

NWIFCA Technical, Science and Byelaw Committee

18th May 2021: 10:00 a.m.

Agenda Item
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SCIENCE REPORT FOR INFORMATION 1ST JANUARY – 31ST MARCH 2021

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

Recommendation: Report for information, Receive the report

This quarter has been busy with training new members of the science team. Training has involved both external and in-house training with the priority of getting officers trained for surveys and writing survey reports. The 2021 survey program has begun with a number of inspections and surveys taking place, including:

- Solway side scan sonar and grab sampling survey
- Heysham, South America and Duddon mussel inspection
- Foulney and Walney Channel Dutch Wand survey
- NWIFCA attendance on industry Heli flight across Morecambe Bay

This quarter has seen an increase in the number of dispensation applications, marine consent applications as well as a range of other consultations. The increase is likely due to the disruptions in 2020 due to the pandemic and the predicted easing of restrictions.

1. NWIFCA RESEARCH PROJECTS

a) Razor Clam collaborative research

Bangor University Shellfish Centre electro-dredge study – Amended HRA and MMO dispensation in place and Bangor University scientists are looking at potential survey dates over the next few months to start surveying on industry vessel.

b) Whelk Fisheries in the North West

There has been effort to process the backlog of samples which were collected in 2020. Size of maturity (SoM) analysis has started and it is hoped to provide a report on the work carried out since 2019 at the next TSB meeting. The aims are to better inform management within the potting byelaw and identify further sampling which may be required.

c) Plastics in mussels

Cumbria University project will re-start with a new student taking over. Mussel samples have continued to be collected and stored and will be provided to get the project up and running again.

2. TAG meeting – 18th February 2021

a) TAG discussed the following:

- AIFCA business plan
- The continued use of a document / information sharing platform
- MMO Fisheries Management Plans
- EA Citizen science fish survey
- Members update on research activities

3. WHELK WORKING GROUP (WWG)

A further meeting was held virtually in January of this multi-agency / multi-area group. Updates were given by members on the research, monitoring and management which is planned or being carried out. Many members are reviewing potting byelaws, regional size at maturity research, management options on MLS and closed seasons. The implications and compliance options of different MLS in different areas within District are being considered. Science team are particularly interested in research into possible stock assessment methods and potential use in the future within NWIFCA district.

4. MARINE PROTECTED AREAS IN THE NWIFCA DISTRICT:

a) NWIFCA MPA Monitoring and Control Plan

The rolling programme of review of HRAs for all activities in all sites continues to ensure HRAs are still fit for purpose and management is appropriate.

b) MPA Management

Defra are currently looking at the management of MPAs to ensure all sites are progressing towards or are achieving effective management. Officers have provided information on all the sites within the NWIFCA district showing whether all commercial fishing activities have been assessed, where there are still outstanding assessments, what the risk of fishing is and if there is likely to be any additional management required. Most assessment have been completed and those which are outstanding have been assessed as low risk. Other than the netting assessment in the Solway Firth SPA which as previously reported will be completed over the following months.

c) St Bees Closure 5th March – 25th July

The St Bees Voluntary Netting Closure was implemented on 5th March. The closure was earlier than previous years due to early bird activity.

5. FUTURE INSHORE STRATEGIC HAND GATHERING IMPLEMENTATION GROUP (FISHGIG)

An IFCA based group has been set up with a representative from each IFCA to discuss the management of both recreational and commercial hand gathered fisheries. FISHGIG provides a strategic working group to focus upon shared solutions to future management, through both non regulatory and regulatory means and allows for the sharing of resources and ideas. The group has started to develop a draft package of information as a source for all IFCA's to use when deciding if management is required for hand gathering activities.

