

**NWIFCA Technical, Science and Byelaw
Committee**

7th August 2018: 10:00 a.m.

**AGENDA
ITEM NO.**

7

SCIENCE REPORT
14TH APRIL – 23RD JULY 2018

Purpose: to provide an update to members on the work of the Science team in the last quarter

Recommendation: that Members approve the report.

MARINE PROTECTED AREAS IN THE NWIFCA DISTRICT:

Marine Conservation Zones

West of Walney MCZ

1. MMO have been undertaking their formal consultation on management measures for WOW MCZ from 8th May – 13th July. The proposed measures will prohibit all bottom towed gear within the 12nm area of the MCZ. NWIFCA has received a copy of a substantial objection to the measures raised by NFFO - National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations.

Defra consultation on Tranche 3 MCZ sites

2. The consultation by Defra on Tranche 3 MCZ sites ran from 8th June until 20th July. Full details of the T3 sites in NWIFCA District were given at the June Authority meeting. We await the outcome of the consultation.

Assessment of Fishing Activities in Marine Protected Areas

3. Following around fifteen months of lack of clarity on what activities should be incorporated into a programme of assessments on recreational and commercial 'bait collection' and lack of agreement on responsibilities in terms of activities occurring within Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Defra have now made it clear that IFCA's must have completed HRAs and identified management on all the following activities within all EMS by end of December 2018:

- worm digging;
- worm pumping;
- crab tiling;
- shore crab gathering;
- winkle gathering;
- shrimp netting;
- bivalve gathering.

4. This will naturally divert Science Officers' work priorities so that this deadline can be met. It is disappointing that the decision-making history to this is so confused. The Senior Scientist has been asking Defra for clarity since March 2017, a fact that was addressed by TAG Chair in a letter to Defra in June 2017. This elicited a response from Defra saying the following:

6. *“It’s important to be clear that Defra’s expectations that regulators must manage activities within protected sites (whether SSSI, MCZ or EMS) to deliver the conservation objectives haven’t changed. That said I think it makes sense to park further discussions until we have had a chance to understand the outputs of the MMO report on bait collection/ digging due later this year. A large part of the problem with managing this activity is that the scale of the problem is not well understood. I understand there are plans for a workshop early next year to discuss options for management, this could perhaps include the cross-warranting issue where that would make a difference”.*
7. The MMO project to which Defra’s response relates began in 2016 when the MPA Management National Steering Group (NSG) began a project to better understand the risk posed by bait collection across the network of English MPAs, combining information from IFCA’s on the location and nature of bait collection activities, with information indicating the location and sensitivity of MPA features to identify areas. The purpose of the work was to generate a national picture of how bait collection may be affecting MPAs and to do this using a methodology which in the longer term would allow risks from different activities to be compared in a consistent way. The project was not completed and MMO staff diverted elsewhere.
8. Furthermore at the beginning of July 2018 IFCA’s were informed of a Natural England led bait collection and hand gathering Task and Finish Group, whereby a working group would develop a strategic method of determining the need for assessments, and a consistent process for taking these assessments forwards to management where required, recognising that bait collection and hand gathering is more of an issue for some IFCA’s than others.
9. NWIFCA Science Team have expressed their willingness to cooperate fully with the NE project and has been awaiting further data requests / engagement to progress this work. However following discussion at last week’s TAG meeting it is now evident that IFCA’s need to be progressing this work without any further delay.
10. NWIFCA have eighteen months’ worth of fully geo-referenced bait collection data from IFCA shore sightings, which the science team have begun to analyse and map. An initial investigation of this data and localised knowledge suggests that bait collection and non-commercial hand-gathering is not prosecuted by large numbers and the Senior Scientist envisages that most activities in most sites will only require taking to the first stage of HRA – ie. Test of Likely Significant Effect. However until the data has been fully amalgamated it is not possible to be totally confident of this fact.
11. It is also proposed to engage the recreational angling sector for their data by sending out a bait collection questionnaire to those who have registered as stakeholders through our website and angling strategy. This additional data should provide more confidence in our conclusions.
12. Officers have been providing information to Southern IFCA who are managing a Defra-funded project to summarise the IFCA’s experience of the Revised Approach to Fisheries Management in EMS.

