

**NWIFCA Annual Meeting:
20th June 2019: 11.00 a.m.**

**AGENDA
ITEM NO.
14**

SCIENCE AND SURVEY QUARTERLY REPORT 17th FEBRUARY - 17th MAY 2019

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

Recommendation: i) Members approve the report.

This quarter the team has remained under strength by one officer, and recruitment has been undertaken for a new Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Advisor.

1. MARINE PROTECTED AREAS IN THE NWIFCA DISTRICT:

The Senior Scientist's attendance at the monthly national Inshore Fisheries Working Group tele-conferences has been sporadic this quarter due to other work commitments.

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

Announcement of the designation of T3 MCZs was made on Friday 31st May. The designations were actually made on 20th May. The three proposed estuarine sites for protection of smelt in NWIFCA District have been designated: Solway Firth, Wyre and Lune Estuary and Ribble Estuary. <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/marine-conservation-zone-designations-in-england>

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

The Voluntary Code of Conduct for Netting in the area around St Bees Head was implemented on 18th March this year following reports of large numbers of birds gathering on the cliffs. Foot patrols are undertaken by IFCOs on a regular basis and recorded. To date compliance has been 100%. The Senior Scientist is engaged with a project run by the National Trust and Natural England using volunteers to survey for bird disturbance on the cliffs. Reporting will cover all types of disturbance to provide information on whether other types of activity require management.

c) Assessment of Fishing Activities in Marine Protected Areas

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. Data has been collated from IFCO sightings data and the 50 responses to the online bait collecting questionnaire.

d) Association of IFCA's Marine Protected Area Project

The AIFCA's project has gone live on their website with an interactive map showing MPAs and what management has been implemented to protect designated features (<http://www.association-ifca.org.uk/map/>). The project has received a further one year's funding, and a presentation will be made at the TAG meeting in July to describe the planned scope and outputs.

e) Whole Site Management

There has been no further word on WSM approach to management, and Officers keep a watching brief on it.

2. NWIFCA RESEARCH PROJECTS

- a) Bass populations and tagging study – Cefas project. A meeting was held to discuss a plan for northwest bass, which includes working with fishers to tag more fish with data storage tags. Several tags have been returned to Cefas from the first batch of tagged fish. Unfortunately some of these had become corrupted and the data was not useable. However two tags did hold sound data which Cefas scientists are analysing and initial results look very interesting in terms of where the fish are going and the depths they reach. Naturally more data from a higher number of fish is required before any conclusions can be drawn.
- b) Razor Clam collaborative research – regular liaison is occurring between NWIFCA and Bangor scientists. MMO have been contacted over the dispensation against the EU regulations that is required for the electro-dredge gear. This is in draft, as is the NWIFCA dispensation. Environment Agency have been contacted and have not expressed any concerns about the research being undertaken, and work has begun on the HRA.
- c) Whelk Fisheries in the North West – three moments of samples have been obtained from a Cumbria fisherman and these are being processed for width / length / weight, sexual maturity (n = 200) and aging (n = 60) per month.
- d) Nephrops Creels project - Natural England project led by Dr Emily Baxter has been going ahead with varying catches reported depending on which pots are used.
- e) National Oceanography Centre Liverpool, NERC bid - following approval by TSB a letter of support was sent to accompany a bid application by NOC for NERC research funds. The project entitled: Digital coasts: rEmote sensing Network for Intertidal Mapping (DENIM) aims to set up a network looking at intertidal mapping, specifically bathymetry and a bed characterisation using remote sensing methods. Using both land-based radar techniques and satellite imagery towards building intertidal maps and with Morecambe Bay as a pilot study they aim to train machine learning techniques, with the view of deriving sediment type from satellite. If the bid is successful NWIFCA will contribute staff time to attend meetings and by providing in situ sediment samples taken during our surveys in Morecambe Bay.

3. DEVELOPMENT OF SUBTIDAL SURVEY ABOARD NORTH WESTERN PROTECTOR

A full report was made to TSB on the progress of subtidal surveying of mussels and associated substrate and can be obtained from the NWIFCA website: <https://www.nw-ifca.gov.uk/app/uploads/Item-5-Silloth-Subtidal-Mussels-Report.pdf>

In summary, progress has been frustrating at times, particularly in view of the need for answers for Silloth fishers. Efforts continue to be prioritised when other workstreams allow.

