

NWIFCA Technical, Science and Byelaw Committee

1st November 2016: 10:00 a.m.

**AGENDA
ITEM NO.
9**

SCIENCE REPORT 23RD JULY – 14TH OCTOBER 2016

General

The Senior Scientist has been carrying out staff appraisals with all members of the science team and working with them to forward plan for the coming months. She would like to acknowledge the hard work and dedication shown by the science team over the past 12 months. Unfortunately, Ms Vause has decided not to continue her employment with the NWIFCA and is due to leave in early November.

An update of key areas of work carried out by the team over the past quarter is provided below.

Marine Protected Areas in the NWIFCA District:

a) Marine Conservation Zones

Tranche 2 - West of Walney MCZ – Recover Objective. See separate report.

Tranche 3 – three estuarine sites in the NWIFCA District are to be consulted on during the next round of MCZ designations. These are the Ribble MCZ, the Wyre / Lune MCZ, and the Solway MCZ. All three sites are proposed for designation to protect smelt (*Osmerus eperlanus*).

Smelt are shoaling fish, distantly related to the salmon. They live in the salty water of estuaries and around the mouths of rivers. During May to August the smelt come upriver to spawn in fresh water before then returning to the sea. Smelt are silvery-green in colour and usually around 20cm long, although they can grow to twice that length.

Threats to smelt populations include pollution and overfishing – smelt was once a delicacy and is now fished for pike bait. Smelt are also threatened by the loss of their habitat, especially spawning grounds, which may be destroyed by silting or construction. They may also be prevented from reaching their spawning grounds because of weirs or other barriers.

Most of the recorded populations in Scotland are now extinct, as are a third of those from estuaries in England and Wales. Populations can recover in areas where several estuaries interconnect, as one can restock another. However, once smelt have become locally extinct from isolated estuaries (such as the Tyne), they will not return. JNCC. (<http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-5667>).

Officers have been instrumental in facilitating discussion between fishers and Natural England colleagues, and in providing what fishing activity data we have for these sites.

b) Review of Fishing Activities in European Marine Sites

The table below (Table 1) provides an update of the progress on the review of Fishing Activities in EMS and the number of assessments carried out and left to be completed by the deadline at the end of December 2016. Progress has stepped up a pace in the past month. Only one assessment has not been started yet – bottom trawling in the Dee SAC/SPA. Five are underway and nearly ready for discussion with Natural England.

A further six HRAs have been carried out on active fisheries in the last quarter. These include:

- seed mussel hand-gathering at Heysham Flat
- size mussel hand-gathering at Heysham Flat (in first draft)
- seed mussel dredge fishery north Morecambe Bay (South America)
- seed mussel dredge fishery Fleetwood
- cockle hand-gathering – Pilling Sands (in draft)
- cockle hand-gathering Leven Sands (in draft)

Table 1: Review of Fishing Activities in European Marine Sites – Assessment table – 12th October 2016

	Expected Total	Not yet started	Currently underway	Assessment complete and in final discussion with NE	Assessment complete and signed off by NE	On website and huddle
Non-occurring “Light” TLSE	12 + 4 working which will be combined ¹	1	0	0	11	(11) 13/07/15
Non-occurring commercial activity currently recreational only	8 ²	0	0	0	8	(8) 12/10/16
TLSE	13 ³	0	0	2	12	(12) 12/10/16
Joint assessments with MMO	1 ⁴ (inc. 4 gears)	0	1	0	0	-
Appropriate Assessments	12 ⁵	1	5	1	4	(4) 21/04/16
Totals	46	2	6	3	35	35

Changes in figures are due to the following:-

- ¹ Non-occurring light TLSE’s added to 4 working documents which will be combined with original non-occurring for each site when review process has been completed. Reduced number of total assessments due to additional activities found to be non-occurring in the district.
- ² Activities thought to have been commercial found to be recreational.
- ³ Decrease in TLSE due to expected TLSE going through to AA (netting activities).
- ⁴ Cross border site Liverpool Bay EMS with MMO - joint assessments.
- ⁵ Decrease in AA due to some activities being combined for a site (types of netting activities), (otter and beam trawl for fish).

Small Fish Surveys – working with Environment Agency

During October Science Officers attended the Environment Agency’s Water Framework Directive (WFD) fish surveys to gain experience and learn best practices, so that in the future, the IFCA may conduct independent fish surveys utilising the same methodologies thus obtaining data which is nationally valuable and comparable. A variety of methodologies in various locations/intertidal conditions have been learnt; Fyke netting, Beach seine netting and a small beam trawling in the Ribble Estuary (sand cobble), the Lune (deep mud) and the Wyre (predominantly cobble). The EA have been extremely supportive and have provided the IFCA with their long term data series for the

district. It is our intention to analyse this data and conduct a literature review to identify potential nursery grounds of commercial fish, and to develop a survey programme with the goal of collecting data to inform sustainable management of commercial fish stocks in their juvenile life stages.

