NWIFCA Quarterly Meeting
18th September 2015: 11:00 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM NO. 11

SCIENCE REPORT
23RD MAY- 28TH AUGUST 2015

Staffing and Recruitment

As Members are aware Ms Leadbeater left the Authority on 12th June. Following the advertising of the vacant science officer post, 65 applications were received and skype interviews were carried out on 20th August with six short-listed candidates. We are very pleased to have appointed Jon Haines to the team. Jon is previously known to us as one of the first cohort of Wildlife Trust Marine Graduates and has since worked with North Eastern IFCA. Interestingly Jon is the third NWIFCA staff member to have been recruited from that partnership project, showing its value to career development in this sector and the partnership's success.

Cockle and Mussel Fisheries in the NWIFCA District

IFCOs regularly report to the Science Team on the state of the cockle and mussel beds in the District and if signs are that there is significant stock then surveys are targeted at those beds. To date there have been no reports of any significant settlement of cockles. Details of the Solway and Leven cockle surveys are given in the report below.

Officers report that the West Kirby mussel bed in the Dee has more or less gone – it had formed on old cockle shell but has not been subject to mussel recruitment for a few years now. There is regular low level harvesting of size mussel in the Ribble Estuary. Details of the current known situation of all other beds are given in the report.

SURVEY AND FISHERIES WORK

Fleetwood Mussels

The mussel beds at Fleetwood were inspected on 4th August. Positions of these beds are shown in Figure 1.

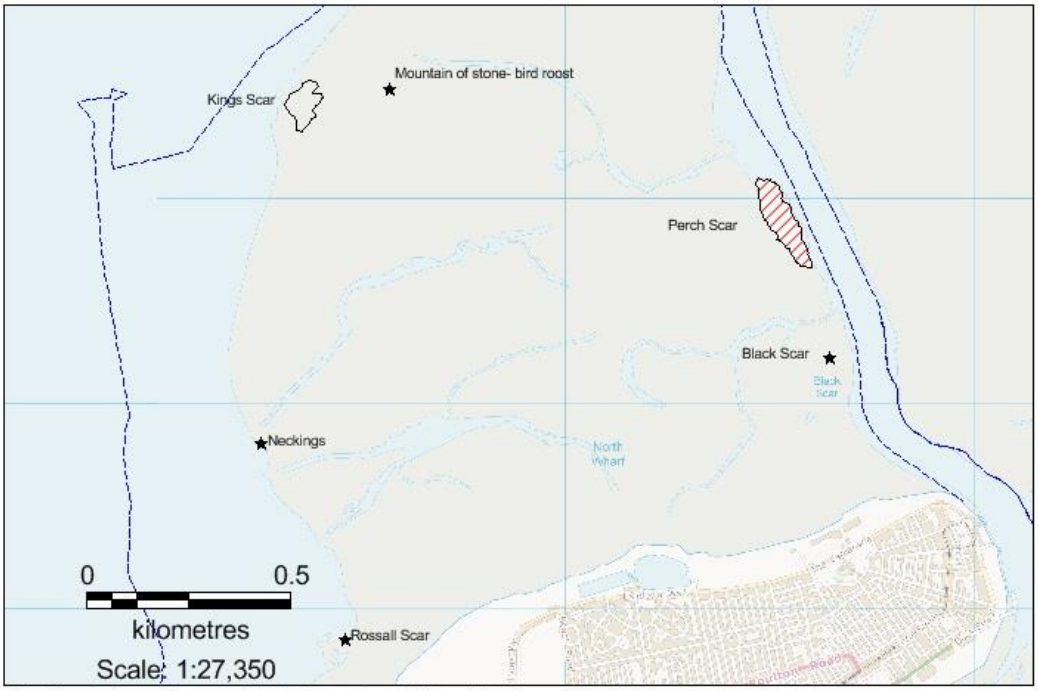

Fig. 1. Positions of Fleetwood Mussel beds.

Black Scar:

Very little mussel apart from narrow strip averaging 6m wide, along edge of channel for about 400m – size or nearly size – loose, clean and sitting on mud. Area of mussel estimated = 0.24ha. Higher up on bed some mussel hard in ~ 5mm length. Also some pin prick – just settled.

Perch Scar:
Two areas of mussel with sand between. Lower area had plentiful mussel ~ 10-20mm length (Fig. 2). Hard in as of yet but will be good if it persists (Fig. 3). Top area holds small but dense mussel, again hard in. Area estimated from previous mapping = 5ha.

Fig. 2. Perch Scar, Fleetwood, with dense mussel cover. 4th August 2015.

Fig. 3. Perch Scar, Fleetwood, hard in dense mussel. 4th August 2015.

King Scar:
Thick dense mussel – hard in. From 5mm – 30mm. At least two spatfalls. Local IFCO assesses that majority of this bed would uncover on 1.8m tide. Area estimated from previous mapping = 2.5ha. More to the east of it on scar ground – very hard in ~5mm.

Neckings:
Large amount of loose 2015 mussel washed up in piles which is dying (Fig. 4). Clean but smells. Local IFCO advises mussel here is normally washed out by October / early November. Nearly size. Large number of birds feeding on it.

Fig. 4. Piles of loose clean but dying mussel at Neckings, Fleetwood.
4th August 2015

Rossall Scar:
Plenty of mussel dense and mixed sizes – 10-40mm. Some healthy *Sabellaria alveolata* clumps. A very rough guestimate a this bed was not mapped would give around 5ha – similar size to perch Scar. Southern area of this scar already washed out – Birds feeding. Mainly gulls with some ringed plover and oystercatcher.

Wyre End mussels

The mussel beds at Wyre End (Knott End) were inspected on 30th July. The bed was tracked on foot using handheld GPS. This was uploaded into MapInfo and the image below created to show the bed outline (Fig. 5). It covers an area estimated at 11.53ha, with a perimeter estimated at 2.26km. Gulls and oystercatchers were observed feeding on this skear, which held a ring of varying sizes of mussel around its periphery (Fig. 6). The centre of the skear was covered in green algae (Fig. 7) which on closer inspection held very little mussel beneath it. There was no evidence of a recent spatfall.

Due to limited time due to the tide it was not possible to map the actual mussel area – however using the mapping software a rough estimate can be made giving mussel coverage as 30% and thus an area of around 3.5ha holding mussel of mixed sizes.

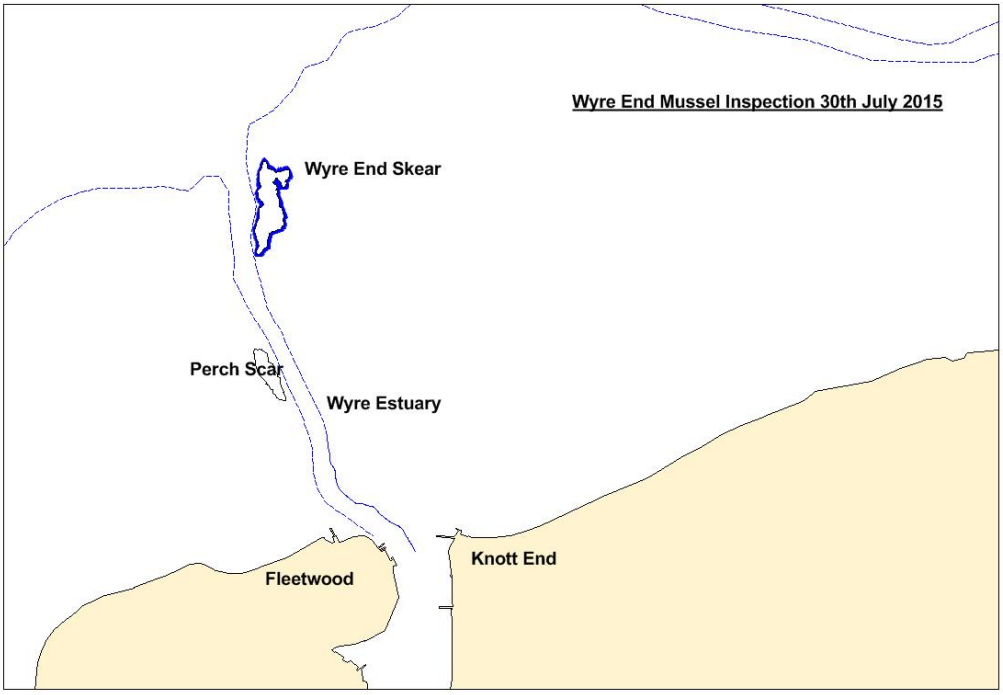

Fig. 5. Mapping of Wyre End skear 30th July 2015 – showing its size and position in relation to Perch Scar, Fleetwood and Knott End.

