

NWIFCA Authority Meeting 4th December 2025: 10:00 a.m.	Report no. 4
--	--

SCIENCE REPORT FOR INFORMATION
26TH OF SEPTEMBER 2025 – 21ST OF NOVEMBER

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 to complete the remaining surveys for the year and to continue progressing outstanding workstreams following a busy survey season through the spring and summer.

This includes the launch of the NWIFCA cockle fisheries management plan consultation, continued development of drone methodology for mussel surveys, review of the Byelaw 4 Flexible Permit Conditions, investigations into shrimp decline, and the development of Mergin Map work to improve the organisations ability to effectively monitor and record fishing activity across the District.

Key achievements since the previous TSB meeting:

- 1) Completed one mussel survey and reinstated the Leasowe large bivalve survey (completed over three tides)
- 2) Completed the first iteration of the NWIFCA cockle fisheries management plan and launched the stakeholder consultation.
- 3) Responded to two consultation requests and five dispensation requests.
- 4) Two officers completed training in intermediate powerboat
- 5) One officer completed the theory element of General Visual Line of Sight Certificate (GVC).

ONGOING WORK STREAM UPDATES:

1. COCKLES AND MUSSELS

a) Survey and inspections

Between September 26th and November 20th, NWIFCA science officers carried out one mussel inspection, one mussel survey, and one large bivalve survey. Full inspection reports for the mussel inspection and survey undertaken prior to October 22nd are provided in Agenda 5 of the November 4th TSB report and is available on the website ([Technical, Science and Byelaws Sub-Committee Meeting - IFCA North West](#)). No further surveys have been completed since October 22nd.

Table 1. Mussel survey and inspections this quarter.

Surveys and inspections this quarter	Date
Mussels	
Morecambe Bay	
Foulney (Island)	10-10-25

b) Morecambe Bay cockle fisheries

Open beds: Flookburgh, Leven, Pilling, and Newbiggin – Fishery and TAC uptake provide in the HoE report.

2. Leasowe Large Bivalves

Officers reinitiated the large bivalve mollusc survey of the North Wirral foreshore over three low tides. The purpose of the survey was to identify the location, extent, and prevalence of Otter clams (*Lutraria lutraria*), and Sand gaper (*Mya arenaria*) species.

These species are protected under Byelaw 2 which prohibits the removal of all shellfish from the foreshore. This byelaw was introduced in 2022 in response to large quantities of shellfish being removed by recreational fishing. Surveying the site allows us to identify any changes in the location and extent of the species post the introduction of the byelaw.

The full survey report is not publicly available due to sensitivities regarding poaching and the location of the shellfish. A second survey is scheduled for spring 2026 and will contribute to the Byelaw 2 review evidence.

3. NWIFCA RESEARCH PROJECTS

a) Mergin – maps (officer sightings data)

A project looking into streamlining and consolidating officer stats for use in science reporting is progressing with the development of QGIS, and PostgreSQL databases. This project has been led by Officer Robin Love, with the assistance of an external partner from the company Maptastic, and aims to improve both the officers accuracy in reporting and monitoring fishing activities in the District. The working app will provide a simple user interface for officers, reducing duplication and reporting times, while updating our databases in real-time, so this information is more readily available to Science officers for analysis and use in assessments. Work with Maptastic has been completed, trials with officers have been done and Robin is now working on integrating the system into everyday work.

b) Whelk Fisheries in the North West

Following on the MCRS work undertaken in 2024, this year work is being undertaken to review the Flexible Permit Conditions of Byelaw 4, specifically in relation to pot

limitations. Officer Gemma Grose is leading on this project and is currently looking into the historical data collected since the introduction of the permit scheme and launching a consultation with stakeholders to get views on pot number and the permit scheme. This work is integral to building up an understanding of the relatively new whelk fishery in the District and determining its effective management going forward.

c) Shrimp research in the North West

Following the publication of the summary report at the March 2025 TSB meeting, lead Officer Lucy Loud has been exploring new research partnerships and projects to progress with investigating the cause of decline in the shrimps in the Northwest. This quarter samples have been obtained from Morecambe Bay and are being processed. The project will look to gain data on the size composition, sex and maturity of shrimps in the Bay. Funding avenues are being explored with Salford University to develop further research.

d) Drone survey work development

Work continues on 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. Most of the work this quarter has been processing the data collected previously on flights and setting out a plan to ground truth results.

e) Cockle dispersal PhD project

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

4. 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. Of the four outstanding, two (Ribble MCZ and, Wyre and Lune MCZ) have been completed with officers receiving Natural England's advice agreeing with officers assessment subject to trigger points for re-assessment being agreed, and two (Cumbria Coast MCZ and Solway Firth MCZ) are with Natural England for review.

c) Marine Natural Capital – Oral Histories

No further update.

5. 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 March 2026.

6. 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:

- Scoping Request – Area 393 Hilbre Swash Marine Aggregate Extraction
- Stena Salt Island Bridge Replacement Works

Dispensations this quarter:

- Environment Agency – Mersey Estuary Fish Surveys
- Environment Agency – Ribble & Wyre Estuary Fish Surveys
- Westinghouse Springfield Fuels Ltd
- Natural England – Smelt Surveys
- Lake District Coast Aquarium

7. WORKING GROUPS AND EXTERNAL PARTNERSHIP WORK

a) Technical Advisory Group

No further update

b) Whelk Working Group

Officer Gemma Grose attended the meeting held on November 6th with each of the members highlighting areas of research being carried out. Areas of work include MCRS and potential impacts and stock assessments.