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

There has been no further involvement since the last report as a Stakeholder Reference Group (SRG) meeting scheduled for 12th October was postponed to allow NWCC to progress their proposals further before taking out for further discussion. However the science team were notified by email on 14th October that the meeting had been re-scheduled for 24th October (a date when Officers are not available to attend), and that the public consultation on the detailed design of the route was to start on 28th October and run until 6th January 2017. The Senior Scientist has expressed her dismay at the lack of notice about this latest meeting. The Press Release on the consultation, along with a link to information on a series of 30 public meetings, is attached as Annex A.

Moorside Power Station - NuGen

Officers remain engaged with technical meetings for the new nuclear build at Moorside and in particular how the project will affect fishing stakeholders, fishing grounds and the marine and coastal environment. Officers have attended meetings with a range of fellow regulators on Marine Ecology and Ornithology, Marine Water Quality, Marine and Coastal Processes and Fisheries and have responded to technical notes produced by NuGen for the review of baseline evidence to be incorporated into the EIA.

Bivalve Mollusc Working Group (BMWG)

A further successful meeting of BMWG was held on 10th October when cockle survey results and potential management options were discussed. Also on the agenda was the topic of industry assistance to the IFCA of providing data on sub-tidal ground in Morecambe Bay using acoustic ground discriminating equipment and scientific dredge survey. It is the intention to use this along with helicopter flights in the future at the beginning of the season to assess the extent of mussel settlement.

The science team also aims to provide notes of these meetings to TSB in timely fashion, once they have been checked for accuracy by the Group. These are attached at Annex B.

Fleetwood Fishermen and Dong Energy

As discussed at the NWIFCA meeting in September Officers have been in liaison with Fleetwood Commercial Fishermen's Group, Dong Energy and the MMO over issues surrounding survey and works for cable laying for the Walney windfarm extension and impacts on fishing activity. The Head of Enforcement has now taken over this role and attended a meeting with all parties on 20th October.

Shellfish Liaison Group (SLG)

Officers continue to be involved in the District-wide SLG which meets six-monthly, to discuss all issues relating to shellfish hygiene. The group is attended by local authority and port health environmental health officers, Environment Agency, Food Standards Agency, Cefas, the government labs, United Utilities and shellfish industry. The number of high sample results on the District's shellfish beds remains a matter of concern, as it is leading to temporary down-grading of classifications, and in some cases total prohibitions of harvesting from those beds. Officers have brought the matter up at the SLG, as well as in other meetings with United Utilities and the EA,

requesting that the causes / sources of contaminations are investigated and if possible action taken to prevent them re-occurring.

Sefton Conference

Ms Carroll attended the Sandscapes Conference run by Sefton Coast Landscape Partnership, North West Coastal Forum and Sefton Council. There was a range of presentations and discussions surrounding the concept of natural capital, ecosystem services, the importance and successes of partnership working and in preserving natural and landscape heritage.

C-BASS Workshop Lowestoft

Ms Carroll attended a one day workshop in Lowestoft and provided an update on bass within the NWIFCA District. Attendees were updated on the current research of the C-BASS Project and data gaps in each IFCA region were identified. The science team will continue to explore the potential for bass research in the north west and, funding pending, hope to expand the C-Bass tagging study into our waters.

Mersey Sediment Management Group, Peel Ports

Ms Carroll attended a meeting at Peel Ports in Liverpool. An update was given on the maintenance dredge disposal sites. A revised and updated Maintenance Dredge Protocol is underway, and NWIFCA will be consulted on a draft. Peel Ports have commissioned research to identify 'beneficial or alternative uses' for disposal of dredged material. This could include beach recharge, bird island or fish nursery habitat creation. The science team have requested to be consulted at an early stage to assist provision of information on fisheries activity to minimise interference with other legitimate users of the sea.

Liverpool City Region's Coastal Designated Sites Evidence Strategy Workshop

Ms Knott and Ms Carroll attended a two day workshop in Liverpool. The workshop highlighted the wealth of data available from a wide range of sources including industry, environmental consultants, NGO's, local government, and academic institutions. The workshop aim was to identify the sources of data and find an accessible data sharing mechanism.

Science Officers
24th October 2016