

**NWIFCA Quarterly Meeting:  
9<sup>th</sup> September 2021: 11.00 a.m.**

**AGENDA  
ITEM NO.  
10**

**SCIENCE QUARTERLY REPORT 1st August 2021 – 31<sup>st</sup> October 2021**

**FOR INFORMATION**

**Purpose:** To provide an update on science work in the last quarter;

**Recommendations:** Members approve the report.

This quarter the majority of the workload has been completing an extensive survey schedule. The main priorities have been the completion of surveys, HRAs, Authorisations and dredge fishery Permit Conditions for potential fisheries.

Mr Elliott Waltho left on 8<sup>th</sup> October to take up a post with Natural England as a Lead Advisor in the Cheshire and Lancashire area team. Mr Waltho has been a valued member of the team since moving from the IFCO role he previously had.

The further reduction in staff and the prioritisation of cockle and mussel fisheries has meant a continued reduction in some of the other work streams. Therefore the science report is relatively short this quarter.

**1. MARINE PROTECTED AREAS IN THE NWIFCA DISTRICT:**

**a) NWIFCA MPA Monitoring and Control Plan**

The rolling programme of review of HRAs for all activities in all sites continues to ensure HRAs are still fit for purpose and management is appropriate.

**b) HIGHLY PROTECTED MARINE AREAS (HPMAs)**

No further update.

**2. NWIFCA RESEARCH PROJECTS**

**a) Razor Clam collaborative research**

The survey has been scheduled a couple of times in September and October but unfortunately cancelled due to bad weather. A new dispensation and amended HRA will be completed and submitted for continuation of the project with survey work being carried out in 2022. A meeting is scheduled with Bangor University to discuss progress to date and plans going forward.

**b) Whelk Fisheries in the North West**

Analysis of the data has been started and will be finished over the coming months with a report on the work carried out since 2019 provided at a future TSB meeting. The aims are to better inform management within the potting byelaw and identify further sampling which may be required.

## **2. WHELK WORKING GROUP (WWG)**

A further meeting was held online in September of this multi-agency/ multi-area group. A presentation from a Defra representative on Fisheries Management Plans was provided to the group and the potential for whelks to be identified as a priority. An update was provided from each members on the various whelk and potting work streams around the UK. The second annual report for the group is in draft form and once finalised it will be provided to members.

## **3. FUTURE INSHORE STRATEGIC HAND GATHERING IMPLEMENTATION GROUP (FISHGIG)**

The final draft of the package of information has been completed and will be distributed internally to all IFCA's for comment. Once available for external distribution it will be provided to members.

## **4. OFFSHORE WIND LEASING ROUND 4**

There have been six proposed new offshore wind projects in the latest round of offshore wind leasing. Three of these areas are within the Irish Sea. All of the proposed areas are outside of the district. Crown Estate are currently undertaking a Plan-Level Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) to assess potential impacts to European Marine Sites prior to awarding seabed rights. Further information can be found on the Crown Estate website with links to the process and maps of the proposed areas: <https://www.thecrownestate.co.uk/en-gb/media-and-insights/news/2021-offshore-wind-leasing-round-4-signals-major-vote-of-confidence-in-the-uk-s-green-economy/>. It is expected that the HRA will have been completed spring 2022.

## **5. MERSEY ESTUARY WFD MONITORING**

There was the fourth online environmental workshop for the Mersey Estuary Tidal Barrage project. This is led by the Merseyside Environmental Advisory Service (MEAS) who have been appointed by the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority to undertake some evidence-based environmental work to support the development of a Mersey Tidal Power project.

The workshop was attended by representatives from wide ranging environmental agencies both statutory and non-statutory with knowledge and expertise in the area of potential influence from the proposed barrage. This area stretches from the Ribble Estuary down to north Wales and out into Liverpool Bay, centering on the Mersey.

At the moment, the project is in the initial scoping stage where the aim is to take on board comments and questions from stakeholders in order to guide the direction of the next stages. In terms of fish/ fisheries, they are looking at carrying out multi-year duration surveys with an initial focus on some sectors and the potential to extend the scope later on. They are welcoming comments on commercial aspects to be taken into account, and the species that should be included. Their aim is to make all their data open source. They will be looking further into finding key survey periods and have listened to different strategies on how to focus this part of the study. After this initial stage of seeking input, they will move on to produce a more solid evidence plan. They are currently in the process of recruiting an EIA survey lead.