Fig. 6. Mussels around the periphery of Wyre End skear. 30th July 2015.

Fig. 7. Wyre End skear looking north east showing the centre covered in green algae, a band of shell and then mussel in mud beyond. 30th July 2015.

Heysham Flat mussels

A heliflight was chartered over the Bay on 18th May and covered both Heysham Flat and South America north Morecambe Bay. A foot inspection was carried out on 3rd July (1.1m ebb). The area has received at least two spatfalls – one very recent with pin prick mussels. One that in the lower reaches of the scar has grown to around 15-20mm length. The settlement is very substantial and blanketing the skear (Figs. 8-10). It has covered the size mussel that had remained on top of the main *Sabellaria alveolata* reef area. It is also all over the two skears beyond Dallam Dyke. Dallam Dyke looks like it could fill in. It has a 'dam' of old shell almost stretching across its width at the northern end. If that fills in then the whole dyke will fill in and the two skears join.

The 2014 mussel looks to be buried under 2015 settlement. It is unlikely to survive as the mussel puts down mud. The worms are also blanketed with seed mussel. There is very little across the whole skear in any fit condition. It was surveyed by Wildlife Trust Marine Trainees on 6th July. There is some settlement and tiny worm tubes, but this is covered by the pin prick mussel.

A full mussel survey utilising the Dutch Wand methodology was carried out on 3rd August 2015. The whole of the main skear was included in this survey to estimate biomass, with map of transects shown in Figure 11. The area of the main mussel bed was estimated at 62.2 hectares, with mussel coverage of 87%. Samples taken, weighed and input into the biomass calculations gave an estimated biomass of 4921 tonnes. This corresponds to previous years when estimates of around 4000 tonnes have been given for the main skear.

Using MapInfo, an estimate of the areas of Knott End skear and the next skear out was made (4.81 ha and 0.90 ha respectively). Using the biomass of the main skear as a proxy, an estimate of biomass on these skears was also made, giving 380.5 tonnes and 71.2 tonnes respectively.

Fig. 8. Heysham Flat skear 3rd July 2015.

Fig. 9. Heysham Flat skear 3rd July 2015.

Fig. 10. Heysham Flat skear 3rd July 2015.

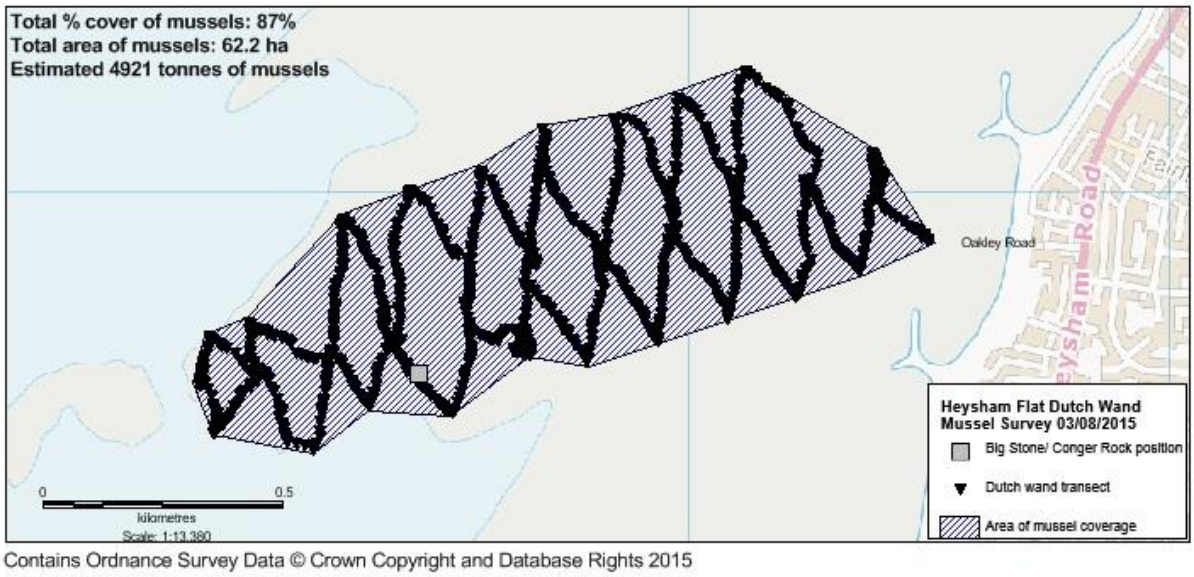

Fig. 11. Mapping of the Heysham Flat Dutch Wand mussel survey showing transects across the skear. 3rd August 2015

A Habitats Regulations Assessment was carried out and with mitigation and management a conclusion of no risk to the integrity of the EMS from fishing activities could be drawn. Conditions were included in the authorisation issued for the hand-gathered seed mussel fishery to open on 17th August to hand-gatherers, with a demarcated zone of no access or fishing to protect the historical main reef area of Honeycomb Worm reef. (Fig.12).

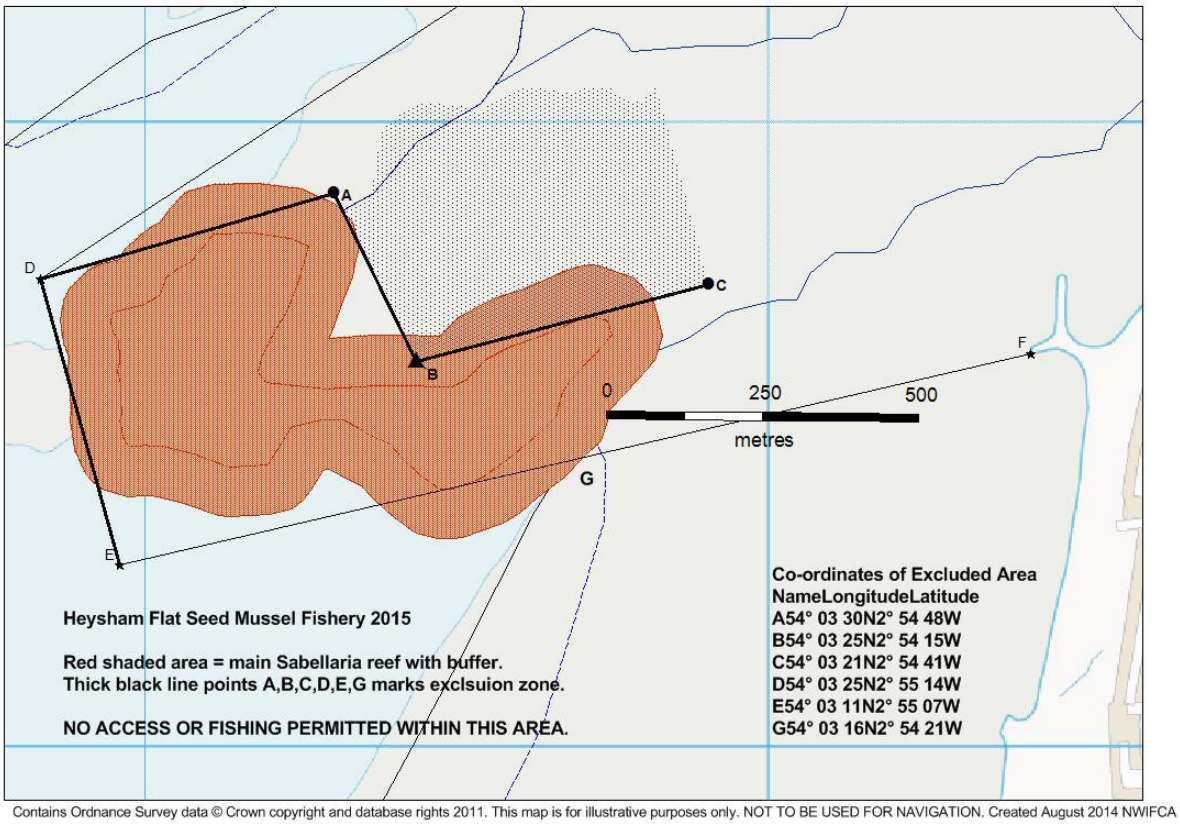

Fig. 12. Heysham Flat seed mussel fishery authorised area 2015.

