

**NWIFCA Technical, Science and Byelaw
Committee**

6th November 2018: 10:00 a.m.

**AGENDA
ITEM NO.
5**

**SCIENCE REPORT
24TH JULY – 12TH OCTOBER 2018**

Purpose: to provide an update to members on the work of the Science team in the last quarter

Recommendation: that Members approve the report.

1. MARINE PROTECTED AREAS IN THE NWIFCA DISTRICT:

The Senior Scientist continues to attend the monthly national Marine Protected Area Management Group tele-conferences facilitated by 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 results of the MMO consultation on the proposed byelaw to prohibit bottom towed gear within the whole MCZ.

ii. Defra consultation on Tranche 3 MCZ sites

There has been no further update on the results of the Defra consultation on the proposed T3 MCZs within the NWIFCA District.

b) Assessment of Fishing Activities in Marine Protected Areas

i. As previously reported Defra have advised that IFCA's must have identified management for all commercial and recreational bait collecting and hand-gathering activity within European Marine Sites by the end of December 2018. This includes all of the following:

- worm digging;
- worm pumping;
- crab tiling;
- shore crab gathering;
- winkle gathering;
- shrimp netting;
- bivalve gathering.

IFCA's have contributed to discussion around this, and provided information on the impact this will have on existing works-streams and plans. A project lead by Natural England whose aim was to simplify the process appears to be faltering, and in fact has caused delay in some areas for the work progressing. TAG has requested that Defra give an extension to the deadline and provides answers to some outstanding questions, and the suggestion is now March 2019. *The NWIFCA is working towards carrying out the bait*

collection assessments, through analysis and mapping of IFCO sightings data, and increased data from an on-going recreational anglers' questionnaire/survey. Templates for each site assessment are being set-up and once data has been compiled the assessments will be completed, agreed with regional NE, and posted on our website and Huddle.

Achieving the deadline may be difficult against other priorities. NWIFCA will act should any concerns be raised from Natural England, any NGOs or members of the public. The NWIFCA has a proven track record of delivery including the Voluntary Code of Practice for netting around St Bees Head (Cumbria Coast MCZ T3 proposed extension); inclusion of Allonby Bay MCZ (T2) site Sabellaria alveolata reef prior to site designation when making Red Risk byelaw; and individual bed specific HRA and management for cockle and mussel fisheries.

Bait collection activity levels are relatively low in this District and therefore assessments are only anticipated to need to go to TLSE.

ii. Officers invited colleagues from Southern IFCA to the District in September. A meeting was held to provide further information for the Defra-funded project to summarise the IFCA's experience of the Revised Approach to Fisheries Management in EMS. This was followed by a tour of Morecambe, Heysham and Sunderland Point. An impromptu visit to Margaret and Trevor Owen resulted in an extremely educational conversation and demonstration of haaf netting for salmon and trout, from the NWIFCA ex-member. Margaret is the only woman haaf netter in the UK – possibly globally, and although in her 60s still continues to venture into the Lune with her hand-made net. She explained the position relating to the current proposals from the EA in restricting the haaf net fisheries. Our SIFCA colleagues were very impressed by Margaret, Trevor and Sunderland Point itself having never come across fishers like them.

The following day our guests were invited aboard North Western Protector as she was taken out on patrol, and given the opportunity to discuss with Master Hughie Thinnesen the vessel, her workings and a boarding patrol using the RIB from the stern ramp. SIFCA are considering purchasing a similar vessel. Science Officers took advantage of their presence by getting advice on carrying out survey from her.

c) NWIFCA MPA Monitoring and Control Plan

Science Officer Dr Melanie Hartley has been tasked with carrying out the scheduled monthly reviews of the site / gear HRAs within the MPA M&C Plans, with assistance from Deputy Jon Haines. She will also shortly begin carrying out the assessments for Cumbria Coast MCZ and Allonby Bay MCZ, neither of which have much fishing activity occurring at all, hence their position on the priority list.

2. NWIFCA RESEARCH PROJECTS

- a) Nephrops creel potting – Natural England project with assistance from NWIFCA. Unfortunately this project has failed to get off the ground following a promising start.
- b) Bass populations and tagging study – Cefas workshop held in September attended by around a dozen fishers from both commercial and recreational sectors. An informative day with presentations from Cefas, Bangor University and NWIFCA, culminating in useful exchange of fishers' knowledge and experience on bass stocks in the NE Irish Sea. This data will be used by Cefas and Bangor scientists to shape further work. An online survey has also been announced with details provided at Annex A.

