig. 1. Aerial photograph of Falklands showing the seed mussel area and surrounding sandbanks of South America – 28th April 2017

- c) Heysham Flat – has received a spat settlement. It is expected that further settlements will occur. Regular inspections will take place with the view to a possible hand-gathered fishery in late summer;
- iii. Heysham Flat Exclusion zone - currently there is little size stock on the skear, and access to it across Dallam Dyke has changed and is problematic with the channel becoming deeper again. The risk of incursion into the exclusion zone for size mussel is therefore currently low.

The exclusion zone remains. Requests from industry at BMWG to carry out a scientific study to assess damage from quad bikes and harvesting were explored by Science Officers and colleagues from Natural England and the Wildlife Trust. There are an inordinate number of variables affecting the skear, the mussel community and the *Sabellaria alveolata* reef. It is not possible to envisage collecting any data from which meaningful conclusions could be drawn. Officers had the same discussions last year and the situation has not changed.

COCKLES

Results from cockle surveys carried out is supplied as Annex A to this report.

5. **Wirral Cockles**

- a) Leasowe - there is potential for a commercial fishery later in the year should the stock persist in sufficient densities and grow through to size. A further survey will be carried out in the summer to inform TSB;
- b) Hoylake – IFCO and Port Health Authority inspections have revealed stock on this beach, and a survey to provide an assessment of stock will be carried out in due course.

6. **Ribble Cockles**

The cockle stock at Penfold North in the Ribble still persists in a dense muddy patch, but is growing far slower than predicted and has still not reached size. It will again be surveyed in the summer with the view to a potential opening in September should it have grown through and remain in sufficient densities.

7. **Morecambe Bay Cockles**

The Leven Sands and Pilling cockle fisheries close on 30th April for the closed season. Officers have been surveying stock on these and other beds in the Bay. Although not in the abundance originally predicted, it does look possible that there may be further low level fisheries in September, on Flookburgh, Pilling and Leven Sands. Surveys will be repeated in the summer to provide data to Members on which to make that decision.

8. **Assessing biomass of cockles**

Work is underway to gain a mean value for weights of individual size ranges of size and undersize cockle in all areas to complement work previously carried out by Bill Cook on size cockle in Morecambe Bay. This may result in different figures for different estuaries. These figures will provide a value for use in assessment of overall biomass.

9. **BIVALVE MOLLUSC WORKING GROUP**

A meeting was held on 19th April, the notes from which will be provided to Members by email prior to TSB.

Science Team
29th April 2017