NWIFCA MPA Monitoring and Control Plan

13. In accordance with the MPA M&C Plan work has been ongoing to ensure the annual schedule of reviews of HRAs is completed. To date in 2018 the following HRAs carried out as part of the Defra Revised Approach have been reviewed. Two are found not to have any change in relation to the triggers set in the Plan to warrant further assessment. One has been found to require interim review following a report of bird entanglement in shore set nets:

- Lune Deep, Drigg Coast and Dee Estuary – no change to assessment;
- Mersey Narrows and North Wirral Foreshore - potential issue with bird entanglement – Interim Review of August 2018 set;
- In addition, up-to-date activity data has been provided to MMO to assist them in undertaking assessments on straddling sites including Liverpool Bay SPA extension, Shell Flat SAC and Fylde MCZ.

14. Work will shortly begin on assessments for Cumbria Coast MCZ and Allonby Bay MCZ.

ST BEES VOLUNTARY CODE OF PRACTICE

15. The Voluntary Code of Practice to prevent netting around St Bees Head was brought in at the beginning of March and ended on 15th July. IFCOs from Whitehaven have been patrolling regularly and report 100% compliance which is very encouraging. As reported to the Authority, the area for the netting closure was under consultation for inclusion within the Cumbria Coast MCZ as part of the T3 MCZ consultations and it is expected for it to go through to designation. It is pleasing to show that NWIFCA and our stakeholders have seen the need for good practice ahead of formal designation.

NWIFCA RESEARCH PROJECTS

16. Nephrops creel potting – all the vessel safety information required to satisfy insurance requirements and proceed through risk assessment for science officers to work on the fishing vessel as observers has been completed. Officers are on standby for notification from the fisherman as to when he will start to fish the creels.
17. Bass populations and tagging study – CEFAS scientists worked one set of tides assisted by the Deputy Senior Scientist in July with full MMO dispensation. They used rod and line to catch and tag twenty-six >40cm bass with DST (data storage tags), and sixty <40cm bass with T-bar tags and for scale sampling. A run at drift netting was unsuccessful. They intend on returning to carry out more tagging work in the coming months over the summer, and the science team will assist where possible. A workshop with anglers is being planned for later in the year.
18. Razor Clam collaborative research – one further expression of interest from industry to be involved in the collaborative research and officers are to meet with him on 27th July to discuss.
19. Whelk Fisheries in the northwest – discussions are on-going with one fisherman to obtain samples over at least a 12 month period, MMO have been contacted regarding dispensation to take undersize whelks, and equipment has been ordered to begin the sexing and ageing work. Updates and reports will be provided to TSB when further progress has been made.

MMO EVIDENCE PROJECT NON-LETHAL DETERRENDS SUITABLE FOR CONTROL OF SEALS FROM FISHING VESSELS

20. Members may recall an agenda item a number of months ago where science team had been approached by fishers having severe problems with seals taking the catch from nets before fishers were able to haul them in. Officers investigated options for effective non-lethal seal deterrents and found none available. It is therefore very welcome and of great interest to see that MMO have launched a project with the following objective:
21. “The MMO seeks better understanding of non-lethal deterrents suitable for control of seals from fishing vessels. This project will improve understanding of seal depredation (seals eating the catch from the fishing gear) including what assists and influences the behaviour and how

substantial the impacts on English fisheries. The project will: review what non-lethal measures, gear modifications or fishing tactics are currently available to reduce seal depredation and bycatch for static net fisheries at sea; clarify what impacts may result to the fishing industry, managers and seals of using such non-lethal deterrents; field test the most promising deterrent approaches”.

22. A poster has been dispatched (Annex A) and will be displayed around the District calling for fishers to take part in the survey. A notice will also go on the website.
23. The contractors are APBmer with NFFO and Tegen Mor Consultants and they plan to hold a workshop later in the year that presents the results of the survey with fisheries, interviews with key informants and evidence from literature searches and experts. This workshop is to discuss field trial approaches.

