

**NWIFCA Authority Meeting**  
**19<sup>th</sup> March 2026: 10:00 a.m.**

**Report**  
**no. 3**

**SCIENCE REPORT FOR INFORMATION**  
**22<sup>ND</sup> OF NOVEMBER 2025 – 5<sup>TH</sup> OF MARCH 2026**

**Purpose:** To provide an update on the work of the Science Team in the quarter.

**Recommendation:** a) Receive the report

**UPDATE FOR THIS QUARTER**

This quarter, the main priorities of the science team have been progressing the development of drone methodology for mussel surveys, complete a review of the Byelaw 4 Flexible Permit Conditions, setting up a joint project into shrimp decline in Morecambe Bay, and progressing for the development stage of Mergin Map into the implementation stage.

**Key achievements since the previous TSB meeting:**

- 1) Completed one mussel survey testing the Dutch Wand methodology on Foulney.
- 2) Completed a review of the whelk flexible permit conditions and opened an application process for new entrants.
- 3) Initiated a funded joint research project looking at potential impacts into shrimp populations in Morecambe Bay.
- 4) Progressed to the implementation stage for Mergin Maps working towards full implementation in May 2026.
- 5) Responded to twelve consultations and two dispensations.
- 6) Gemma Grose completed training and receiving the General Visual Line of Sight Certificate.

**ONGOING WORK STREAM UPDATES:**

**1. COCKLES AND MUSSELS**

**a) Survey and inspections**

Surveys and inspections have been low due to the time of year, tides and daylight with only one survey being completed of two days at Foulney with the purpose of testing the Dutch Wand methodology for accuracy. The data is still being analysed and will be presented at TSB when completed.

**Table 1.** Mussel survey and inspections this quarter.

Surveys and inspections this quarter	Date
<b>Mussels</b>	
<b>Morecambe Bay</b>	
Foulney	01-12-25 02-12-25

**b) Morecambe Bay cockle fisheries**

Flookburgh, Leven, Pilling, and Newbiggin beds closed 28<sup>th</sup> February 2026 – Fishery and TAC uptake provide in the HoE report.

**2. NWIFCA RESEARCH PROJECTS**

**a) Mergin – maps (officer sightings data)**

The project has been developed to streamline and consolidate officer stats for use in science reporting with the use of QGIS, and PostgreSQL databases. Officer Robin Love, with the assistance of an external partner from the company Maptastic, have complete the integration of the working app Mergin Maps which provide a simple user interface for officers, reducing duplication and reporting times, while updating databases in real-time, so this information is more readily available to officers for the analysis and use in MPA and fisheries assessments, as well as providing data for authority reports.

The project is working towards full implementation in May 2026, with all officers having received in-house training covering all project functions and how business-as-usual activities and daily workflows will transition once the system goes live.

The project is in a seven-week trial phase. During this period, officers will use the app in daily operations to fully test functionality and provide feedback on any issues, limitations or required refinements. This will allow any problem to be resolved prior to full rollout and ensure the system is operationally robust.

In parallel, development work is ongoing to automate mapping outputs for authority reports, further streamlining reporting and improving efficiency.

**b) Whelk Fisheries in the North West**

Officer, Gemma Grose, has completed a review of the whelk flexible permit conditions under Byelaw 4 (Potting Permit Byelaw), which assessed fishing effort, landings data, landings per unit effort, stakeholder feedback and the policy direction set by the national Whelk Fisheries Management Plan.

The review concluded that while the fishery remains productive, effort controls are still necessary to safeguard stock sustainability.

At the Authority's Technical Science and Byelaw Sub-Committee (TSB) meeting on the 10th February 2026, members agreed to reopen the application process for whelk permits within the district for a two-month period between March and April 2026 of up to 2,500 pots in total will be made available to new entrants, with an initial target allocation of 500 pots for up to five vessels. If more than five applications are received, members will consider sharing the available pots between a greater number of vessels and / or introducing additional eligibility criteria to assist with permit allocation. Existing vessels with a qualifying track record will retain their 1,000-pot entitlement and vessels with 400 pot entitlement may increase to 500 pots if new permits are issued at that number. However, if demand results in lower allocations (e.g. 300 pots per vessel) the existing permits will not be reduced below 400 pots. The full report and recommendations can be found here ([Agenda-Item-7-Review-of-Byelaw-4-Whelk-Flexible-Permit-Conditions-Report.pdf](#))

The application process is now open on the NWIFCA website.