South America and North Morecambe Bay

An inspection was made by quad bike on 4th July (0.9m tide) accessing the northern area from the shore. It was only possible to reach around 1.6km into the old 1978 Mussel Fishery Order area from the north – the rest of this area remained covered in water. The area known as Box 1 from the 2014 fishery lay off to the west with a covering of water. There was no change of colour in the water progressing from north to south - it all looked to have a sandy substrate and therefore not suitable for mussel settlement. Looking out to the south there were no birds seen at all, suggesting there was nothing for them to feed on. In years when mussel is present there are usually large numbers of birds seen heading out to the exposed skears as low water approaches, and the white from their plumage can be seen from a distance.

Industry reported that they had carried out a hovercraft inspection on 2nd August accessing the area known as the Falklands beds which lies further south, and finding two areas, one with 2014 mussel interspersed with new spat settlement, and one with 2014 now dominated with on-growing 2015 mussel. The NWIFCA has received requests to open these areas to dredge fishing. Officers will inspect the beds on the big spring tides at the beginning of September and provide an updated verbal report to Members.

Low Bottom mussels– area between Foulney and the Seasalter oyster farm:

The area around the oyster frames and between the frames and Foulney ‘Ditch’ was also inspected on 4th July and had scarce mussel showing. There was a small amount of 2014 mussel left right at low water line on which oystercatchers were feeding. From the ditch over to Foulney there was the older mussel which is usually seen there. There was no evidence of any 2015 settlement (Figs. 13 and 14).

Fig. 13. North Morecambe Bay between oyster frames and Foulney ‘Ditch’.

Bare sand with sand mason colonisation.4th July 2015

Fig. 14. North Morecambe Bay between oyster frames and Foulney ‘Ditch’.

Small amount of 2014 mussel left right at low water line which OC were feeding on. 4th July 2015.

Foulney

The mussel bed at Foulney was surveyed using the Dutch Wand methodology to assess biomass on 3rd August (0.5m tide). The mapping below (Fig. 15) shows transects that were walked. (Note the base map used in MapInfo does not reflect the true low water marks now found on this skear). There was a problem with the GPS so some of the transects were conducted by eye to cover a zig zag pattern across the bed. Samples using a corer were taken every 25 hits. The total bed size was estimated at around 40.8 ha with 77% coverage giving an estimated 5253 tonnes of mussel biomass.

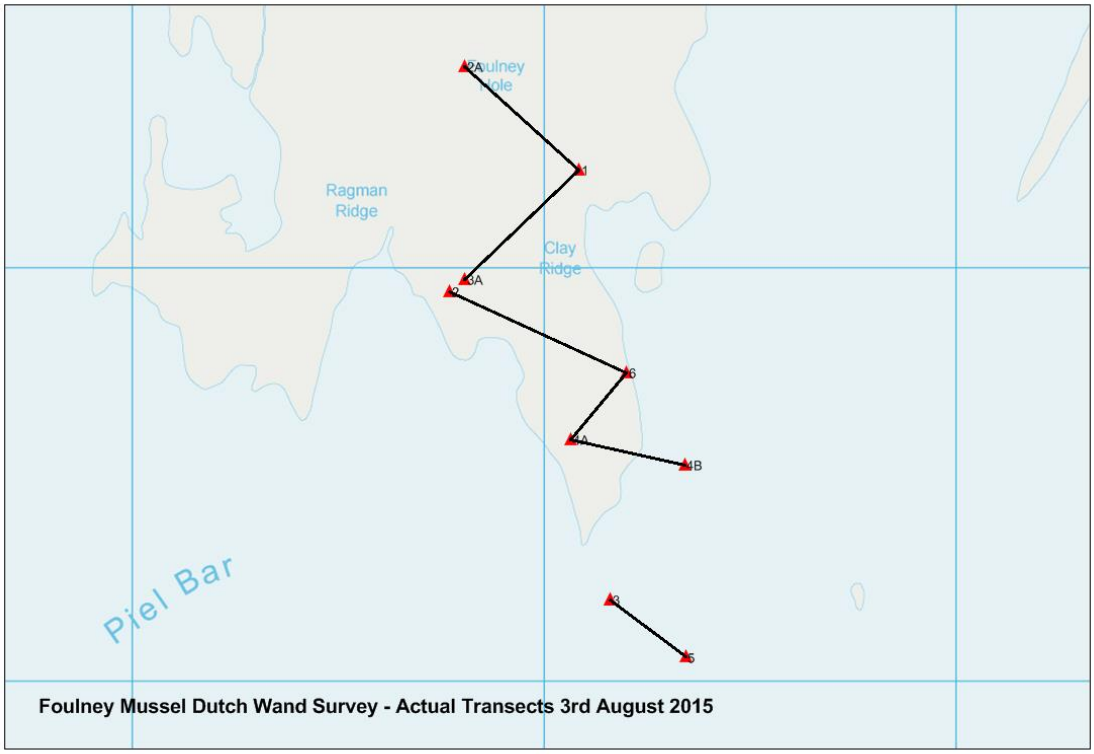

Fig. 15. Dutch Wand Survey to assess mussel biomass on Foulney. 3rd August 2015.

Sample 5A to 5B contained the largest mussels (2014 remaining). It appears off the skear but is actually on an 'island' off the bottom of the skear that can only be reached on the biggest tides due to a channel running between it and the main skear. There were some starfish still littering the north eastern part of this bed which had previously been observed swarming over western edge. This island had around 99% mussel coverage, and was an area that had been hand-gathered in 2014.

The rest of the skear held a mix of sizes with a great deal of broken shell. Much of the lower skear was covered in a dense mat of green algae, covering the mussel underneath. This is a common occurrence on this skear and in some years appears to protect the mussel from being washed out in scouring.

Duddon Estuary

The mussel bed at Hardacre (Fig. 16) has been fished by up to around 40 hand-gatherers for size mussel from April 2014 – July 2015, when a substantial settlement was recorded and hand-gathering ceased to protect the new spat. The area of the bed is estimated (from 2014 survey data) to be around 30ha.

