

**NWIFCA Technical, Science and Byelaw
Sub-Committee**

11th August 2015: 10:00am

**REPORT
NUMBER**

8

BIVALVE MOLLUSC WORKING GROUP

Purpose: to inform Members of discussions held and agreement reached at the second BMWG meeting

Recommendations

- 1. That Members approve the work of the BMWG.**
- 2. That Members approve the recommendation made by BMWG to proceed with an authorisation for hand-gathering of seed mussel at Heysham Flat skear, subject to HRA.**
- 3. That Members approve the recommendation made by BMWG that this situation should be reviewed at the next BMWG meeting in relation to levels of hand-gathering effort and authorisation of dredge harvest off the bottom skears at Heysham Flat.**
- 4. That Members approve the recommendation made by BMWG to assess the seed mussel stock on the Fleetwood beds on the next suitable tides, with the view to authorising a limited dredge fishery, subject to HRA.**
- 5. That Members approve the recommendation made by BMWG for authorisation of seed mussel from mussel beds at Seafield Road slipway, Ribble Estuary by hand-gatherers, subject to HRA.**

Bivalve Mollusc Working Group

The second meeting of the BMWG was held on 13th July with full attendance from the group. A further draft of the Management Plan for Morecambe Bay mussels was tabled and discussed. This is attached as Annex A and is based on Eastern IFCA's Management Plan for mussels in The Wash. There was some agreement over the format of the plan with some minor amendments, and that some of the management measures were good practice to be aimed for in the future and should be included now, although not necessarily possible to define or achieve at the present time. However, there were some areas where agreement could not be reached and where further discussion should be had, and the point was raised that Morecambe Bay operates very differently from The Wash. For example, setting a minimum spawning stock biomass of adult mussel across the whole Bay that should remain after any fishery – and using this figure to help in setting Total Allowable Catches (TACs). It was recognised that this was a good beginning and that there is on-going work to be done.

The second part of the meeting looked at the known mussel resources in the Bay, and how the resource should be managed this year. The Senior Scientist made the suggestion that the two bottom skears at Heysham Flat could be dredged for seed on neap tides, and that hand-gathering could be authorised on spring tides, with the exclusion zone to protect the honeycomb worm reef as in 2014. The Byelaw 3 permit representatives presented their case that they were able to access all the skears via the sandbanks and that they would wish to fish it. They also put forward a case for harvesting the area of the main worm reef because in its present state it may actually benefit the worms for future settlement if the mussel is removed. It was agreed to authorise hand-gathering once the mussel was ready for harvest, and to consider while carrying out the HRA

which areas of the skear could be harvested. It was also agreed to reassess the situation at the next meeting in August, when it will have been possible to further inspect all the beds for very recent (and late) settlement, and to have carried out the boat survey of South America with industry. Further inspections of the Fleetwood beds will be carried out at the end of July / beginning of August and if a commercial stock is present then this will be brought back for discussion at the next meeting, with the possibility of authorising a limited dredge fishery.

It was emphasised at the meeting that the mussel resource is limited in the Bay this year and that this must be taken into consideration in respect of the bird conservation features. Each fishery will require assessing under EU Habitats and Birds Regulations, and it may be necessary to restrict the fishery, spatially, temporally, or in setting TACs.

The settlement in the Ribble was also briefly discussed, and it was agreed for a further inspection by science officers to be conducted, and an HRA to be carried out with the view to authorising hand-gathered harvest of the seed mussel from the Seafield Road slipway area.

The next meeting is to be arranged for some time in August.

Mandy Knott
Senior Scientist
14th July 2015