**c) Shrimp research in the North West**

Officer Lucy Loud has assisted in developing a shrimp research project which has received funding, granted to the University of Salford (partners include NWIFCA, Cefas and Mersey Gateway Environmental Trust) through the Coast-R Network small grants fund. The aim of this project is to assess if there are contaminant levels (heavy metals, PFAS) in shrimps, sediments and water which may affect the population and to examine climate stressors (sea water temperature, salinity etc.)

The project will run until October with monthly samples of shrimp, sediment and water collected by NWIFCA from three locations in Morecambe Bay. Previous samples of shrimp already collected from 2025 will be included in the data set. The bid also includes training for NWIFCA in the analysis process. There will be workshops with industry to disseminate the results and discuss the problems that are facing the shrimping industry further.

**d) Drone survey work development**

Work continues developing a novel method for identifying mussel using the DJI multi-spectral camera. This work has involved trialing different flight heights and speeds, to determine optimum resolution quality. In this quarter, officer Gemma Grose qualified as a drone pilot by completing training and receiving the General Visual Line of Sight Certificate. Work focuses on in-house training of the use of the science drone, automated flights and use of the processing software. This will increase the authorities ability to develop this workstream.

**e) Cockle dispersal PhD project**

Historical data for the district cockle beds has been provided to the PhD student.

**3. MARINE PROTECTED AREAS IN THE NWIFCA DISTRICT:**

**a) Highly Protected Marine Areas (HPMAs)**

No further updates.

**b) Marine Conservation Zone Assessments**

NWIFCA are required to assess the impacts of fishing activities in each of the MPAs designated within its District. As of 2024. Four have been completed, Ribble MCZ, Wyre and Lune MCZ, Cumbria Coast MCZ, and Solway Firth MCZ with officers receiving Natural England's advice agreeing with officers' assessment subject to trigger points for re-assessment being agreed.

**c) Marine Natural Capital – Oral Histories**

No further update.

**4. FISHERIES MANAGEMENT PLANS**

**a) National FMPs**

Update provided in CEO report.

**b) Cockle fisheries management plan**

The first iteration of the NWIFCA cockle fisheries management plan has been completed and is currently out for consultation. The FMP, supporting materials and how to provide a response is available on the website ([Consultation - Cockle Fisheries Management Plan - IFCA North West](#)). The consultation will run until the end of March 2026.

**5. MMO MARINE LICENCE AND OTHER CONSULTATIONS FOR THE QUARTER**

**a) Morecambe Bay Offshore Wind**

No further update

**b) Mersey Tidal Power Project**

No further update

### **Consultations this quarter:**

- Variation to Morlais demonstration zone
- Dubmill Point Coastal Defences
- Western Link 2 - Geotechnical surveys
- Wardleys Marine Yacht Club Boreholes
- Acoustic tracking of migratory fish through the Dee Estuary and River
- A494 River Dee Bridge Replacement Scheme
- SeaSTORE lander deployment - Site A
- Awel y Môr Offshore array area geotechnical survey
- Mersey Tidal Power Project - Baseline Survey Works
- Morlais Variation - Further information submission
- Morecambe Offshore Windfarm Geotechnical Works
- Hoylake Beach Vegetation Removal

### **Dispensations this quarter:**

- CEFAS Clean Seas Environmental Monitoring Programme 2026
- Cockle Wet Dredge Demonstration for NWIFCA Officers

## **6. WORKING GROUPS AND EXTERNAL PARTNERSHIP WORK**

### **a) Technical Advisory Group**

No further update

### **b) Whelk Working Group**

The group now produces a quarterly update newsletter detailing a summary of the various research projects and management implementation each organisation is completing.

**5<sup>th</sup> of March 2026**