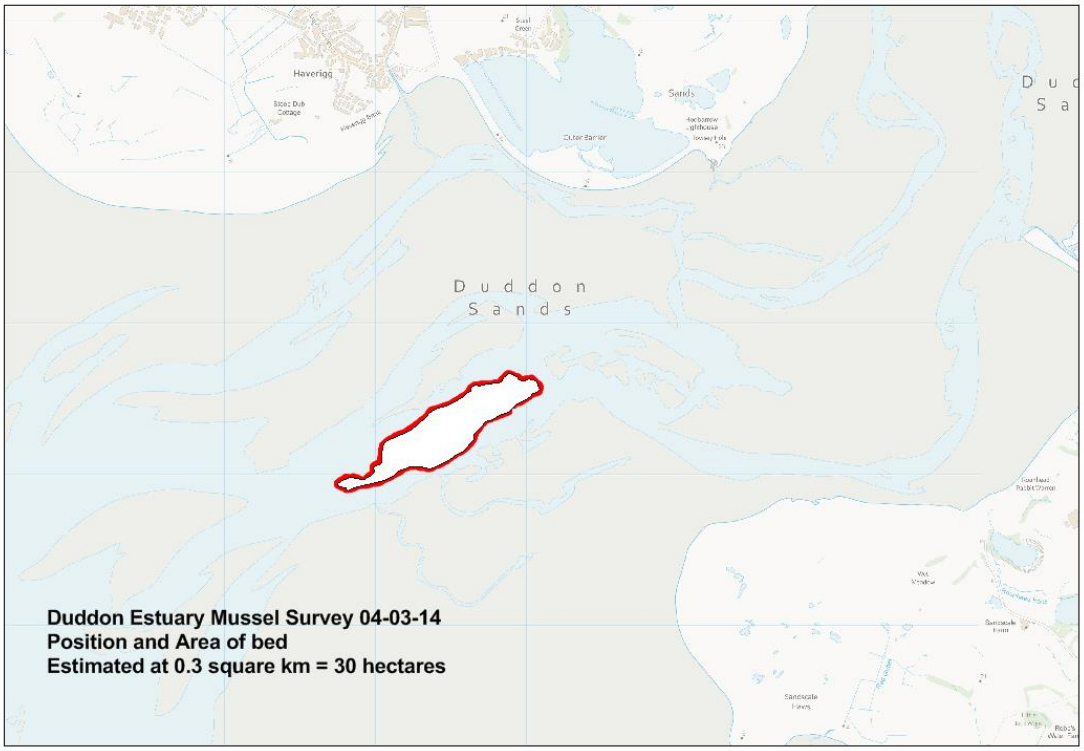

Fig. 16. Illustrative map of the mussel; bed at Hardacre, Duddon Estuary which is now heavily settled with 2015 mussel spat.

Lytham mussels

From Seafield Road slip two main areas of mussel exist. To the west going out of the river is an area that has built up over the last 12 months which is nearly always under water (Fig. 17). It is very well protected by the training wall and may not succumb to scouring. Some of the mussel is already size or just under size. Most will probably have reached size by September. It is very loose, sitting on a deep layer of soft mud. The mussels are very clean with no barnacle attachment. A few gulls and the occasional oystercatcher were seen feeding on it.

There are also patches of new settlement – around 3mm particularly along a 'ridge' which looks to have stone underneath, along with some pinhead size spat. Although officers did not reach the training walls it was evident that these had also been settled on both north and south. It was possible to see it was black and there were flocks of birds on the wall, suggesting food availability.

Officers will enforce the MLS on this bed and mussel will be riddled and graded on the beach for size mussel harvesting. The level of scour and persistence of the mussel will be recorded.

The second area extends eastwards including the area that was authorised to seed mussel hand-gathering earlier in the year which was prosecuted by six Byelaw 3 permit holders taking 3 tonnes in total. There is a dense settlement (Fig. 18) which extends quite high up on the bank, some sitting on very claggy mud, which it is assumed is not mussel mud but normal estuarine mud as it is too early and they are too small for them to have put down this amount of mud. There is also an amount of mussel left from earlier in the year which is size or near to size, along the edge of the channel and extending into the water (Fig. 19). Some reaches 50 – 55mm and is very clean and loose. Where it has scoured (very small area and limited) it has re-seeded. This is now very soft on the edge and might scour when the weather changes.

Fig. 17. Lytham Mussel west – 17-08-15

Fig. 18. Lytham Mussel east - new settlement– 17-08-15

Fig. 19. Lytham Mussel east – size mussel along channel; edge 17-08-15

The question arises as to whether this area will scour out or persist. Contrary to previous assumptions it has not scoured or died from earlier in the year, some of which may be a result of the thinning of the earlier hand-gathering which was a requirement in the conditions of the authorisation. It will be worth monitoring this area and recording what happens.

There were large numbers of small birds feeding on smaller mussel numbering into the thousands and very flighty and easily disturbed. There were also some gulls and oystercatcher on the larger mussel, along with gulls on opposite training wall.

Mersey mussels

Officers received a proposal from Peel Ports regarding the capital dredging of a shingle bank in the Mersey Estuary to allow navigation to the Liverpool 2 development. In August NWIFCA received a benthic report carried out by a consultancy for the developers, (survey conducted in June) which showed the presence of quantities of juvenile mussel within the (subtidal) proposed dredge site. NWIFCA has no previous data on mussel beds in the river as the Mersey only came under the Authority's jurisdiction in 2011. This was reported to TSB on 11th August following correspondence between Officers and Peel Ports regarding concerns around the loss of the mussel resource present in the proposed capital dredge site and the possibility of mussel dredgers fishing the stock prior to the capital dredging operation. Peel Ports agreed to consider an application from industry to take the juvenile mussels from the area; however the timescale for this would be short. TSB resolved to authorise dredging of the mussel (NWIFCA Byelaws 3 and 12) in the area concerned should an application be received. NB. No Habitats regulations Assessment was necessary to authorise the fishing. One had already been carried out by the developers for the capital dredge.

Investigations were carried out by Officers with FSA, Mersey Port Health Authority and Cefas to ascertain the legality of relaying of this seed mussel given its prohibited status (due to chemical contaminants). Capital dredging was planned to be carried out by the Docks on 24th August. NWIFCA issued authorisations to two mussel dredge vessels on 21st August - however following initial

inspections of the area by the vessels, the juvenile mussel present was not in quantities feasible to dredge.

Other mussel beds in the District.

Whitehaven officers will inspect the Solway beds during shore patrols on suitable tides, and liaise with Science Officers over surveys should they be warranted.

Solway Cockles

Following HRA, cockle suction dredge surveys were carried out in the Solway Firth on 25th and 30th June aboard an industry vessel, surveying Middle Bank one day (only accessible by vessel), and Beckfoot and Cardurnock Flats (intertidal beds) on the second day (Figure 20). Samples were taken and figures calculated to work out the number of size cockle per m^2. Results indicated that there is not a sufficient stock in any of the areas to currently open a fishery in the Solway (Figures 21-23). The maximum estimated number in Middle Bank was 8 size cockle per m^2 at one site, with three other sites ranging between 5 and 7 size cockles per m^2. The rest of the 21 sites had less than 3 size cockles per m^2. In Beckfoot, the maximum estimated number of size cockles per m^2 was 6 at two sites, with the other six sites all at less than 2 per m^2. At Cardurnock one site had an estimated number of 7 size cockles per m^2, while the three other sites had less than 1 per m^2.

Calculations were also carried out to estimate the cockle densities if the undersize cockles grew on to size before the beginning of September. Only two of the twenty-one Middle Bank sites were estimated to have over 20 cockle per m^2 in this scenario. (NB. 20 size cockle per m^2 is the figure used by NW&NWSFC as the absolute minimum density threshold at which a fishery would be closed). However these figures were still very low (with a maximum of only 7 cockles over the minimum density threshold should all undersize cockles grow to size) indicating a fishery could not be opened later in 2015. All of the Beckfoot sites were estimated to have 15 or less cockles per m^2. Two of the four Cardurnock sites were calculated to have estimated densities of 27 and 71 cockles per m^2; however these cockles were well undersize and they would not be expected to reach size before September. The other two Cardurnock sites were estimated at 11 and <1 cockles per m^2. These results all indicate that a cockle fishery cannot be opened in 2015. Officers will resurvey again in 2016 should industry suggest there may be a stock there.

