

NWIFCA Technical, Science and Byelaw Committee

15th May 2018: 10:00 a.m.

AGENDA
ITEM NO.

7

SCIENCE SUMMARY REPORT 14TH JANUARY – 13TH APRIL 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.

1. MARINE PROTECTED AREAS IN THE NWIFCA DISTRICT:

a) Marine Conservation Zones

i. West of Walney MCZ

MMO have contacted NWIFCA to advise that they will be undertaking their formal consultation on management measures for WOW MCZ from 8th May – 13th July. They will advertise the consultation in two local newspapers and Fishing News. The full documentation including the measures, the Regulatory Impact Assessment and the Environmental Assessment will be available to view in MMO offices in Preston and Whitehaven.

The proposed measures will prohibit all bottom towed gear within the 12nm area of the MCZ.

ii. The consultation by Defra on Tranche 3 MCZ sites is still awaited.

b) Assessment of Fishing Activities in Marine Protected Areas

No further developments on the NWIFCA work to report this quarter which is on-going, although nearing completion. Southern IFCA are leading on a new project to summarise the IFCA's experience of Defra's Revised Approach on Fisheries Management in EMS.

c) Monitoring and Control Plan – see separate report and recommendation.

2. ST BEES VOLUNTARY CODE OF PRACTICE

The Voluntary Code of Practice to suspend all netting activity around St Bees Head began on 1st March. A press release was distributed around ten days before it came in. Officers have been monitoring for any non-compliance and to date there appear to be no issues. As Members will be aware BBC Countryfile became interested in the story and filmed NWIFCA officers on-board Solway Protector carrying out a monitoring patrol, as well as RSPB colleagues on the clifftops. The programme was aired on 15th April.

3. NWIFCA RESEARCH PROJECTS

a) Nephrops creel potting – Members will recall that Natural England were able to secure a small pot of money for a project to explore the possibilities of using creels for fishing for nephrops around the West of Walney windfarm. A fisherman from Barrow is contracted to test the use of the creels and gear has been purchased. Weather put paid to the start of the project, and

during this time Emily Baxter from Cumbria Wildlife Trust agreed to take over the reins of the project while Natural England staff changes occur. She submitted a larger bid to the West of Morecambe Fisheries Fund to extend the project, but sadly this was not successful. It is hoped that results from the initial project can be used to bolster and further bid to be made for European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF) funding. NWIFCA scientists intend on accompanying some of the fishing trips to observe the deployment of the gear, and record catches.

- b) Bass populations and tagging study – Officers are delighted to announce that Cefas has been successful in its bid for EMFF funding for a 3 year project working with IFCAs and fishermen, amongst other agencies, for a further bass research project. Cefas scientists will work alongside NWIFCA science team to deploy data storage and T-bar tags in bass in the District. The project outcomes should provide greater understanding and evidence of the stocks, their movements and the connectedness of populations.
- c) Razor Clam collaborative research – following the February TSB meeting the Senior Scientist put out a call for interest from industry for a collaborative approach to razor clam research. Three companies expressed interest and a meeting has been fixed for 4th May for an initial discussion.
- d) Whelk Fisheries in the northwest – as previously reported IFCA officers nationwide have been watching the trends across the UK into whelk fishing. NWIFCA understands that industry interest is likely to grow in our fisheries. It is vital that a baseline of stock data is obtained to inform future management. Science officers were invited to Bangor University School of Ocean Sciences by PhD student Phillip Hollyman who has been researching ‘Age, growth and reproductive assessment of the whelk, *Buccinum undatum*, in coastal shelf seas’.

Officers were trained in techniques in:

- i. sexing of whelks;
- ii. determining sexual maturity;
- iii. determining spawning condition;
- iv. and by use of dissection and microscopy aging whelks using miniature otoliths embedded in their flesh.

Data is being gathered on what whelk fishing occurs within and outside the 6nm, and contact is being made with fishers and processors with the intention of working with them to investigate stocks within the District. Science Officers also welcome any views or opinions from Members and stakeholders at this early stage to improve understanding of the fisheries currently, and options for management in the future. In particular the issue of the whelk MLS (set at 45mm) needs addressing.

4. NORTH WEST MARINE PLAN

MMO carried out a consultation on Iteration 2 of the Northwest Marine Plan between 29th January and 29th March. On viewing the consultation documents online, the Senior Scientist found it rather confusing what was being asked of stakeholders and so attended a one day workshop in Whitehaven on 7th February, also attended by TSB Chair Ron Graham and Cllr Tony Markley. Although the workshop was useful in explaining what was required, the extent of the documents and the detail to be scrutinised meant that no time could be found to respond. This point has been made during the workshop and it is understood others found the process unnecessarily complicated and unwieldy.