CEFAS SMOOTH HOUND TAGGING

24. Cefas are currently running an EMFF funded project tagging smooth hounds around the UK and had planned to attend a specific smooth hound angling match being held in Morecambe Bay in July but unfortunately were not able to. Officers are assisting with providing information on other possible opportunities to tag fish in the North West and will continue to assist where possible and when time permits with other work streams.
25. If any tagged fish or individual tags are found please report them to Cefas. Information on what the tags look like, who to contact and whether the tag has a cash reward is available from the Cefas website. <https://www.cefas.co.uk/contact-us/returning-tagged-fish-and-shellfish/>

BLUECOAST

26. The BLUEcoast consortia is led by the National Oceanographic Centre and aims to inform coastal management by reducing uncertainties in the prediction of medium-term (years) and long-term (decadal and longer) regional sediment budgets, morphological change and how the coast recovers after sequences of storms. To do this they have selected several representative coastal systems, one of which is Morecambe Bay.
27. Science Officers met with researchers whilst they were undertaking fieldwork at West Plain, Flookburgh, to informally discuss our work and questions we have regarding the influence of sediment dynamics on fisheries in the Bay. Science Officers will be meeting BLUEcoast researchers again later in the year to further discuss any potential for informing each other's work.

SOUTHERN RIB PATROL

28. Science officers accompanied IFCOs Brownrigg and Taylor on a RIB patrol from Mersey to Ribble Estuary as a familiarisation with the marine aspect of that part of the District, as well as IFCO RIB patrol protocols.

TAG – IFCA TECHNICAL ADVISORY GROUP

29. The Senior Scientist attended an informative TAG meeting in July at the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) offices focusing on MSC Fisheries in Partnership (FIP) projects which work to MSC accreditation (scallop and nephrops), updates on whelk research including CEFAS research and all areas with whelk fisheries, discussion around staff exchanges and more collaborative research, data management systems, CEFAS new stock assessment models for crab and lobster fisheries.

INSTITUTE OF FISHERIES MANAGEMENT CONFERENCE AND LANCASTER UNIVERSITY

30. As reported to the June Authority meeting, science officers attended the Institute of Fisheries Management conference at Lancaster University. The Senior Scientist took the opportunity to seek out academics from Lancaster University to discuss research opportunities. A conversation with Ian Winfield, Freshwater Ecologist at CEH (Centre for Ecology and Hydrology), led to a productive meeting with Prof. Philip Barker, Director of Lancaster Environment Centre (LEC) focusing on potential for biological and ecological student projects within our estuarine and coastal areas. The science team will draw up a list of potential projects and forward them to Prof. Barker, with the intention of firming up project proposals with his fellow academic staff and offer them to Masters students.

INVASIVE NON-NATIVE SPECIES (INNS) AND CHINESE MITTEN CRAB

31. All NWIFCA IFCO and science officers are fully aware of the NWIFCA Biosecurity Plan and the need to be vigilant over the potential for spread of INNS and shellfish disease. In May IFCO Dixon reported that three adult Chinese Mitten Crab had been found under crab tiles in the Walney Channel. This has had major implications for movement of seed and part-grown mussel from Morecambe Bay and a full report is provided separately to TSB.

RECREATIONAL ANGLERS ENGAGEMENT

32. Science Officer James has been tasked with progressing the Recreational Angling Strategy work and has begun familiarisation with angling marks in Morecambe Bay and attempts to engage face to face with anglers as a starting point to gaining better understanding of their issues. He took advantage of the opportunity to meet fishers and a key local tackle seller at the Morecambe smoothhound competition in May.

CROWN ESTATE OFFSHORE WIND LEASING

33. The Crown Estate held some engagement events for statutory stakeholders and industry representatives on the potential for new offshore wind leasing. Following these events they updated the potential new leasing pages on their website and included the slides from the industry event, which can be shared by science team on request. They have also issued a press release which provides further details of the events. Officers will report further <https://www.thecrownestate.co.uk/en-gb/media-and-insights/news/2018-the-crown-estate-holds-industry-and-stakeholder-engagement-to-explore-potential-new-offshore-wind-leasing/>

STAFF TRAINING

34. Science Officer Melanie Hartley has now completed her compulsory training to enable her to fully partake of fieldwork and survey. Both Melanie and Huw James will be attending a MapInfo foundation course in the coming months.

Mandy Knott
Senior Scientist
27th July 2018