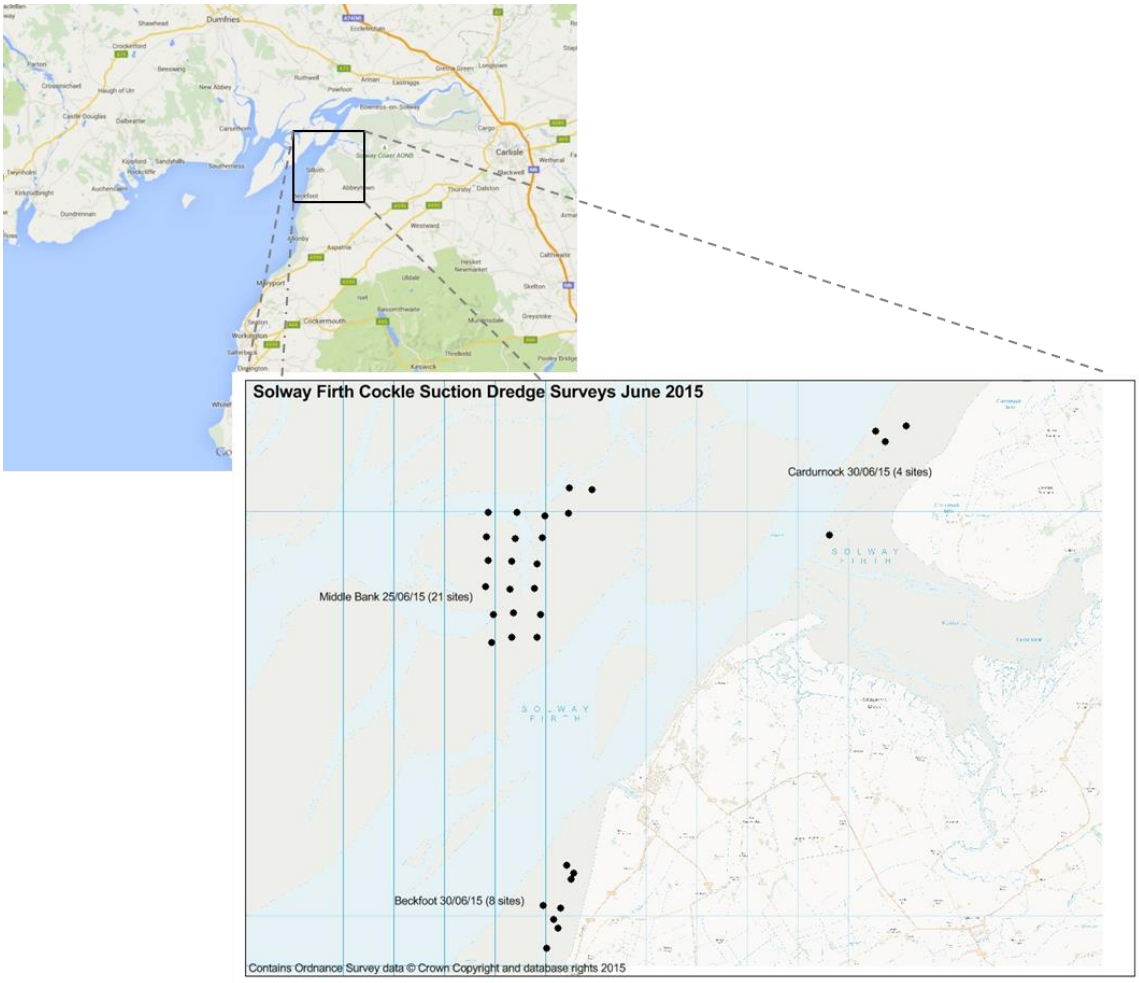

Fig.20. The Solway cockle survey stations (June 2015)