The September workshop focused on environmental survey and scope of non-breeding birds and results from a marine traffic study.

The fifth workshop is scheduled for 9<sup>th</sup> December and will be attended by a science officer.

## 6. **NWIFCA BIOSECURITY PLAN 2021-2024**

A first draft of an updated NWIFCA biosecurity plan has been produced and will be submitted to NE for comment and made available on our website.

## 7. **COCKLE AND MUSSEL**

A full survey report was provided at the November TSB meeting for information with no further proposals or recommendations on cockle and mussel fisheries this year. All reports including survey information are available on the NWIFCA website.

### **Cockles**

At the request of a member of TSB, Newbiggin cockle bed and Leasowe cockle bed were added as agenda items to revisit the potential opening of both beds this year. TSB resolved in August that stocks on these beds were too low for fishing to be HRA compliant.

Discussions on Newbiggin focused on the industry prediction of very few permit holders fishing Newbiggin and the information and data used within the HRA. TSB members resolved for officers to reassess the HRA based on the number of permit holders likely to fish the site and to see if a fishery at Newbiggin would be HRA compliant. Officers are reconsidering the information used within the HRA, assessing previous years' data and are in dialog with Natural England for advice. Officers will report back to TSB when there is further information available.

Discussions on Leasowe focused on the 2021 spat settlement and that at Leasowe cockle can grow quickly. TSB members resolved for officers to resurvey Leasowe cockle bed to see if stocks had changed significantly since the July survey and if a fishery maybe possible. Officers resurveyed the site 10<sup>th</sup> November and will report the findings to the TSB when the report is complete.

### **Size Mussel**

Progress has continued with the Hard Acre mussel bed within the Duddon Estuary with a survey and HRA being completed and the bed nearing the end of the 10 sample classification process.

NWIFCA, Natural England and the National Trust had a site visit to discuss access to the fishery and potential for damage to Natterjack Toads. Natterjack toads are listed as a protected species in the SSSI and Ramsar designations. The byway and access onto the beach has changed considerably since the last fishery a large shingle bank has formed on the top of the shore, creating large pools of water which are used by Natterjack toads in the spring and early summer during breeding, and in the early part of the life cycle of the species. Discussion between the agencies' were positive with the proposal of the preferred access point being Lowsy Point with access from Sandscale Haws an option outside of the breeding season which is likely to be between late March and July. The change in access between March and July from Sandscale Haws ensures that the fishery remains HRA compliant.

Formal advice has been received from Natural England, with Natural England concurring with the assessment carried out by NWIFCA, with a request on actions which will be taken by NWIFCA should:

- Disturbance and/ or damage occur to Natterjack toads from use of track from Sandscale Haws between March and July
- The number of permit holders fishing exceed significantly the number predicted within the assessment.

8. **MMO MARINE LICENCE AND OTHER CONSULTATIONS FOR THE QUARTER:**

Mersey Channel and River Maintenance Dredge Disposal Renewal 2021	MMO Marine Licence
Burbo Bank Offshore Wind Farm O&M	MMO Marine Licence
Duddon Estuary pipeline remediation works	MMO Marine Licence
Conway Scrubbing Harbour Berths 2021	NRW Marine Licence
Colwyn Bay Waterfront Project	NRW Marine Licence
Central Rhyl Coastal Defences	NRW Marine Licence
EDF Monitoring Sampling 2021/22	Dispensation
EA WFD Monitoring 2021	Dispensation
Hull Marine Laboratory – Mostyn Tidal Lagoon 2021/22	Dispensation

9. **MEETINGS, WORKSHOPS AND TRAINING ATTENDED THIS QUARTER**

Mersey Tidal Power Project 4<sup>th</sup> Workshop  
Proposal for an inshore fish Natural Capital and Ecosystem Assessment (NCEA)  
Natural England and National Trust Duddon Fishery Access Site Visit  
Sea Survival Course  
B+E Trailer Training and Test

**NWIFCA**  
**25<sup>th</sup> November 2021**