

**NWIFCA Quarterly Meeting:
14th March 2019: 11.00 a.m.**

**AGENDA
ITEM NO.
13**

SCIENCE AND SURVEY QUARTERLY REPORT 17th NOVEMBER - 16th FEBRUARY 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:

The Senior Scientist continues to attend the monthly national Inshore Fisheries Working Group national Natural England, to keep up-to-date with developments and feed in NWIFCA MPA work.

a) Marine Conservation Zones

i. West of Walney MCZ

There has been no further update on the signing off of the MMO byelaw to prohibit bottom towed gear within the whole MCZ. It is expected imminently.

ii. Defra consultation on Tranche 3 MCZ sites

Defra report that they received over 48,500 responses to the consultation on Tranche 3 MCZs. Site designations are expected by June 7th 2019. At this time Defra will publish a full government response to the consultation, outlining the evidence received and explaining the decisions taken on each site.

b) St Bees Head - Cumbria Coast MCZ - Netting Voluntary Code of Practice

Large numbers of guillemot have already been observed on the cliffs at St Bees during a Whitehaven Officer's patrols. Natural England and RSPB colleagues were contacted for advice on whether there was a need for NWIFCA to act early to implement the voluntary Code of Conduct for netting this year. Advice from Natural England is that further understanding of the birds' behaviour is being sought, but that mid-March is the key vulnerable time for the breeding birds and is a satisfactory time for implementation of the Voluntary Netting Code of Conduct. Officers have been working to inform stakeholders that it will begin on Monday 18th March.

c) Assessment of Fishing Activities in Marine Protected Areas

Analysis of two years of IFCO sightings data and responses to our bait collection questionnaire is being carried out. Assessments of bait collection activity within the District's MPAs has begun. Some assessments will cover multiple MPAs. In total eight assessments will be carried out including all European Marine Sites, MCZs and the proposed T3MCZs.

d) Association of IFCA's Marine Protected Area Project

The AIFCA's National MPA project was launched on 12th February in the House of Commons. The Chairman and Senior Scientist attended for NWIFCA. The successful event was hosted by Scot Mann MP, and it is understood the Minister George Eustace MP and Under-Secretary of State Thérèse Coffey MP were both able to spend a few minutes there. The publication which celebrates the work carried out by the IFCA's into fisheries management in MPAs 2011 - 2018 can be downloaded from the Association's website: <http://www.association-ifca.org.uk/Upload/MPA/AIFCA%20Leaflet-2019%20v15-hires.pdf> along with an interactive map: <http://www.association-ifca.org.uk/map/>

e) Whole Site Management

Defra have recently published a report titled 'Marine Protected Areas Network Report 2012 - 2018' which provides an update on the current state of the Marine Protected Area network established under the Marine and Coastal Access Act. It sets out the progress in establishing the network since 2012 and future plans. This report was laid in parliament on 17th December 2018, pursuant to Section 124 of the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009.

Members' attention should be drawn to Section 3 of the report where Defra states their "commitment to a 'Whole Site Approach' set out in the 25-year Environment Plan and we will explore further the scope for Highly Protected Marine Areas (HPMAs)".

There has been some correspondence from the Marine Conservation Society's Jean-Luc Solandt relating to 'Whole Site Approach' which criticises IFCA's management of some fisheries in some Districts. This raises concerns over whether Defra will require further assessment and management under the "Revised Approach" despite the fact that these assessments have been signed off by Natural England. An example of such a report from the Economist can be found: <https://theecologist.org/2018/nov/08/weak-regulation-jeopardises-marine-life>

NWIFCA had not been aware that this report was in production and has now brought it to the attention of the Inshore Fisheries Working Group where it will be a standing item on the agenda to ensure any updates are fully disseminated.

The report can be accessed through:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/marine-protected-areas-network-report-2012-to-2018>

2. NWIFCA RESEARCH PROJECTS

a) Bass populations and tagging study – Cefas project. No further work during this quarter other than the circulation of a poster highlighting the tagging and providing details of where to return any tags found and the accompanying reward (Annex A).

b) Razor Clam collaborative research – Officers have been working to further the collaborative research. An opportunity has arisen to work with Welsh company Deepdock and Bangor University's Shellfish Centre. TSB approved that Officers continue to develop this project and to apply for dispensation for use of the electro-dredge from the MMO. TSB also approved the issue of a NWIFCA dispensation against NWIFCA byelaws for the research project should the project go ahead.