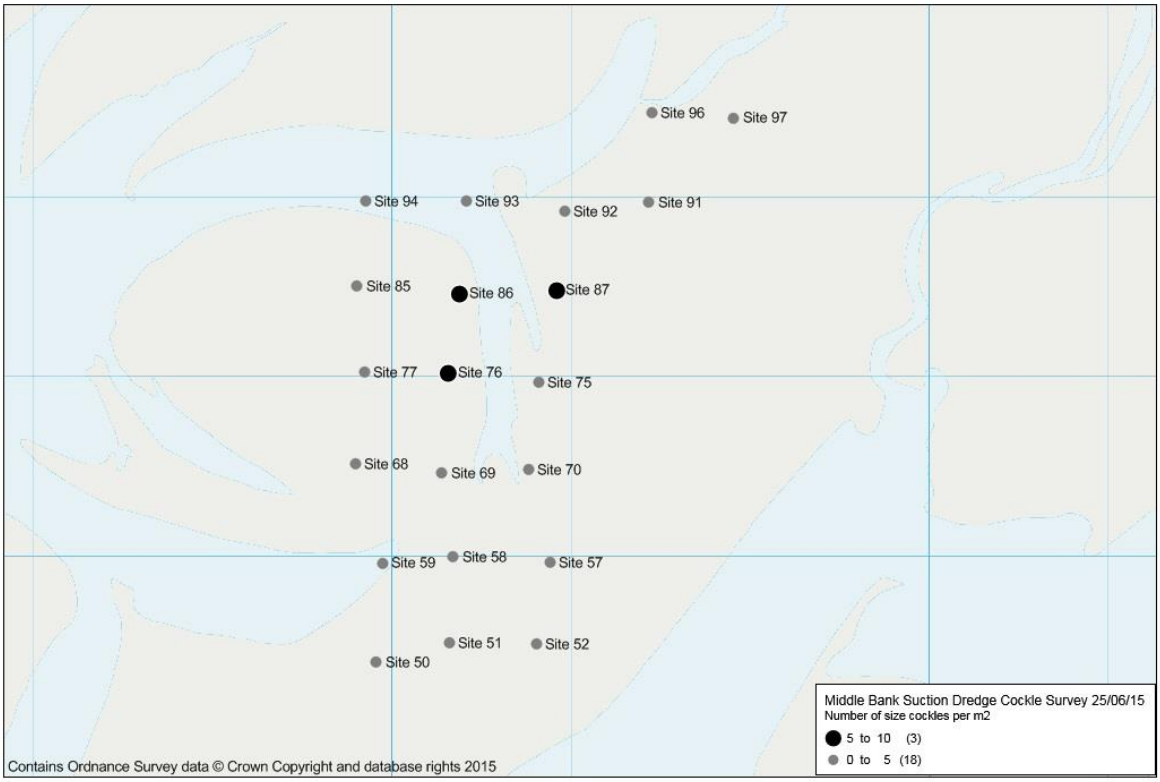

Fig. 21. Middle Bank survey stations with number of size cockle per m^2

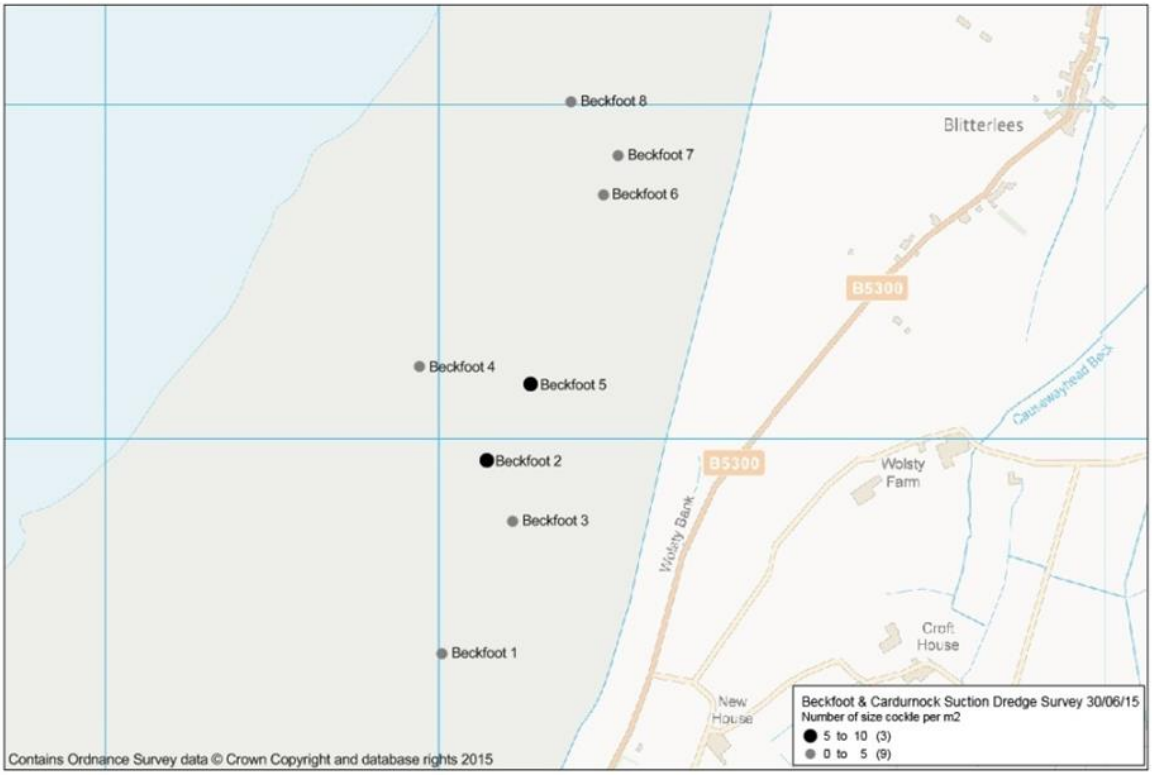

Fig. 22. Beckfoot survey stations with number of size cockle per m^2

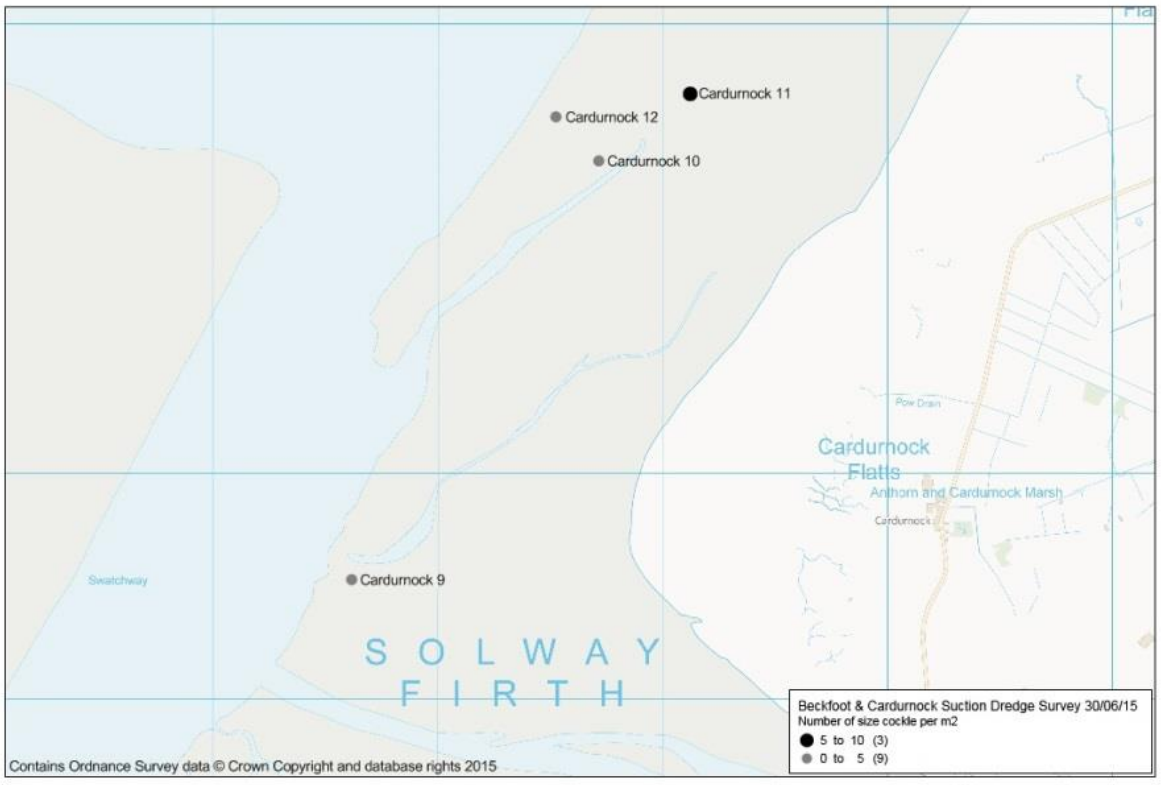

Fig.23. Cardurnock survey sites with number of size cockle per m^2

Leven Cockles

As reported to the June Authority meeting, cockle stocks on the Leven Island bed in Morecambe Bay were re-surveyed during June, as results from a previous survey were not thought to be representative due to high winds 'blowing' the cockles back in to the sand. Unfortunately although on the day of the repeat survey the winds abated, days leading up to it appeared to have influenced the position of the cockles in the sand and once again they were not coming up in the survey. A further third survey was carried out on 30th July in order to fully assess whether there was a commercial and viable stock on the bed. Weather conditions prior to and on the day of the survey this time were favourable. However the results from this last survey showed that stocks were not of sufficient quantity to open a commercial fishery with a mean density of size cockle of 7 per m^2 (n = 83). Therefore the bed will remain closed following the seasonal closure on 1st September. The position was stated clearly on the website throughout the surveys to ensure Byelaw 3 permit holders were kept fully informed.

BIVALVE MOLLUSC WORKING GROUP

A meeting of the Bivalve Mollusc Working Group was held on 13th July and a report tabled at the TSB meeting in August. The notes from this meeting are attached as Annex A. A further meeting is scheduled for 4th September to discuss on-going mussel fishing interest in Morecambe Bay and the Duddon Estuary, the Ribble and the Wirral area and a verbal report will be given to Members.

Assessment of Fishing Activities in European Marine Sites

Progress has been made on the EMS assessments of fishing impacts. The table below provides the situation regarding work completed, and yet to be carried out as at 28th August 2015. Much has been achieved through the hard work of Ms Temple and Ms Leadbeater. However there is still much to be done:

	Expected Total	Not yet started	Currently underway	Complete	Signed off NE	On website and huddle
Non-occurring "Light" TLSE	12	0	0	12	12	13th July 2015
TLSE	43	26	10	7	0	-
Appropriate Assessments	7	4	2	1	0	-
Totals	62	30	12	20	12	

1. 62 assessment documents expected.

2. Gear types are grouped across sites, so several gear type / feature interactions may be included in each assessment. For example the 12 light TLSE documents cover 214 gear types across 12 EMS.

3. Cockle and mussel fisheries:

   Cockle and mussel fisheries are intermittent traditionally open, subject only to MLS and only closed when stock was low. The NWIFCA has done HRAs for periodic fisheries for many years. For example:

a. 2015 cockle stock suction dredge survey, Solway Firth SAC

b. 2014 hand-gathering seed mussel at Heysham Flat skear, Morecambe Bay SAC / SPA;

c. 2013 dredging seed mussel Morecambe Bay SAC / SPA;

d. 2012 hand-gathering cockles, Ribble and Alt Estuary SPA;

In future, under the EMS review cockle and mussel fisheries will be assessed when they occur. Management measures implemented as required will ensure no adverse effect on site integrity.

5. Bait collection- Crab tiling and bait digging occur in various EMS of the NWIFCA District. Crab tile surveys were carried out in the Walney channel area and the Mersey, where collectors reported that they were collecting on a recreational basis. Recreational activity will not be assessed under the Defra EMS Review. Should commercial bait collection occur in an EMS, such fisheries will be assessed under EMS protocols. An additional 14 HRAs could be needed but are not expected. If any members have information on bait collection in their area this would be very useful for Officers.

Byelaw Review

Ms Knott and Ms Temple sit on the Byelaw Review group working on the drafts of byelaws to be brought to TSB and the Authority. Ms Temple leads on the Regulatory Impact Assessments and correspondence with the MMO, and in the informal consultations.

