

# NWIFCA Quarterly Meeting: 19<sup>th</sup> March 2020: 10.30 a.m.

## AGENDA ITEM NO. 13

### SCIENCE AND SURVEY QUARTERLY REPORT 3rd NOVEMBER 2019 - 2<sup>nd</sup> FEBRUARY 2020 FOR INFORMATION

**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:**

Environment Minister Rebecca Pow delivered a keynote speech at the 2020 Coastal Futures conference in London, at which she congratulated the IFCA's on their work in managing fisheries within MPAs. She also announced that this year Government will be developing and publishing a comprehensive Seabird Conservation Strategy for England, to help in understanding the biggest impacts on our seabirds and how to protect them more effectively. A consultation will occur later this year.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/minister-pow-committed-to-deliver-seabird-conservation-strategy>

Members and Officers have been invited to attend the AIFCA "Management of the English Blue Belt Symposium" in London on 9<sup>th</sup> March, an event designed for attendees to discover how MPAs are being actively managed to deliver clean, healthy, productive and biologically diverse oceans and seas. Focusing on the inshore region, experts in the field will share their work and experiences in developing and implementing appropriate management, highlight the benefits that successfully introduced measures can bring to the marine environment and also to those who depend on MPAs for their livelihoods and wellbeing, and explore what the future holds for the English Blue Belt. The event will end with a panel discussion and an opportunity for attendees to discuss and exchange ideas from the day's topics. It is hoped for Ministerial attendance. Officers will report back to the Authority about the day.

#### **a) Marine Conservation Zones**

MMO have produced their draft assessment of fisheries activity in the Fylde MCZ inviting comments from NWIFCA which have been submitted. Activity data for fishing within the 0-6nm part of the MCZ have been supplied by NWIFCA.

#### **b) EMS**

MMO have produced their draft assessment of fisheries activity in the Shell Flat and Lune Deep SAC inviting comments from NWIFCA which have been submitted. Activity data for fishing within the 0-6nm part of the EMS have been supplied by NWIFCA.

#### **c) Highly Protected Marine Areas (HPMA) - Review**

Defra have now renamed the HPMA review as the Benyon Review. The current situation is unclear, but Officers understand that the panel has compiled a long list of marine areas -

recommended by stakeholders and Defra agencies - as potential HPMAs sites and are currently assessing the ecological viability of these areas.

“This initial ecological assessment uses a number of criteria to allow the long list of suggested sites to be ranked according to their ecological grading. This assessment will also split the sites by their inshore (0-6nm) and offshore (6 – 200nm) location. The next stage in the Panel’s site selection process is to take the top 10 ecologically ranked inshore and offshore areas and try to understand the social implications of recommending them as HPMA’s”.

#### **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) Razor Clam collaborative research:
  - i. the HRA for the study with Bangor University scientist and industry vessel has been carried out and submitted to Natural England for their advice. Natural England have agreed with the NWIFCA conclusion of No Likely Significant Effect from the project. An application has been submitted to the MMO for dispensation against the EU regulations prohibiting electro fishing;
  - ii. planning with Liverpool University MRes student for intertidal sampling of razor clams at Leasowe on the Wirral has been ongoing, with dates scheduled in for March to May surveys with logistical support from NWIFCA science and enforcement officers.
- b) Whelk Fisheries in the North West –.although the number of samples received from industry over the past 12 months was low for a variety of reasons, the initial analysis of size at maturity data for whelks in the District are showing the Authority’s decision to increase minimum landing size to be appropriate. Officers have approached a second vessel to increase sampling effort. Following training from NWIFCA scientists the Lancaster University BSc student assigned to this work continues to assist with analysis of statoliths for aging of whelks.
- c) Plastics in mussels - the project with Cumbria University to investigate plastics in mussels is on-going with samples being provided by Officers.

### **3. MARINE PLANS AFFECTING THE NWIFCA DISTRICT**

Officers provided a summary of the current situation regarding MMO’s North West Marine Plan, the Welsh National Marine Plan and Scotland’s National Marine Plan in the report to TSB in February. A 12 week consultation was launched on draft marine plans for the North West, North East, South East and South West on 14<sup>th</sup> January and Members are asked to take the time to read the TSB report and to respond to the consultation if relevant. Officers are significantly concerned by the fact that there is a lack of reference to fisheries or sea fisheries resources in the overall vision statement of the North West Marine Plan. Closing date is 6<sup>th</sup> April.

