

**NWIFCA Technical, Science and Byelaw
Committee**

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

**AGENDA
ITEM NO.**

7

COCKLE AND MUSSEL REPORT

Purpose: to provide a report to members on the District's cockle and mussel fisheries.

Recommendation: that Members approve the report.

1. BMWG – Bivalve Mollusc Working Group

There have been no meetings of BMWG since July. Correspondence has been carried out by email.

Full survey results are provided in Annex A

2. MUSSELS:

i. Heysham Flat

Surveys for Chinese Mitten Crab (CMC) provided no evidence of presence on the skear. The seed mussel fishery was authorised on 23rd July. Effort was low. Officers inspected landings to gather evidence that screening for CMC was being properly carried out by the fishing industry.

An inspection of the skear on 13th September showed that the southern area had experienced significant scour and loss of top layer of mussel, with some areas having also lost mud. Other than that the whole of the main skear and the entirety of Knott End skear held superabundant (SAC abundance scale) undersize mussel. The majority of it was hard in (mussel is tightly compacted together within the substrate) the only area with any mud under the mussel was in the upper skear where the abundant mussel was around 20mm shell length and very soft shelled. The superabundant mussel on the lower areas of the skear and Knott End skear was around 30mm shell length. Harvesting was expected to cease post inspection due to the hardness of the ground.

The bottom skears could not be accessed but appeared black with numerous feeding birds (mainly oystercatcher and gulls) suggesting mussel still present. Looking at the layer under an area that had been raked by gatherers there was live mussel which presumably following the next tide would be sitting on the top of the sediment.

The main area of *Sabellaria alveolata* was to the north in the channel, off the skears. It looked healthy from a distance but inspection was not possible. The area on the north of the main skear was also still in evidence. Small clumps of *Sabellaria alveolata* on the main skear were inspected and appeared to not hold any live worms. Small clumps on Knott End skear were inspected and did hold some live worms.

The Authorisation was on the whole fished without incident. One incident of unpermitted gathering was detected and a FAP for £500 was paid.

ii. Foulney

A survey for Chinese Mitten Crab was carried out on 15th August, with 39 adult shore crabs, 115 juvenile shore crabs, two brown crabs and a long-clawed porcelain crab (*Pisidia longicornis*) recorded. No CMC were found either by visual search or sampling. The results of this survey were provided to regulators in other administrations where the mussel is being sent for relaying.

Size mussel was being and continues to be fished by a few gatherers.

iii. Fleetwood mussels

Perch Scar

Work was carried out to authorise a dredge fishery on Perch Scar under the “NWIFCA Restriction on the Use of a Dredge Byelaw 2017”, A Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) was completed with mapping. An authorisation, and application forms were drawn up. Two companies were interested, however the mussel was lost to tides and weather before completed applications and fees were received and therefore no fishing occurred. However this event did provide further evidence of the ephemeral nature of this stock.

iv. Seafield Road, Lytham

The dense seed mussel was inspected on 11th September. Some had scoured out, but there was abundant stock remaining however continuing high e-coli results gives the bed a prohibited classification meaning no size mussel destined for the human food chain can be removed for sale.

A potential relaying fishery was discussed at Shellfish Liaison Group and by email with Cefas, FSA, local EHO and industry. However, these agencies agreed that because some mussel are above the MLS and there is a mix of size classes on the bed, the risk of mussel being taken for sale is too great. A fishery should not be permitted therefore until the classification has improved. Hygiene sampling will be restarted in the hope the condition of the river has improved and size mussel can be classified again.

Officers and industry have asked at Shellfish Liaison Group that investigations are carried out as to why the river waters are so poor, and work carried out to improve matters. The whole of the bivalve mollusc stock in the Ribble, is either prohibited or class C.

v. Dee mussels

A low level of effort by Byelaw 3 permit holders continues on the size mussel on the English side of the Dee.

3. COCKLES:

i. Penfold North cockles, Southport

In June – July cockle was dying in hot weather, TSB approved commencement of harvesting and the fishery opened during the Seasonal Closure on 30th July. Science Officers attended to observe the fishery and the methods for removing the cockle from the severely muddy area. Operators used an assortment of kit including ropes, car bonnets and tonne bags to drag the cockle off the muddy area to the sandy edges where it was loaded onto quads and trailers.

There was concern over litter being dropped within the Nature Reserve, and one operator attempted to divert water from creeks on the saltmarsh to use for cockle washing. In the context of a severe drought and the importance of water management on the nature reserve, this was unacceptable. Despite instructions from IFCOS to discontinue this practice, it carried on. The Authority may consider closing a fishery prematurely if there is damage to a protected site from activities associated with the fishery.

ii. Morecambe Bay cockles

Pilling, Leven, Flookburgh and Newbiggin contain sufficient cockle to consider authorising a fishery. All cockle beds contain mixed sizes of cockle including high densities of juveniles. Due to potential damage to the juvenile stock, management measures including a reduced jumbo size and the use of a craam were considered. TSB Members were invited by email on 25th September to comment on and approve to open these areas for fishing with craam only. Members gave authority by emails which member Stephen Manning requested be included in the papers for this meeting. Accordingly the emails received are in Annex B.

- a. Pilling Sands: A limited cockle fishery has not yet been authorised at Pilling where concerns have been raised that a craam only fishery would be difficult to enforce. Recent experience at Flookburgh has shown unwillingness to comply with a craam only fishery. An investigation is on-going into the use of rakes by several permit holders
- b. Leven Sands / Flookburgh: The cockle fishery has been opened using craam only and reduced size jumbos as used on the Leven Sands fishery in spring 2016. These measures should ensure that the fishery is HRA compliant and protect juvenile stock for a possible fishery in autumn 2019. Any fishery will of course be subject to future survey results.
- c. Newbiggin – Morecambe Bay: There is a similar year class make up of stock as at Flookburgh / Leven Sands beds but much lower density. This bed may be authorised for opening in future but is currently declassified for shellfish hygiene purposes. Sampling by IFCOs on behalf of local authority Environmental Health has begun and re-classification may permit opening in December 2018.

iii. Leasowe – North Wirral

An inspection of the cockle bed at Leasowe showed a dense area of recruitment. Surveys will be a priority in early spring as this is known to be an area where cockle can grow rapidly. Suffice to report for now that a fishery seems likely some time in 2019.

4. Shellfish Liaison Group

The Senior Scientist and HoE attended the SLG meeting in September, and continue to work regularly with other agencies and regulators where appropriate.