Biosecurity

Officers have received reports of two American lobsters (*Homarus americanus*) caught off Workington and Fleetwood in July and August. Officers notified Cefas, the Non-Native Species Secretariat and the MMO of these catches, and will continue to do so in the future so that these lobsters can be monitored. The lobster caught in July was initially kept alive by Maryport Aquarium and then sent to Cefas for disease testing and was found to be clear. IFCOs will continue to raise industry awareness of these lobsters and the importance of reporting them to NWIFCA. If any are caught, information such as location of catch, lengths, weight, sex, and any photos should be sent to NWIFCA before the lobster is destroyed. IFCOs have also received reports of a possible hybrid (cross European/ American) lobster. As there is no conclusive science on whether hybridisation is possible, if any of these are caught in the future we would ideally acquire them live for genetic testing.

NORTH WEST COAST CONNECTIONS - NATIONAL GRID work on routing options for 400KV cables from Moorside nuclear power station

Following the public consultation held by NWCC for the routing of high voltage power cables from the new-build nuclear power station on the Cumbrian coast to the grid, they announced their preferred route options on 17th June, which includes a tunnel under Morecambe Bay. The science team have worked with NWCC for over five years, and consider this to be the least damaging option to coastal, marine and intertidal areas as it will be drilled 25m under the seabed and through the bedrock itself, with exit points in industrial areas of Roosecote and Heysham.

There was a flurry of meetings held immediately around this announcement as the Duddon and Ravenglass Estuaries routing (overland) causes high concern to some interests, such as Lake District National Park and Friend of the Lake District, mainly due to visual impact of nearly 50m pylons

crossing the coastal zone and being visible from beauty spots in the lakes. There are other issues of concern, including archaeology and designated (terrestrial) sites. A lengthy meeting took place over the alternatives – tunnel, horizontal directional drilling (HDD), rock-armoured cable laying and pylons, and explanations for why Grid considered the overlanding option preferable. There were some vociferous opponents to this option. The Senior Scientist and Natural England worked together to explain to other stakeholders the enormity of the impact on the marine environment through the rock armouring and pylons options. Grid explained the technical and financial difficulties of the tunneling and HDD options.

A watching brief will be kept on the project as it goes through the planning process in case the preferred options are withdrawn or refused by the Planning Inspectorate and other options come back on to the table. A letter from Friends of the Lake District was received by Science Officers, which indicates the strength of objection from other stakeholders to the proposed option round the Duddon.

On 18th August it was announced that National Grid will be holding 27 community events from September to share information about the ongoing development of the project, with formal consultation expected to take place in spring/summer 2016. Details of the community events will be confirmed shortly. If people would like to be notified directly they are invited to register their details on the North West Coast Connections project website: www.northwestcoastconnections.com.

The company aims to submit an application to the Planning Inspectorate for consent to build the new connection in 2017. A decision will then be made by the Secretary of State for the Department of Energy and Climate Change. If consent is granted, construction work is expected to start in 2019. National Grid is required to provide NuGen with the first phase of the connection into its transmission network by 2024. For further information about the project, please contact the project team direct using any of the following methods: Freephone: 0800 876 6990, Email: nationalgrid@northwestcoast connections.com, Freepost: Freepost NG NWCC.

Moorside Power Station

Officers have been engaged with the initial discussions over Moorside power station in relation to the offshore surveys and the proposals for cooling waters outfall location. Ms Knott attended a recent meeting of the Biodiversity Group, and the team will participate in various meetings as and when appropriate. Matters of relevance will be reported back to Members. Members are advised that consultation around the new-build will be carried out at the same time as further formal consultation over the NWCC routing, dates to be confirmed.

West Cumbria Tidal Lagoon

There have been no further developments with this proposal a far as meetings etc are concerned. Officers will attend and report back when appropriate. Mr Roger Woods from the project has been invited to present to the Authority.

Cumbria Wildlife Trust Marine Trainees Partnership

This year's intake of Marine Trainees were started in June, and they received the one days training course from Science Officers. They have carried out the *Sabellaria alveolata* and mussel biomass surveys on Heysham Flat with officers, and are due to return to finish the survey off in due course. One of the four will take on the project of writing the annual report on the Health and Distribution of the *Sabellaria*. There are ideas for two other projects that they may carry out in conjunction with the IFCA, and these are in discussion at the present time. One would be to assess levels of biodiversity on the *Sabellaria alveolata* reef at Allonby Bay, comparing it to cobble areas without *Sabellaria* cover.

The other would be carried out before, during and after the seed mussel fishery at Heysham Flat to assess levels of bird disturbance to birds feeding on the skear.

TAG – 28th July – London

The Senior Scientist attended the IFCA Technical Advisory Group meeting and can supply details to Members on request.

Project Inshore

The final Stage 3 reports have all been published, including a National Report which 'provides a national strategic overview of the findings and recommendations provided in the 9 IFCA specific Strategic Sustainability Reviews which were the primary focus of Stage 3 of Project Inshore. In addition, the national overview report provides the opportunity to highlight those stocks which straddle the inshore boundary (6nm) and have therefore not been the focus of the IFCA specific reports'.

The individual IFCA Stage 3 reports 'detail bespoke sustainability reviews for inshore fisheries and describe a bespoke sustainability roadmap for each of the 9 IFCA regions involved. There is also a guide on stock assessment and harvest control rules provided'.

The reports can be found here:
http://www.seafish.org/industry-support/fishing/project-inshore/project-reports/stage-3-–-strategic-sustainability-reviews

As Members will recall the NWIFCA had concerns about the whole project and in particular the Stage 3 reports for the District, and made it clear we were distancing ourselves from it. The eight other IFCA reports can be accessed through the hyperlinks on the website. The NWIFCA link appears to be broken and one is directed to the Home page of Seafish. (Note: Sussex IFCA did not take part in Project Inshore due to their previous work in piloting a multi- species fishery methodology in 2010 with its 'Navigating the Future' Inshore Fisheries Sustainability Pilot (Dapling et al., 2010). Navigating the Future utilised the MSC pre-assessment criteria to evaluate the performance of 26 local inshore fisheries'.

In addition the MSC Pre-Assessment Database is available. The database is designed to 'allow users to determine how near or far every inshore Fishery in England is from the MSC's accreditation standard and whether or not they could progress to full assessment at some stage':

http://msc.solidproject.co.uk/msc-project-inshore.aspx

Halite – Gas Storage in Salt Caverns at Preesall near Fleetwood

The Energy Minister Lord Bourne granted planning consent for the Preesall Underground Gas Storage Facility project on Friday 17th July. The facility is proposed to be constructed on the east side of the Wyre Estuary at Preesall in Lancashire and will be used to store and extract gas from local underground salt caverns. In their press statement DECC stated:

'The project may create up to 300 jobs during construction and up to 40 permanent jobs once operational. Preesall would be a demand response facility, with gas entering the national system in response to market conditions.

Energy and Climate Change Minister Lord Bourne, who is the Minister responsible for energy planning consents, said: 'Investment in new energy infrastructure is essential if we are to keep the lights on and bills down. This is a major project which will benefit the local economy by creating jobs

and stimulating businesses. Gas is also the greenest fossil fuel and helps us lower our carbon emissions, which is important in the UK's move to a cleaner energy future.

In making this decision, DECC listened to all views and took into account further geological information that demonstrated the anticipated storage. We also considered an assessment by Senergy, an independent geological assessor, which suggested that the development was suitable for the local geology'.

The full Statutory Instrument Development Consent Order can be found here: http://infrastructure.planningportal.gov.uk/document/3298371

The Protect Wyre Group issued the following statement:

'It's obviously very disappointing news for all those people that have fought against this underground gas storage scheme for the past 13 years and the more you look into the events of those 13 years the more incredulous the decision seems to be.