5. HALITE GAS STORAGE (PREESALL) AND MARINE MONITORING GROUP

The start of construction on the Halite gas storage brine wells and the brine discharge pipeline have been held up for 6 – 12 months. This has enabled the Marine Monitoring Group to convene for its first meeting held on 27th March. A useful discussion was held which

established the Terms of Reference of the group. A point to note is that all representatives on the group agreed that it was important that a public statement should be produced after each meeting to keep all stakeholders updated. The TOR and Summary Note of First meeting is attached at Annex A.

6. WYRE POWER STATION

It has come to light that there is a proposal for a further power development on the Wyre Estuary, namely the Hillhouse Enterprise Zone Power Station by Wyre Power Ltd, on land previously owned by ICI.

According to the Infrastructure Planning Inspectorates website:

“Up to 900MW Megawatt electrical (MWe) Power Plant primarily using combined cycle gas turbine (CCGT) technology with optional additional open cycle gas turbine (OCGT) technology to help address the fluctuating energy demands of UK power consumption. The project will include a new gas pipeline, Above Ground Installations at St Michael’s on Wyre and Hillhouse, and an electrical cable to Stanah substation”.

<https://infrastructure.planninginspectorate.gov.uk/projects/north-west/hillhouse-enterprise-zone-power-station/> (accessed 20-04-18).

It is not known at this stage whether or not the project will require a MMO Marine Licence at which stage the NWIFCA would normally be consulted. It may not require one and be dealt with by local authority planning, in which case NWIFCA may find itself outside of the loop. Efforts will be made to contact Wyre Borough Council’s planning department to ask to be included in any planning consultation in case of likely impact to marine or coastal resources.

7. TAG – IFCA TECHNICAL ADVISORY GROUP

Despite the forecasts of blizzards Science Officers braved the motorway network to attend the TAG Conference in Poole at the end of February. Although attendance was reduced due to the weather and the second day had to be cut short, it was time well spent, with conference this year concentrating on crab, lobster, whelk, cephalopods and bivalve fisheries. Following concerns raised by NWIFCA and EIFCA over effects of electro-magnetic fields, discussion also revolved around elasmobranchs with a summary of existing evidence and discussion of data gaps to be filled.

IFCAs shared their research, management and future workstreams. TAG has developed substantially over the years and serves the IFCA science community well, with a commitment to share and collaborate whenever possible. Monthly emails are circulated with contributions, advice, reports etc posted with an overarching objective of enhancing our work across the board, and mesh IFCA research with that of other UK bodies.

8. MERSEY CHARTER BOATS

Science Officers have received disturbing phone calls from charter boat skippers from the River Mersey who claim to have been so severely affected by loss of business due to developments in the Mersey itself and Burbo Bank windfarm in the approaches to the river, that they are selling up or moving elsewhere. They report losing repeat business as anglers are failing to catch anything in these areas. Species mainly affected are tope and cod.

Officers raise these kinds of concern at any relevant opportunity, within our MMO Marine Licence consultation response and most recently at a meeting of the Peel Ports ‘Sediment Management Group’. Naturally it is very difficult to provide evidence of cause and effect, and with such a naturally dynamic environment and so many developments, the lack of robust research and monitoring of developments to inform consents, licences and permits, there

appears to be a worrying trend to approve proposals with no real understanding of the possible associated unintended consequences.

This is not only a potential disaster for stakeholders if their livelihoods are being lost, but also the longer term impacts on whole estuarine and marine systems are immense.

9. INVASIVE NON-NATIVE SPECIES AND BIOSECURITY WORKSHOP

Science Officers attended a workshop on invasive non-native species (INNS) in the North West coastal region, hosted by Peel Ports. The aim of the workshop was to gather stakeholders to discuss and identify what information currently exists on INNS in the region and what are the gaps in knowledge. Officers provided a presentation on NWIFCA's biosecurity plan. It was identified that the process of reporting and gathering data on the presence of INNS is currently fragmented as organisations do not currently use a singular INNS reporting system. Discussions also raised concern regarding a general lack of information regarding the responsible bodies and methods for responding to reports of INNS. Attendees agreed that a singular database for reporting INNS sightings could improve current awareness on their presence in the region. It was also suggested that responsible bodies, such as Defra, need to improve the clarity of INNS response protocols. Peel Ports hope to host a second workshop in 2018 to discuss updates on INNS and biosecurity in the region

Mandy Knott
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20th April 2018