

**NWIFCA Quarterly Meeting:
5th December 2019: 11.00 a.m.**

**AGENDA
ITEM NO.
11**

SCIENCE AND SURVEY QUARTERLY REPORT 10th AUGUST – 2nd NOVEMBER 2019

Purpose: i) to provide an update on work carried out in the last quarter;

Recommendation: i) Members approve the report.

1. MARINE PROTECTED AREAS IN THE NWIFCA DISTRICT:

a) Marine Conservation Zones

There are no developments to report on seven designated MCZs within the District.

b) Highly Protected Marine Areas (HPMA) - Review

Further to the appointment of the panel carrying out the review, Defra announced a four week 'Call for Evidence' for stakeholder input to the process of deciding on how to take forward the proposals for Highly Protected Marine Areas. Officers await the outcome.

c) Assessment of Fishing Activities in Marine Protected Areas

Work continues to assess bait collection and hand-gathering activity within the District's MPAs.

d) NWIFCA MPA Monitoring and Control Plan

The rolling programme of review of HRAs for all activities in all sites continues to ensure if any significant change occurs the HRAs are still fit for purpose and management is appropriate.

2. NWIFCA RESEARCH PROJECTS

a) Bass populations and tagging study – Cefas project. The proposed tagging work to be carried out by Cefas scientists was cancelled due to lack of >50cm size fish required for tagging with the Data Storage tags (DST). No further progress.

b) Razor Clam collaborative research –

(i) Officers have been working with the Bangor scientist to firm up survey methodology and area, and the electro dredge equipment has undergone some refinement. Officers await final details before submitting the application for an MMO dispensation for the use of the gear. Drafting of the HRA is underway.

(ii) Officers investigated the possibilities of stock survey of intertidal razors at Leasowe on 2nd August to provide more rounded data for the research. Due to location of razors close to the spring low water line and the limited time this gives, it was not possible to discern a practical methodology. Thinking on this continues.

c) Whelk Fisheries in the North West – samples obtained from industry are being processed in the lab. Flesh containing statoliths for aging are frozen. There is a high time demand on this work and so a Lancaster University under-graduate student has

been identified to assist, and officers have attended the university to demonstrate the methodology.

- d) Nephrops Creels Project - Cumbria Wildlife Trust - following the approval to issue a derogation to Cumbria Wildlife Trust to trial the use of nephrops creel pots within the Cumbria inshore waters, they were deployed from North Western Protector by NWIFCA crew over a number of tides and in different locations. NWIFCA scientists attended along with Dr Baxter to the hauling and measuring of the catch. The report from the trial is expected shortly.
- e) Plastics in mussels - Cumbria University. An undergraduate dissertation project has been instigated to investigate mussels from Morecambe Bay. Samples are being collected by IFCOs alongside hygiene samples. Officers have facilitated linking Cumbria University work in this realm with that of the Wyre Rivers Trust.

3. WHELK WORKING GROUP (WWG)

The national Whelk Working Group held its second virtual meeting in early September to discuss the extensive workplan. There are a number of work streams that could assist NWIFCA whelk management in the future, for example the possibility of Cefas scientists developing a methodology for stock assessment and Bangor University PhD research into the effects of temperature on metrics such as growth rates, maturity and maximum size.

4. BYELAWS - Minimum Conservation Reference Sizes

Science officers have begun work on a literature review of current understanding of size at maturity for a number of key species in order to progress work with the byelaw review and possible Minimum Conservation Reference Size byelaw. A full report will be submitted to TSB at a future date.

5. FISHERIES MANAGEMENT PLANS - LONGER TERM PLANNING

The Senior Scientist has agreed with CEO to instigate longer term planning for the District's fisheries through individual fishery's management plans. A list of key commercial species will be drawn up, and existing knowledge and data gaps will be explored in order to plan what research is required to gain the understanding needed for long term sustainable management. Opportunities for working with external partners and academic institutions will be explored. Any work carried out will be brought to the Authority for approval at each stage.

The obvious starting point will be to finalise the cockle and mussel management plans for Morecambe Bay, and to roll this approach out to the other fisheries in the District.

6. HALITE GAS STORAGE AND BRINE DISCHARGE

No further news on this development. Officers declined an invitation to be interviewed for a BBC One programme 'Inside Out North West'. It was suggested to the programme researcher that as NWIFCA is part of the wider Marine Monitoring Group led by EA it would be more appropriate for them to approach the Environment Agency. The programme was screened on 30th September.