Officers are keen to see a subsequent workshop to train fishers on T-bar tagging. Two bass tagged last year with data storage tags (DST) have been recovered. Unfortunately it was found that the DST from the first one had become corrupted and no useful data could be retrieved. It is not known how this occurred. The second one is awaiting collection by Cefas in the NWIFCA freezer.

- c) Razor Clam collaborative research – following a request a further meeting was held with an English razor fisher with a licence to fish in the Scottish scientific trials of electro gear in razor fisheries (<https://www.gov.scot/Topics/marine/Sea-Fisheries/management/razors>). Other progress is delayed as Officers await industry action relating to H&S protocols to enable science officers to work aboard their vessels. On-going background research and reading is being carried out by Dr Hartley.
- d) Whelk Fisheries in the North West – all equipment and MMO dispensation now obtained to enable aging and reproductive condition to be assessed. Samples to begin as soon as contracted fisher can land some to Officers. It is hoped to obtain samples from within the District in the old NWSFC area. Otherwise samples will come from just beyond the 6nm limit.
- e) The Senior Scientist and Dr Hartley met with Prof. Philip Barker, Director of Lancaster Environment Centre (LEC) and Ian Winfield, Freshwater Ecologist at CEH (Centre for Ecology and Hydrology) to investigate collaborative research focusing on potential for biological and ecological student projects within our estuarine and coastal areas. The science team will draw up a list of potential projects and forward them to Professor Barker, with the intention of firming up project proposals with his fellow academic staff and offer them to Masters students.

A search of temperate marine biology research and study at Cumbria University (based in Ambleside) has also been carried out and efforts will be made to build links with academics there where appropriate.

3. NORTH WESTERN PROTECTOR

Attempts to begin setting up survey equipment onboard NWP have been delayed due to the need for a new carnie. However Deputy Senior Scientist Jon Haines has worked with marine electricians brought in to sort out the new wheelhouse computer to ensure the electronic components and data feeds are up and running.

4. BIOSECURITY PLAN

An ID leaflet and advice on Chinese Mitten Crab has been produced (Annex B) and is being distributed for display and circulation. The 5 year NWIFCA Biosecurity Plan (2014 – 2019) is under review by Science Officer Huw James so that a revised and updated version can be published in 2019.

5. RECREATIONAL ANGLERS ENGAGEMENT

Officer Huw James has taken on the task of actioning the NWIFCA Recreational Angling Strategy and is constantly on the look-out for opportunities to meet with and engage with the sector. He has visited fishing marks in the District and spoken to anglers there. He has attended two angling matches at Morecambe sponsored by Jerrys Fishing: a smoothhound match and an open competition. He has also presented at a meeting of the Sefton Angling Club with IFCO Brownrigg.

The bait collection questionnaire for recreational anglers has been widely circulated, and a digitised version is on the NWIFCA website. Although there has been the expected negative comments about it on social media, 34 responses have been received to date and more are anticipated. Officers have been keen to explain the purpose of the data collection and to attempt to dispel the natural caution some anglers have to providing data to a regulator.

6. NORTH WEST MARINE PLAN – MMO

The Senior Scientist attended two webinars on developing policy documents for the NW Marine Plan, on the subjects of Recreational and Tourism, and Fisheries.

7. SOLWAY FIRTH PARTNERSHIP WORKING GROUP

Officers continue to attend and contribute to the quarterly SFP Working group meetings, and will be presenting on fisheries in the Solway at the SFP Annual Conference in November.

8. BARROW WILDLIFE AND HERITAGE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Officers attended the meeting in September to provide information on the Chinese Mitten Crab issue and the good practice carried out in screening protocols by the NWIFCA and fishing industry. The CMC leaflet has been distributed via this committee as Walney Channel and its surrounds is an area of particular interest.

9. CROWN ESTATE OFFSHORE WIND LEASING

Dr Hartley has been responding to consultation with the Crown Estate over potential new offshore wind leasing sites. NWIFCA response to the latest documents is provided for Members at Annex C.

**Mandy Knott
Senior Scientist
16th October 2018**