<https://consult.defra.gov.uk/mmo/draft-north-west-inshore-and-offshore-marine-plans/>

### **4. MERSEY TIDAL POWER PROJECT**

Liverpool City Region are investigating the feasibility of a tidal power project in the Mersey Estuary. The interest in developing a tidal power project on the Mersey has strong backing

from the incumbent Metro Mayor. Officers Knott and Hartley were invited to meet with the project lead at Liverpool City Region offices to receive a short briefing on project development. The project has completed a phase of option modelling and is seeking funding for the next stage of development. A project launch event at the end of February will be attended by Dr Hartley.

## **5. RIVER BASIN PLANNING: CHALLENGES AND CHOICES CONSULTATION**

The Environment Agency have launched their Challenges and Choices consultation in which they are seeking views on the challenges our waters face and the choices and changes we all need to make to help tackle those challenges. Responses will contribute to updating of the current river basin management plans, and assist the EA in considering how some approaches to water management may need to change in response to climate change and a growing population. The consultation runs until the 24th of April 2020.

<https://consult.environment-agency.gov.uk/environment-and-business/challenges-and-choices/>

## **6. 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 amongst other things 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.

## **7. COCKLES**

A full report was given to TSB in February presenting survey results up until mid-November when lack of daylight prevented access to intertidal areas.

### **i. Warton Sands**

Officers continue to monitor the cockle stock here when collecting samples for classification purposes. A dense area of undersize cockle persists. BMWG will be convened in the coming months to discuss issues of access to this fishery, as there are a number of constraints making planning should the cockle reach size problematic.

### **ii. Leasowe**

Following industry requests to allow the fishery to operate over 6 days per week instead of the authorised 5 days Officers investigated this in terms of effort, the TAC and for local authority view. Effort is very low and landings report 136 of the 400 tonnes TAC harvested to the end of December. The authorisation to fish 6 days per week, excluding Saturdays, was issued starting 00.01 hrs on Sunday 16th February.

### **iii. Do birds benefit from cockle hand-gathering?**

As Members are aware NWIFCA has a duty to ensure that all its fisheries, including every cockle and mussel fishery, is compliant with nature conservation legislation. The issue of disturbance to protected birds is a key component of these assessments. It is therefore

delightful to receive photographic evidence of the bond established between bird and gatherer which clearly shows some birds take full advantage of the easily available food created by cockles left on the sand from hand-raking. These photographs were sent from a Byelaw 3 permit holder working on Leasowe, who admitted to also sometimes sharing his sandwiches with the birds.



## 8. MUSSELS

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

### **Solway Mussels Subtidal Survey:**

Work continues to better understand the nature of the subtidal mussel ground in the Solway to provide evidence to the Authority and Natural England in relation to 'risk' from a dredge fishery on the protected features of the Solway Firth SAC and SPA. A detailed report was provided to TSB in February. Since then logistics and the weather have scuppered attempts at surveying so far this year, but work has progressed into the acquisition of a mini Hamon grab which is needed for ground truthing the data on type and condition of seabed habitats from the side scan sonar.

## 9. MMO Marine Licence and other consultations for last quarter:

Coastal Monitoring Wave Buoy Network  
 Sellafeld Radioactive Substances Activities Permit - Draft Decision  
 Canning Half Tide Dock dredging\_Dec 2019  
 Eastham Hydropower Project\_Nov 2019  
 Removal of above ground redundant gas main  
 Celtix connect\_round 2 consultation  
 Meathop Embankment

MMO Licensing  
 EA  
 MMO Licensing  
 MMO Licensing  
 MMO Licensing  
 MMO Licensing  
 MMO Licensing

Walney Extension Transmission Assets O&M  
A595 Grizebeck Transport Improvement Scoping Opinion Request  
Howley Weir (archimedes screw hydro project)

MMO Licensing  
Cumbria County Council  
MMO Licensing

**10. Meetings, Workshops and Training attended this quarter**

Solway Firth Partnership Advisory Group Meeting  
Allonby Bay MCZ meeting with Natural England  
NWIFCA Byelaw Review Meeting  
EMFF workshop  
Mersey Sediment Management Stakeholder Group Meeting  
Mersey Tidal Power Project  
Whelk Working Group – Skype  
University of Cumbria – lecture delivered to students

**Science Team**  
**25<sup>th</sup> February 2020**