

**NWIFCA Technical, Science and Byelaw
Committee**

5th of May 2026: 10:00 a.m.

Report no.

1

COCKLE FISHERIES MANAGEMENT PLAN - CONSULTATION RESPONSE REPORT

Purpose:

- a) **To report on the results of the NWIFCA cockle fisheries management plan**

Recommendation: Approve the following:

- a) **To accept the first draft of the CFMP for adoption in the Authority's cockle guiding fishery recommendations – subject to agreement with NE on outstanding comments, and the commitment to review annually.**

INTRODUCTION

This document summaries the responses to NWIFCA's consultation on our Cockle Fisheries Management Plan (CFMP) and sets out our response.

The aim of the CFMP is to set out a framework for managing a sustainable cockle fishery in the district. It will be reviewed and improved each year in the light of new information.

The document was split into three main parts:

1. Background – detailing the historical context, stock assessments, stakeholder groups, and aims of the CFMP.
2. Proposed management – detailing the management measures proposed, including introducing Total Allowable Catch (TAC) limits and the rationale behind their calculation
3. Research plan - detailing the Authority's approach to addressing outstanding knowledge gaps which hinder effective management.

The consultation asked participants to give feedback on each part.

BACKGROUND

The consultation ran from November 1st 2025 to March 31st 2026.

Stakeholders were notified by:

- email
- text message
- our website
- our Facebook page

The consultation was hosted on Survey Monkey, and stakeholders were welcome to provide feedback via the survey link, or directly to officers.

RESPONSES

A total of seven responses to the consultation were received.

Five of these responded to the consultation via the online survey, and two responded directly to officers via a letter.

Out of the seven respondents, four were directly linked to the fishery by way of being permit holders, one was a buyer, one an Authority member, and one a formal response from Natural England as the Statutory Nature Conservation Body (SNCB). No responses were received from NGOs or other members of the public.

Table 1: Summary of respondents to the consultation

Respondent	Number
Byelaw 3 permit holder	4
Byelaw 3 permit holder and buyer	0
Buyer	1
Authority Member	1
SNCB	1
NGO	0
General Public	0
Other	0

HOW WERE THE RESPONSES ANALYSED?

Due to the broad scope of the CFMP and qualitative nature of responses, responses were analysed by themes including recommendations for change and main concerns. A high-level summary of these responses is provided here.

As only three respondents provided detailed responses, these have been addressed directly with the respondents.

In light of all the changes suggested by respondents, NWIFCA has provided a tracked changed version of the document to demonstrate how it has been altered in response.

NWIFCA will clarify outstanding points with relevant respondents directly.

COMMENTS ON PART 1 – BACKGROUND TO THE FMP

Four out of seven of the respondents provided comments regarding Part 1, specifically regarding the CFMP's objectives and the background information.

Comments from industry on the proposed objectives:

Industry members expressed a desire for the development of quotas to be considered as an objective. They also thought an annual fishery which provided a reliable income should be considered as an objective.

They expressed concerns that objectives around considering the socio-economic factors within the fishery were covered in our mission statement and were already not being met, and that the work involved to achieve some of the proposed objectives was not reasonable or achievable.

One respondent commented that MCS Accreditation was not needed and was concerned it could add bureaucracy.

Comments from industry on background information in Part 1:

Stakeholders raised concerns regarding the potential underestimation of cockle stocks, noting that certain areas (e.g. Granny's Bank and North Run) were excluded from surveys due to low perceived abundance. They suggested this may lead to an incomplete assessment of stock levels across the wider area.

It was acknowledged that the inclusion of annual removals in TAC calculations aligns with the approach used by NWIFCA. However, some stakeholders expressed concern that the overall management approach may be overly precautionary, potentially restricting fishing activity even when the fishery could be viable.

Questions were also raised about ecological considerations, including the rate of cockle consumption by oystercatchers and the need for further details on the environmental stressors affecting bird populations. Additionally, stakeholders highlighted the importance of recognising Morecambe Bay as a potentially self-seeding system.

Finally, there was a request to explore alternative harvesting methods, specifically the potential introduction of wet dredging.

Changes to Part 1 in response to comments:

In response to the comments, we have incorporated a requirement to survey all beds within any site being considered for a fishery, with particular attention to Penfold, as well as nearby sites (e.g. Granny's Bank), even where stock levels are believed to be low. This reflects the valid point that setting stock limits for opening should be based on a comprehensive assessment of *all* beds to ensure an accurate understanding, which will in turn support our objective of greater transparency.

References addressing queries on bird food consumption have also been included. Officers determined that, at this stage, the CFMP applies only to hand-gathered cockles, although alternative harvesting methods may be considered in future iterations.

COMMENTS ON PART 2 – MANAGEMENT

Six out of seven of the respondents provided comments regarding Part 2.

Responses to the proposed minimum biomass thresholds

Six out of seven respondents did not agree with the minimum biomass thresholds proposed for each fishery.

Comments recognised the rationale behind the figures but did not agree with having fixed annual thresholds. The reasoning predominantly related to desire for reliable fishing opportunities; they didn't want the thresholds to prevent a fishery. Again, daily quotas were proposed as a possible option that might allow for a bed to be opened with a lower biomass.

Responses regarding how the thresholds were calculated

Two respondents did not agree with the way the thresholds were calculated, and three were unsure.

Respondents highlighted a miscalculation with the numbers for Leasowe total cockle required to open a fishery. They commented that it was a basic form of analysis and did not consider bird food requirements, natural variations, or the possibility of re-seeding of areas occurring from outside the area.

Responses to proposed TACs

Three respondents did not agree with the TACs proposed, one agreed, and one was unsure.

The main reason for those who did not agree was that they felt there was no scientific basis for these; the figures should be based on bird food requirements, or the TAC should be replaced with daily quotas. They added daily quotas may reduce the likelihood of gatherers travelling from outside the district to target the fishery.

Two respondents out of the seven proposed alternatives to the TAC in the form of opening all beds regardless of stock and opening all beds for seven days of the week under the rationale they 'self-regulate'.

Responses regarding flexible permit conditions

Only two respondents disagreed with the way flexible permit conditions were proposed to be determined, though no clear rationale was provided why.

Changes to Part 2 in response to comments:

Threshold calculations were revised in response to feedback. Additional justification for these thresholds has been provided, alongside further exploration of the requirements of the bird food model.

Individual quotas have not been introduced at this stage, but this option has been noted for consideration in future iterations. It is recognised that the CFMP represents an initial framework, which will be refined as key knowledge gaps are addressed through the research plan.

COMMENTS ON PART 3 – RESEARCH PLAN

Three out of the seven respondents provided further comment on the research plan.

The research plan sets out a good framework for addressing knowledge gaps, though at times it was not clear how this would be achieved. More detail on its achievement was desired.

Changes to Part 3 in response to comments:

Additional details on how the research objectives will be achieved were added to Table 25.

FINAL COMMENTS

All respondents expressed positive views on the overall document and its intentions. It was recognised as thorough and as providing strong guidance for future management. The fishery itself was considered to be well run. However, the primary concern raised was the need to better integrate socio-economic considerations into management decisions and to establish a reliable annual fishery, informed by the best available scientific evidence.

RECOMMENDATION

Recommendation: to accept the first draft of the CFMP for adoption in guiding the Authority's cockle fishery recommendations – subject to agreement with NE on outstanding comments, and the commitment to review annually.