- c) Whelk Fisheries in the North West – still awaiting first samples from industry. Alternative sources are being investigated so that the study can begin without further delay.
- d) Nephrops Creels project - Natural England project led by Dr Emily Baxter in collaboration with NWIFCA. Following a disappointing start to the project last year it is hoped that through working with a different fisherman this project can now make progress in 2019, in trialing the success of using nephrops creels in the West of Walney MCZ.
- e) BLUEcoast - - Researchers from the National Oceanography Centre (NOC) attended the Carnforth office to discuss the BLUEcoast research currently being conducted in Morecambe Bay NWIFCA scientists. BLUEcoast consortia is led by the NOC and aims to inform coastal management by reducing uncertainties in the prediction of medium-term and long-term regional sediment budgets, morphological change and how the coast recovers after sequences of storms. To do this they have selected several representative coastal systems, one of which is Morecambe Bay. Officers explored the potential for the work of BLUEcoast to contribute to further understanding the dynamics of fisheries in the Bay, and whether NWIFCA science surveys could contribute to this.

It agreed that collection of sediment cores by officers during cockle surveys would provide data beneficial to both NOC and NWIFCA. These sediment samples are being analysed for particle size and organic matter content that, when analysed with cockle abundance data, may inform questions around sediment preferences of cockles in the Bay.

- f) Members will recall projects carried out with Lancaster University students into the relationships between geomorphology and cockle movements in Morecambe Bay. The BSc dissertation produced by Sophie Bleasdale entitled 'An investigation into the temporal variations of Morecambe Bay's geomorphology in relation to known cockle bed settlements using integrated remote-sensing' received a First Class grade, and has now been published on our website under: <https://www.nw-ifca.gov.uk/policies-and-reports/scientific-reports-publications-archive/>

3. DEVELOPMENT OF SUBTIDAL SURVEY ABOARD NORTH WESTERN PROTECTOR

Officers are working to commission all survey equipment on NWP. Due to the age of the equipment and its lack of use to date, time has been needed to update software and bench testing to ensure all issues are resolved before trialing at sea. The side scan has had a successful sea trial with no issues. The data is still to be processed and assistance has been offered by Cornwall IFCA. The Olex ground-discrimination equipment has been tested in the Solway and officers are continuing with commissioning the offshore survey equipment as a priority as time and weather allows.

4. NATIONAL IFCA TAG CONFERENCE

NWIFCA will be hosting the annual TAG Conference this year at the Lancaster Conference Centre. Held from Tuesday 19th - Thursday 21st February, the conference will showcase the scientific and research work of each IFCA, along with presentations from fellow agencies such as Jersey States, Defra, Natural England, MMO, Cefas, the Environment Agency, the Zoological Society of London, Institute of Fisheries Management, Welsh Government, Isle of Man Government and Marine Scotland.

Day One will see the inaugural meeting of the Whelk Working Group whose purpose is:

“to facilitate communication between various IFCA and other organisations’ science teams that are studying or managing whelks in order to help teams monitor and manage whelk more effectively on both a local and national level. The aim of the first meeting will be to establish

the basis of the group (Terms of Reference), who the members are, how often we will meet etc, and also identify the aims and objectives for the group going forward. The working group will explore ways of working to support communal and comparable data collection and have open discussions with Cefas and other organisations to grow our overall understanding of whelk”.

The Senior Scientist is keen to ensure NWIFCA involvement, collaboration and support for the work of TAG. However it is limited to how much time commitment can be given and hosting the conference this year was seen as an achievable contribution. Additionally the CEO has approved the Senior Scientist taking on the role of Vice Chair of TAG (a mainly secretarial and facilitatory role) for the next term.

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

A European Maritime and Fisheries Funded project, led by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee includes 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.

The second workshop was held in February in Lancaster. The aim of this workshop was to progress the previous discussions of developing a model, using two case studies, including West of Walney MCZ to predict ecological outcomes of management using various scenarios of gear and effort intensity, and to develop a toolkit for fisheries management of MPAs. NWIFCA scientists will continue to attend workshops and meetings, and input where appropriate.

6. NORTH WEST MARINE PLAN – MMO

The Senior Scientist dialed in to a workshop on ‘Essential Fish Habitats’ (EFH) run by MMO and Cefas. EFH have been defined as “those habitats that are necessary to the species for spawning, breeding, feeding, or growth to maturity. Some can be especially important ecologically or particularly vulnerable to degradation.” The MMO commissioned the project ‘MMO113 Sites Important to Fish’, in order to acquire improved maps of EFHs from modeling for their new spatial plan for England and Wales. This workshop was part of this project and aims to validate results based on experts’ opinion and local knowledge. They will use feedback to improve the developed draft models and decrease the uncertainty of the resulting maps. MMO will be using these maps for spatial planning and licensing of developments.

Ms Knott is also registered to attend a further MMO workshop in Carlisle in February on iteration 3 of the NW Marine Plan - Policy Development and will report back accordingly. She is currently in the process of responding to the lengthy online consultation on Iteration 3.

7. HALITE GAS STORAGE AND BRINE DISCHARGE - PREEALL

The Environment Agency has been in touch to organise the second meeting of the Marine Monitoring Group after a lengthy delay. Halite have been looking for increased investment and it is understood Halite Energy has been sold to Cheshire Energy Ltd, part of the NPL Group, for an undisclosed sum. Members will be kept up to date as matters unfold.