6. OFFSHORE WIND LEASING ROUND 4

There have been six proposed new offshore wind projects in the latest round of offshore wind leasing. Three of these areas are within the Irish Sea. All of the proposed areas are outside of the district. Crown Estate are currently undertaking a Plan-Level Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) to assess potential impacts to European Marine Sites prior to awarding seabed rights. Further information can be found on the Crown Estate website with links to the process and maps of the proposed areas: <https://www.thecrownestate.co.uk/en-gb/media-and-insights/news/2021-offshore-wind-leasing-round-4-signals-major-vote-of-confidence-in-the-uk-s-green-economy/>

7. BASS AND RAY ECOLOGY IN LIVERPOOL BAY

Bangor University have provided a report at Annex B on bass and thornback ray ecology in Liverpool Bay. The project was EMFF funded and was additional to a project looking at evidence based sustainable management of the two species in Wales with the potential likelihood of shared stocks. The report highlights a potential bass nursery area and possible local spawning locations of the juvenile bass caught in the Wyre Estuary. Catches of bass were biased towards females indicating potential local spawning. For thornback ray the report compares the L_{50} (length at which 50% of thornback rays are mature) of fish taken from commercial catch in Liverpool Bay with the minimum size for thornback ray in CSFC byelaw 9.

8. CHINESE MITTEN CRAB SURVEYS

Regulators have been asked if there is still value in providing quarterly reports on Chinese Mitten Crab surveillance as previously done. In one response the regulator highlighted why they could not use the reports, highlighting research into the life cycle of Chinese Mitten Crab and saying that the surveys are unlikely to find Chinese Mitten Crab. A copy of the research is awaited. The wider lack of responses suggests that the surveillance reports are not being used. Due to the time it takes to complete surveys and process the samples, surveying for Chinese Mitten Crab has been paused.

9. SURVEY SCHEDULE AND PROGRESS 2021

A full survey and inspection report has been provided. Annex A provides an update of the surveys that have been completed and those which have been planned in. As previously mentioned there has been a change in timings to reflect the need to collect data earlier this year.

Jon Haines
Acting Senior Scientist
5th May 2021

Annex A – SURVEY SCHEDULE AND PROGRESS TABLES 2021

Cockle	Type	Number of days	Number of officers	Planned	Complete	Return needed?
<u>Morecambe Bay</u>						
Pilling	Survey	1	4	May		
Middleton	Survey	1	4	May		
Warton	Inspection	1	2	Mar	Y	Y
	Survey	1	4	May		
Flookburgh	Survey	2	4	May		
Leven	Survey	1	4	May		
Aldingham	Survey	1	2	May		
Newbiggin	Survey	1	2	May		
Duddon	Inspection	1	2	Jul		
<u>Ribble</u>						
Lytham (3 beds)	Inspection	1	2	Jul		
Southport (4 beds)	Inspection	1	2	Jul		
<u>Wirral</u>						
Leasowe	Survey	1	4	Jul		
<u>Solway</u>						
Middle Bank	Survey - Boat	1-2	Boat Crew +4	Jun/Jul		

Mussel	Type	Number of days	Number of officers	Planned	Complete	Return needed?
<u>Morecambe Bay</u>						
Fleetwood (4 beds)	Inspection	1	2	May		
Wyre End	Inspection	1	2	May		
Heysham Flat	Inspection	8	2	Mar	Y	Y
				May		
Foulney	Dutch Wand	1	4	Apr	Y	Potentially
Walney Channel	Dutch Wand	1	4	Apr	Y	Potentially
Low Bottom	Inspection	1	2	May		
S. America	Inspection	1	2	Mar	Y	Y
				May		
Duddon	Inspection	1	2-4	Apr	Y	Y
				Jun		
<u>Dee</u>						
West Kirby	Inspection	1	2	Jul		
<u>Solway</u>						
Silloth	Side Scan Sonar	8	Boat Crew +2	Apr	Y	Y
				Jul		
				Oct		
				Jan		

Otter Clams	Type	Number of days	Number of officers	Planned	Complete	Return needed?
<u>Wirral</u>						
Leasowe	Survey	8	4	Feb	Y	Y
				Jun		
				Sep		
				Dec		