4. NATIONAL IFCA TAG CONFERENCE and WHELK WORKING GROUP

NWIFCA hosted the annual TAG Conference at the Lancaster Conference Centre. The conference was attended by 50 delegates and showcased the scientific and research work of each IFCA, along with presentations from fellow agencies. The Senior Scientist has taken on the role of Vice Chair of TAG, with Colin Trundle from Cornwall IFCA taking on the Chair.

Day One saw the inaugural meeting of the Whelk Working Group with the development of the Terms of Reference of that group, which seeks to provide a forum for sharing research and management experience. There was a call for a national approach to whelk management in UK waters from Defra as there is widespread concern over the risk to stocks, particularly in relation to the legal minimum landing size.

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

The third workshop of the European Maritime and Fisheries Funded project, 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.

6. HALITE GAS STORAGE AND BRINE DISCHARGE - PREESALL

The planned second meeting of the Marine Management Group was cancelled again at short notice. The Senior Scientist raised concerns with EA about the implications of the group not meeting when it was understood that Halite was progressing the project. This issue was discussed with Natural England who will approach EA for further information on where the project and survey work is up to.

7. NORTH WEST MARINE PLAN – MMO

Ms Knott attended a workshop in Carlisle on Iteration 3 of the NW Marine Plan - Policy Development - and participated where she could in the online consultation. This consultation was extremely lengthy and she commented on her thoughts that the majority of stakeholders would not even attempt to respond let alone have time to respond to every document within it.

8. COCKLE and MUSSEL FISHERIES

A full report was given to TSB in May on survey results and potential upcoming fisheries, which include seed mussel at Heysham Flat in August and Leasowe cockle fishery if the stock has persisted and reached size by the beginning of September. Further surveys are planned to assess the stock's progress and the Authority will be kept up-to-date.

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

This serious issue has not yet been resolved despite efforts from officers and industry alike. NWIFCA scientists continue to conduct quarterly monitoring and surveillance surveys of Foulney and Heysham Flat mussel beds following accepted protocols. Reports are sent to all regulators associated with destinations of mussels moved from the Bay for aquaculture.

IFCOs are liaising with crab tilers to ensure up-to-date knowledge on this matter has been disseminated.

Northern Ireland regulators DAERA continue to refuse to allow any imports of mussel in from the Bay. Having been unsuccessful in gaining any real communications with them, Barrow MP John Woodcock was contacted by the CEO, and he was able to elicit documentation from DAERA on their Invasive Non-Native Species Strategy. This evoked a raft of further questions on how this had been developed, what stakeholder consultation had been carried out, and the justifications behind its approach to mussel aquaculture. These were submitted to John Woodcock MP's Caseworker for her to take back to DAERA for further response. However this has not resulted in any movement on DAERA's stance and it has not been possible to establish any direct dialogue with them. This affects NWIFCA Byelaw 3 permit holders as much of the mussel that is around 45mm length goes for relaying as part-grown mussel.

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

MMO Marine Licence consultations

Dubmill Point sea defences
Jubilee Bridge (Barrow) Painting Works
IOM Ferry Terminal - Mersey
Parton to Harrington Sea Walls
Liverpool Channel and River disposal license variation - Mersey
Rockabill Cable System - Southport

Dispensations

Cefas Nephrops Catch Sampling
EA Lune benthic Sample
AECOM - Mersey Gateway Bridge Ecology Surveys

Meetings and Training attended this quarter

Whelk Working Group - Skype meeting
Crown Estates Aggregate Dredging Tender Round - webinar
EMFF workshop - MPA participatory management
TAG Conference
Cefas Northwest Bass Plan meeting
MMO NW Marine Plan Workshop
Sefton Sea Anglers
Solway Firth Partnership Advisory group
Morecambe Bay Partnerships Annual Conference
Mersey Sediment management Group meeting
Razor clam research meeting
Natural England
Defra consultation on IFCAs

First Aid refresher - two officers

Mandy Knott
Senior Scientist
10th June 2019