

NWIFCA Technical, Science and Byelaw Committee

3rd November 2020: 10:00 a.m.

Agenda Item

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MORECAMBE BAY CHINESE MITTEN CRAB

Purpose: To provide an update to members on the issue of Chinese Mitten Crab in the District

Recommendation: Report provided for information.

Background (with information taken from the GB non-native species secretariat ID publication):

1. Chinese Mitten Crab (*Eriocheir sinensis*) is an invasive non-native species (INNS) first recorded from the River Thames in 1935 having been discharged from the ballast tanks of ships. It is now well-established in the Rivers Thames, Humber, Medway, Tyne, Wharfe and Ouse.
2. Populations known to have been established within the NWIFCA District for some years are in the Dee Estuary and the Mersey Estuary (recorded by EA since 2008 and 2009 respectively).
3. Occasional sightings of individual adults had been recorded in the Duddon Estuary, the most recent one being from 2012. This was verified by the South Cumbria Rivers Trust at the time.
4. Chinese Mitten Crabs prefer to moult in freshwater but are unable to lay eggs at low salinities. Adults therefore migrate down rivers in the autumn to gather in estuaries to breed. Once eggs hatch in spring, juveniles and adults migrate back up the river. They are also able to cross dry land and have been found in isolated freshwater ponds. They can travel large distances and have been recorded up to 1,500km from the sea in their native China.
5. Their ability to travel large distances up river systems and cross dry land means that all waterbodies in Britain have the potential to be invaded.
6. Chinese Mitten Crabs burrow into river banks, affecting their integrity and so can cause considerable damage. They have been placed on the IUCN 100 of the world's worst alien species list.
7. Chinese Mitten Crab are listed under the Invasive Alien Species (Enforcement and Permitting) Order 2019 which came into force on 1st October 2019. Under this Order it is an offence for anyone to release Chinese Mitten Crab in to the wild.
8. As members are aware IFCO Dixon was contacted by a crab tiler in the Walney Channel in May 2018 with a report of two individuals caught. Photographs were supplied but the specimens had been destroyed and disposed of and therefore could not be confirmed. NWIFCA mounted a public awareness campaign in the Barrow and Walney area. No further crabs were reported.

Mussel Management and Chinese Mitten Crab:

9. Natural Resources Wales (NRW was CCW) adopted a risk based approach to the import of seed mussel from the Dee Estuary to mussel lays in the Menai Strait in 2011. They implemented a standard operating procedure for screening seed mussel beds developed by Dr

Andy Woolmer, and based permissions for import around times of greatest risk according to crab life cycle and movements as provided above (para. 4).

10. NWIFCA officers liaised with NRW over the harvest of mussel from the English side of the Dee Estuary in 2011, accompanying Francis O'Beirn from the Marine Institute in Ireland in carrying out a timed search on the mussel beds.
11. A good practice guidance leaflet was produced and circulated to NWIFCA mussel gatherers on the Dee who have continued to harvest mussel when it is available as size, some of which has been destined for relaying.
12. Following the report from the Walney Channel NWIFCA officers carried out due diligence by identifying and contacting all regulators of areas to which mussel was destined for relaying, and implementing quarterly surveillance surveys on Foulney and Heysham Flat mussel beds. Reports have been provided to these regulators on a quarterly basis.
13. Various approaches were adopted by regulators at that time dependent on their view of the risk of mussel imports. Some took the risk-based approach of NRW, some implemented their own surveillance on stock coming in to their areas prior to relaying, and Northern Ireland placed a prohibition on any mussel movements from Morecambe Bay.
14. As members will recall there has subsequently been a detrimental effect on the harvest of seed mussel from Heysham Flat as the main outlet had previously been to lays in Northern Ireland.

Current Situation:

15. The Senior Scientist was contacted in late September by a netsman fishing the Keer river who had caught two adult Chinese Mitten Crab on the ebb on the way out of the river, and had kept them contained and alive.
16. The Senior Scientist collected them and confirmed them to be an adult male and an adult female. The female was not carrying eggs.
17. The Senior Scientist contacted Authority Members, regulators and the Bivalve Mollusc Working Group to notify them of the confirmed capture. She also liaised with the Environment Agency.
18. DAERA (NI), Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, confirmed their continued position of prohibition of mussel movements from Morecambe Bay into NI.
19. BIM, Ireland State agency responsible for seafood development, have been in contact to discuss updating their risk assessment of mussel imports and investigating their own surveillance and possibilities of eDNA survey. The Senior Scientist has offered to provide tissue samples from the specimens held frozen in NWIFCA facilities.
20. Other regulators have been in touch and are assessing their approaches.
21. NWIFCA have placed a press release on the website and the Comms Officer has developed a poster (Annex A) for distribution around angling shops and shoreline marks, and to be posted on our Facebook and twitter pages. He has also set up an online recording page for further finds on the website. Officers intend to collect samples and keep close records if possible.

Senior Scientist
14th October 2020

Sources of Further Information: www.nonnativespecies.org