

**NWIFCA Quarterly Meeting:  
17<sup>th</sup> March 2017: 11.00 a.m.**

**AGENDA  
ITEM NO.  
12**

**SCIENCE AND SURVEY UPDATE:**

**19<sup>th</sup> November 2016 – 10<sup>th</sup> February 2017**

**Purpose:** To provide an update on science and related work

**1 Introduction**

This report is for information. No decisions from members are needed at this time.

**2 General**

Officers are pleased to welcome Alex Aitken to the Science Team who started at the beginning of January. Ms Aitken had some previous experience of working with Northumberland IFCA while carrying out her MSc thesis on recent trends in the Northumberland brown crab fishery. She has made an excellent start, mapping fishing activity from MCSS data around St Bees Head, in the Cumbrian Coast MCZ, the Solway proposed SPA extension, and the West of Walney MCZ, and of course under-going her induction and mandatory training.

Work has been on-going on completing the EMS Review assessments, formulating and starting to implement the NWIFCA Recreational Angling Strategy, facilitating discussion over sub-tidal mussels in the Solway, and being key contributors to an internal workshop on the use of the 'bird food model' for cockle and mussel fisheries with Natural England, RSPB and NRW.

More detail and an update of key areas of work carried out by the team over the past quarter is provided below.

**3 MARINE PROTECTED AREAS IN THE NWIFCA DISTRICT:**

**a) Marine Conservation Zones**

Tranche 2 - West of Walney MCZ – Recover Objective. No further updates.

Tranche 3 – three estuarine sites Ribble MCZ, the Wyre / Lune MCZ, and the Solway MCZ. Discussion on-going with Natural England and fishermen over knowledge of occurrence and distribution of smelt in these estuaries.

**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. Progress has been slowed by the release of the formal consultation on the SPA extension to the Solway, which impacted on the progress of the netting HRA. The completed netting HRA is now having to be revisited to include a larger area and more bird species.

A further HRA has been carried out and signed off by Natural England following approval of the management measure by the Authority:

- size mussel hand-gathering at Heysham Flat

Table 1: Review of Fishing Activities in European Marine Sites – Assessment table – 17<sup>th</sup> January 2017

|  | <b>Expected Total</b>                                 | <b>Not yet started</b> | <b>Currently underway</b> | <b>Assessment complete and in final discussion with NE</b> | <b>Assessment complete and signed off by NE</b> | <b>On website and huddle</b> |
|--|---|------------------------|---------------------------|--|---|------------------------------|
| <b>Non-occurring “Light” TLSE</b>                                    | 11<br>+ 4 working which will be combined <sup>1</sup> | 0                      | 0                         | 0  | 11  | (11) 13/07/15                |
| <b>Non-occurring commercial activity currently recreational only</b> | 8 <sup>2</sup>  | 0                      | 0                         | 0  | 8   | (8) 12/10/16                 |
| <b>TLSE</b>  | 13 <sup>3</sup>                                       | 0                      | 0                         | 0  | 13  | (13)20/12/16                 |
| <b>Joint assessments with MMO</b>                                    | 1 <sup>4</sup><br>(inc. 4 gears)                      | 0                      | 1                         | 0  | 0   | -                            |
| <b>Appropriate Assessments</b>                                       | 12 <sup>5</sup>                                       | 0                      | 6                         | 0  | 6   | (6) 20/12/16                 |
| <b>Totals</b>  | 45  | 0                      | 6*                        | 0  | 38  | 38                           |

Changes in figures are due to the following:-

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> Activities to have been thought to be commercial found to be recreational.

<sup>3</sup> Decrease in TLSE due to expected TLSE going through to AA (netting activities).

<sup>4</sup> Cross border site Liverpool Bay EMS with MMO - joint assessments.

<sup>5</sup> Decrease in AA due to some activities being combined for a site (types of netting activities), (otter and beam trawl for fish).

\* Joint assessment with MMO lead by MMO and not included in NWIFCA figures.

Interestingly an article on the 'Revised Approach' showing its importance as a change in Defra fisheries management and marine policy has been published in a scientific journal, and is provided as Annex A.

#### **4 RECREATIONAL ANGLING STRATEGY**

Ms Carroll drafted the NWIFCA Recreational Sea Angling Strategy (provided at Annex B) which was taken to TSB as a working document which will grow over time with the feedback and input gained from engagement with sea anglers. As part of the Strategy, an angling email address has been set up, and business cards and leaflets are being distributed widely amongst angling groups and shops. A list of contact names and email addresses is being compiled currently and engagement with sea anglers has begun via email, with the view to setting up meetings with clubs to find out more about what sea anglers' needs and views are, as well as what data they hold which they would be prepared to share with the science team. Feedback from members is positively welcomed.