7. CENTRAL DREDGING ASSOCIATION - Dredging and Sustainability in NW England Conference

Dr Hartley attended the Central Dredging Association conference on Dredging and Sustainability in North West England. The day covered a site visit at Peel Ports, and topics

such as biosecurity planning, Water Injection Dredging, beneficial use of dredge-won material and remote sensing of the near shore. The informative event had attendees from Natural England, Environment Agency, Natural Resources Wales, National Oceanography Centre as well as a range of consultancy firms.

8. EMFF WORKSHOP - Developing a participatory approach to the management of fishing activity in UK offshore Marine Protected Areas

The final workshop of the European Maritime and Fisheries Funded project was held in November, led by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee including partners from MMO, Natural England, NFFO and Bangor University. The aim of the 2 year project is to develop a participatory process establishing, evaluating and adapting fisheries management measures in MPAs that include sedimentary habitats as protected features. West of Walney MCZ is being used as a case study. The project outputs include *inter alia* a guide to good practice in developing active stakeholder participation and a Benthic Impacts tool developed by scientists at Bangor University to aid regulators in assessing risks from fisheries management options.

9. COCKLES

A full report was given to TSB in November presenting survey results up until mid-October.

A fishery was authorised at Leasowe (Wirral) from 30th September with fishing permitted for three days a week (Monday to Wednesday) and a Total Allowable Catch of 400 tonnes set in order to ensure sufficient bird food resource throughout the winter. Following a low amount of effort and low levels of stock being removed from the bed the fishery was increased to 5 days a week, with weekly landings monitoring. A dense stock of cockle persists on Warton Sands but has not yet reached size. There is some evidence of wash out as the channels shift around. Sampling for classification has begun and the stock is being regularly monitored. Officers resurveyed Pilling Sands to determine if juvenile stocks had grown to size on the west (closed) side of the bed in response to information from industry. Survey results were consistent with the June survey indicating a relatively low density of cockles on the west side of the bed.

MUSSELS

A full report was given to TSB in November presenting survey results up until mid-October.

a) Exports of Mussel to Northern Ireland from Morecambe Bay for Relaying –

Following previous reporting to Members around Morecambe Bay mussel exports for relaying to Northern Ireland and perceived risk of transference of the INNS Chinese Mitten Crab, the Senior Scientist had correspondence with Defra officials. Through this it was established that with the current state of affairs politically there was little that Defra could do to assist, and that there appeared to be no possibility of influencing the approach taken by DAERA.

It was agreed to continue the work to provide a longer term evidence base through quarterly monitoring and surveillance surveys for Chinese Mitten Crab on both Foulney / Walney Channel and Heysham Flat mussel beds. There has been no further evidence of this non-native species since the unconfirmed report in the Walney Channel in May 2018. The monitoring reports are circulated to relevant regulators and interested parties.

b) Solway Mussels

i) Subtidal Survey:

NWIFCA received assistance from scientist Colin Trundle from Cornwall IFCA on board North Western Protector in the deployment, processing and analysis of the side scan sonar equipment. The intention had been to carry out this training over the mussel area in the Solway to gain some usable data, but the weather was not fit, so tows were carried out on hard ground outside of Whitehaven marina instead. This established that the jets from the vessel are causing interference with the signals of the side scan and an alternative means of deploying the survey equipment was needed in the shallow waters where the surveys are needed. Lowering the side scan sonar from the bow of the vessel has subsequently proven to achieve good quality data. Work continues to return to the Solway to carry out a full survey which can be ground-truthed with grab data. Standard Operating Procedures for NWIFCA side-scan and Olex are being drawn up.

ii) Port of Silloth Dredge Disposal

Members will recall the concerns raised in the summer over the position of the disposal of dredge material from the maintenance dredging at Silloth port and its proximity to the protected mussel feature in the Solway. Natural England and MMO Marine Licensing have taken our concerns forward

10. MMO Marine Licence and other consultations for last two quarters:

MMO Marine Licence consultations

Ribble Link Jetty Construction
Celtix Connect - Havhingsten Telecommunication Cable - Irish Sea
Mersey Approach Channel Deepening – EIA Scoping report
Coastal Monitoring Wave Buoy Network

Meetings and Training attended this quarter

Solway Firth Partnership – TB & JH
Whelk working group
Shellfish Liaison Group
Peel Ports INNS workshop
RSPB & IFCA's – MMP Marine Licencing and Marine Planning
Potting Byelaw with Industry – requested by industry
Seafish – Brexit Trade workshop No Deal Scenario
Peel Ports Dredging workshop
Cumbria University research partnership potential
Cumbria Wildlife Trust – nephrops creels project
Lancaster University undergrad student re: whelk aging samples
National Crab Science Meeting – London
TAG
NAEMO Mussel Research Conference – Oban
EMFF Adaptive Management in Marine Protected Areas
Mersey Sediment Management Group
ATV Training

Science team
19th November 2019