8. NWIFCA CONTRIBUTION TO NATURAL ENGLAND NATIONAL TRAINING DAY

The Senior Scientist was asked to provide a presentation to a national training day for NE marine and fisheries staff on the work of IFCAs, and specifically NWIFCA. This was successfully delivered by Deputy Senior Scientist Jon Haines, and considered to be a good opportunity to continue to build on the good relationship with NE colleagues.

9. COCKLE FISHERIES

a) Morecambe Bay fisheries

Officers provided survey reports, input to discussion, and facilitated a BMWG meeting in December on the state of the cockle stocks in Morecambe Bay. Following in principal approval by TSB, Science Officer Haines carried out a Habitats Regulations Assessment for the lifting of the NWSFC Byelaw 13a closure on the eastern part of the bed at Pilling, and for authorisations for craam only fisheries at Flookburgh / Leven Sands, and Newbiggin.

The breakage rate study was furthered when it was repeated at Flookburgh in January, and is scheduled for further work on both Flookburgh and Pilling over the coming weeks.

b) Leasowe - Wirral

Following the successful fishery at Leasowe in 2017-18 when just under 1000 tonnes of cockles was fished (according to Byelaw 3 returns), the area has been subject to a further dense recruitment episode in the autumn. Surveys are planned for the coming weeks to assess how much has survived the winter and it is hoped a fishery might be viable again in September.

10. MUSSEL FISHERIES

a) Morecambe Bay - evidence and management relating to perceived risk of Chinese Mitten Crab transferal in mussel

The Senior Scientist was asked for input to Southern Ireland's regulators risk assessment for movements of size mussel from Foulney to Eire for relaying in relation to perceived risk of transference of Chinese Mitten Crab. This was presented to BIM's working group on alien species and aquaculture on 23rd January. Movements of mussels resumed shortly after, following a suspension during the supposed 'high risk' month of January.

NWIFCA scientists have scheduled in quarterly monitoring and surveillance surveys of Foulney and Heysham Flat mussel beds following accepted protocols. Reports will be sent to all regulators associated with destinations of mussels moved from the Bay for aquaculture. Officers are also investigating putting out crab tiles during key times of year along the Walney Channel, as part of the monitoring. IFCOs have been asked to liaise with crab tilers to ensure up-to-date knowledge on this matter has been disseminated.

b) Solway Mussels

As previously discussed industry have enquired about the possibility of opening a subtidal mussel fishery in the Solway and officers have highlighted the difficulties around collecting the data required to inform a HRA. Officers have been working on developing a survey, which has involved the commission of the side scan unit and discussions with Natural England and those with expertise in side scan equipment and Olex systems for ground discrimination. Survey

opportunity has been limited due to requirement for certain tides and weather, and completing the side scan tows in daylight hours. There have been a number of survey days planned which had to be cancelled due to bad weather. Officers will continue to plan suitable days to survey. It is important to highlight that even once a survey is completed it might not provide the data required to inform a full HRA to enable a decision to be made on the fishery, but will help in building on knowledge of the distribution of habitats and information on the mussel.

Solway fishermen are naturally frustrated and have reported their view to the media. An article appeared in the Cumbrian newspaper 'The Times and Star', much of which is refuted by NWIFCA in a statement and again in an interview by CEO requested by BBC Radio Cumbria for the 'Drivetime' programme on 11th February 2019. Members are reminded that NWIFCA agreed in 2017 to provide dispensations to three of the Solway fishers to put down small scientific dredges to help provide data during this time when IFCA's capacity was limited, and that this offer was not taken up.

c) Mussel Spawning Work

Following an invitation from Authority member Kelsey Thompson, work has been initiated with Morecambe Bay Oysters to identify time of year and size that mussels from Foulney achieve spawning condition. Monthly mussel samples of various sizes are collected by IFCOs from Foulney and delivered to Morecambe Bay Oysters where their spawning condition has been assessed. The project will continue until late 2019. NWIFCA scientists also attended a guided demonstration for the assessment of spawning condition in mussels and oysters at the hatchery on Walney Island in December.

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

MMO Marine Licence consultations

Walney OWF cable reburial
Liverpool Channel and River disposal license variation to dredge disposal location

Byelaw 1 dispensations

Maryport Lobster Hatchery educational display - removal of berried hens

Meetings and Training attended this quarter

IFCO Training - week long in Torquay
Chartwork Course
Solway Firth Partnership AGM - NWIFCA presentation
Public Health England - familiarisation with work of NWIFCA
Mersey Estuary Conservation Group meeting
Liverpool Bay Island Creation stakeholder meeting
EMFF workshop - participatory approach to fisheries management
Collaborative razor clam research meeting with industry
Mussel spawning condition training

**Mandy Knott
Senior Scientist
28th February 2019**