Through repeated planning applications the scheme has been unanimously rejected at every level by the parish, borough and county councils; refused by the Planning Inspectorate following a Public Inquiry; refused by the then Secretary of State; a further Planning Examination (ExA) stated that the adverse effects of the proposed development would only be outweighed if a minimum of 300 mcm of working gas could be stored. The scheme was once again rejected by the Secretary of State and again by the High Court. However an appeal against the appeal made the Secretary of State re-examine the government's decision and today we have the result of Lord Bourne's recommendations to allow the scheme.

The government commissioned an independent assessment, conducted by Senergy (GB) Ltd, which concluded that Halite have only a 5.8% probability of achieving this 300 mcm figure.

Protect Wyre Group's view in its representation of 9th September 2014 to the Secretary of State was that the application should be refused as, using the ExA's own words, "If the minimum threshold cannot be met it would mean the development would not be permitted to proceed any further".

It's difficult to understand what has changed – a 5.8% probability is not, in our opinion, sufficient grounds for the granting of planning permission.

What's been the point of incurring the costs and gross expenditure of time and effort to the residents and the tax payers at all levels with all these Inquiries, examinations, surveys, meetings and the like over the last 13 years if a developer can keep re-appealing over and over again until they achieve their desired outcome?

On a positive note, to everyone that played any part in opposing this scheme at any level, they should consider that their time was well spent and take heart that if this scheme ever comes to fruition, which is open to speculation and conjecture, then it will be so much smaller and so much safer than that originally proposed.

The geology is as suspect today as it was in July 2002'.

Members may remember that Science Officers had input into consultations and discussions over the discharge of brine into the coastal waters off Fleetwood from this proposal. Meetings were held and it was agreed and a document lodged with the Environment Agency Discharge Consent that should the project go ahead, that the MMO, Natural England, EA and NWIFCA were to be fully involved in all stages of planning, and in monitoring of discharge waters, and that means would be incorporated to ensure that should salinity levels exceed those predicted in the model used in the application, that operations would cease immediately.

There is a view that it is circumspect as to whether finance for the project will be found. However, Science Officers will remain vigilant to further progress, implement previously agreed courses of action, and report back to Members.

AUTHORISATIONS AND CONSULTATIONS

Dong Energy - Burbo Bank windfarm extension - benthic surveys
Liverpool Docks - Maintenance Dredging
Mersey Docks and Harbour Company - Capital Dredging
Environment Agency - WFD surveys
Garston Approach Channel and Docks - Maintenance Dredging
Dong Energy - West of Duddon Sands windfarm - post construction surveys
BAE Barrow – maintenance dredging
Cefas Fish Surveys
Drigg Viaduct Repairs
Greenodd Embankment renewal
Maryport Aquarium - lobster enhancement project
Moorside Nuclear Power Station – surveys
West Cumbria Coal Mine – borehole surveys

MEETINGS, WORKSHOPS AND COURSES ATTENDED

Byelaw 2 informal consultation meeting with industry
Lune Rivers Trust presentation on NWIFCA Biosecurity Plan
Byelaw Review meeting (internal)
Bivalve Mollusc Working Group
Dee Sea Fisheries Liaison Meeting
Natural England meeting
Tele-con call with Welsh Government - draft Byelaw 9
Revised Conservation Advice Package Training with Natural England
RYA First Aid course
Fisheries Non-Enforcement Training – MMO
Stakeholder Reference Grid – North West Coast Connections
Marine Protected Areas Conference Calls – joint agency working group
Enforcement Meeting – internal
Research Planning meetings – Natural England and RSPB

Science Officers
7th September 2015

ANNEX A:

Summary of Bivalve Mollusc Working Group Second Meeting- 13th July 2015 18:00 Carnforth Office

Present:

Chris Lumb
Callum Booth
David Harpley
Emily Baxter
Kelsey Thompson
Terry Davies
Gary Piddock
Tim Manning
Robert Butler
Graham Wood
Kim Mould
William Dengemanse
Stephen Atkins (Chair)
Mandy Knott
Andy Deary
Ian Dixon
Sarah Temple

A further draft of the Morecambe Bay Mussel Management Plan (based on the Wash management plan) was tabled and discussed. Agreement and comments were given on the format of the plan, with some amendments suggested, for example on the approach of splitting the fishery types. It was agreed that there was an understanding that several of the measures were included in the plan as good practice to be aimed for in the future but it was not possible to define them currently. Further discussion is required around setting a minimum spawning stock biomass of adult mussel around the Bay to remain after a fishery, and figures should be set where possible. Other questions included how and when to assess the biomass of mussels, the age mussels stop spawning and therefore whether older, barnacled/ stunted mussel should be removed from areas or left as potential spawning stock. Concerns were raised around the conservation interests in older barnacled mussel and its associated biodiversity. One suggestion was to clear an area of old stock, and relay dredged mussel there, another was to have a closed season over part of the summer to help breeding stocks.

It was suggested that an overall stock biomass survey of Morecambe Bay could be carried out, using several officers over a few days. However, the annual timing of surveys may need to vary, particularly in years such as this one where the settlement has been late. It was raised that the Wash plan also includes a minimum stock level (in addition to spawning stock biomass), to help decide if a fishery can be opened, allowing stock to be left as a food resource and for spawning. There were concerns however that this could lead to new measures through closing areas; that the Wash is different to Morecambe Bay, with no need here for a standard dredge size, or specifying leaving areas unfished- some aspects of the plan would be different. It was highlighted that a mussel fishery would be closed only if it was unsustainable or there were conservation concerns.

The management of current mussel resources in the Bay was discussed in the second part of the meeting. A document had been circulated summarising what had been found so far this year. On Heysham Flat- size mussel and new *Sabellaria alveolata* located off the end of the skear was seen in May; by July this was blanketed in seed mussel. South America- in May some 2014 mussel was left but there was no new settlement, with no settlement seen in July on the areas that could be accessed by quad bike. There was some a mix of mussel size classes off Foulney.

The Senior Scientist made the suggestion that the two bottom skears at Heysham Flat could be dredged for seed on neap tides, with hand gathering on spring tides, along with an exclusion zone for the honeycomb worm reef (as in 2014). Byelaw 3 representatives presented their case that they were able to access all the skears via sandbanks and they would wish to fish it. They also suggested harvesting mussel from the area of main *Sabellaria alveolata* reef- potentially beneficial for the worms if the mussel is removed, given its present state. It would however need to be ensured that there was no possibility of damage to the *Sabellaria*, and any surrounding/ developing reef should be protected. It was agreed to authorise hand gathering once the mussel was ready for harvest, and to consider which areas could be harvested in the HRA. The Senior Scientist made handgathering representatives aware of the requirement for council permit packs. It was also suggested to reassess the situation at the August meeting when it will have been possible to inspect all the beds for recent and late settlement and to have carried out the boat survey of South America with industry. Inspections of the Fleetwood beds will also be carried out at the end of July/ start of August- if commercial stock is present it will be discussed at the next meeting. It was agreed that a further inspection of the Ribble settlement would be carried out, and an HRA carried out with a view to authorise handgathered harvest of seed mussel from the Seafield Road slipway area.

It was emphasised that the mussel resource is limited in the Bay this year and this must be taken into consideration in respect of bird conservation features; fisheries may need to be restricted spatially, temporally or through the setting of TACs. Evidence of the bird requirement for mussels and cockles as food is necessary, and any remaining mussel would be breeding stock for next year.

There were several additional questions brought up at the end of the meeting around Byelaw 3 permits. The CEO confirmed that permit holders will not get money back when there are no cockles in the district- it is not in the byelaw to do this. The question of an apprentice scheme was raised, with a need to allow younger members to fish. One suggestion was that permit holders are charged extra to bring an apprentice. The CEO agreed to check the rules on the age people can put their names on the waiting list following a suggestion for younger members to go on the list and receive a permit once they are old enough (hold a NI number) and reach the top of the list.

The next meeting will be held in the middle of August.