Angling email: [angling@nw-ifca.gov.uk](mailto:angling@nw-ifca.gov.uk)

#### **5 COCKLE AND MUSSEL FISHERIES**

Due to the time of year, tides and hours of daylight it has not been possible to carry out any surveys of shellfish beds during this quarter. However, a full programme of stock assessments has been scheduled in starting during the last week of February, and officers are convening a Bivalve Mollusc Working Group meeting in April once survey results are available.

In the last week of January Officers became aware of the Avian flu (H5N8) outbreak at a pheasant farm adjacent to the Pilling cockle fishery. Immediate action was taken to notify Byelaw 3 permit holders of the biosecurity risks, and officers were stood down from patrolling the area and collecting shellfish hygiene samples as a good practice precaution. The situation is being monitored.

The report presented to TSB in February is attached at Annex C for information, and Officers are working towards issuing dispensations to industry boats to assist the NWIFCA to gather data on the beds, incorporating requirements agreed at TSB.

Officers have also convened a further meeting with Natural England, RSPB and Wildlife Trust colleagues to progress the bird feeding requirements, and are working with PhD student Alastair Feather who will make a presentation to the Authority to introduce his work.

#### **6 CEFAS C-BASS PROJECT - POPULATION STUDIES IN SUPPORT OF THE CONSERVATION OF THE EUROPEAN SEA BASS**

As previously reported to the Authority NWIFCA science officers have been attending the external project steering group meetings of the Defra Project (MF 1233) on Bass populations over the past 12 months. The key aim of NWIFCA involvement in the project has been to look for opportunities for research into seabass populations in the north-east Irish Sea.

On 2<sup>nd</sup> February, the Senior Scientist attended the final External Project Steering Group meeting for the original C-Bass project (<https://marinescience.blog.gov.uk/category/cbass/>) whose three year finding finishes at the end of March 2017. A small pot of Defra underspend from the project has been allocated to carry out fishermen's stakeholder engagement in the NWIFCA District by the end of March, and Cefas scientists have asked for NWIFCA

assistance in making that engagement happen through a series of workshops / meetings. The summary text to Defra for this funding is produced below.

The purpose of the engagement is to show north-west fishers (both commercial and recreational) the results to date from the tagging studies and modelling of bass movements in the southern parts of the country. C-Bass has been working collaboratively with Iframer in France, and pooling data obtained from tagging carried out over the past three years. Cefas will be asking fishers about timings and locations of bass (adult / juvenile seasons & prime locations, and best times to DST / mark ID tag & record), and for volunteers to be trained in tagging techniques in order to carry the project forward in to north-east Irish Sea waters, under the next phase of the project (subject to funding bid success).

This is a key opportunity for the NWIFCA to strengthen its relationship with other agencies, in particular Cefas, in a research project that aims to improve understanding of the District's bass population(s) and its connectivity to other UK / European populations. Data obtained will assist in future management decisions over bass management, and answer some long-standing questions around the discreteness of the population in our District. In view of the severity of the recent EU Bass measures and the concerns about the stocks, now is the time to embark on this work.

NWIFCA officers are assisting Cefas in identifying stakeholders across the District and to set up and run the meetings – which are likely to be three or four during March. Other than officer time, all costs will be met from the Defra underspend.

## **7 NORTH WEST COAST CONNECTIONS - NATIONAL GRID formal S 42 consultation on routing options for 400KV cables from Moorside nuclear power station**

The Senior Scientist attended a public event in Heysham and provided a full written response to the Section 42 public consultation. The main subjects in the response relate to the positioning of the ventilation / emergency shaft islet in the Bay, and focus on the assumptions made about how the hydrology and sedimentology will be affected. The greatest concern is that no modelling has been carried out to date and the level of confidence given to these assumptions of little change. It has also been pointed out that although NWCC surveys carried out on the intertidal area around the islet may have revealed a low abundance of infauna, this is highly variable and subject to enormous change – in the case of cockle recruitment, and that changes in elevation can affect this recruitment. A copy of the NWIFCA response is available to Members on request from the science team.

## **8 FYLDE COAST PROTECTION SCHEME**

Officers met with the Fylde Coast Protection Scheme consultant engineer prior to submitting the MMO Marine License consultation response in order to fully understand the proposal. In a cordial meeting representation was made over the perceived impact on local fishermen around Seafield Road slipway, with a clear recommendation that dialogue is carried out as soon as possible to amend the project plans in that area.

## **9 HALITE GAS STORAGE CAVERNS – PREESALL, WYRE**

Following the granting of planning permission in July 2015 by the Secretary of State, Amber Rudd, Officers have been keeping a watching brief on developments. The Science Team were approached by representatives from Mott MacDonald who are working with Halite Energy Group to ensure early engagement is made with relevant stakeholders in advance of

necessary surveys and approvals, and a meeting was held where NWIFCA concerns and previously established position regarding the brine discharge and intake waters were reiterated. It does not appear that there will be any physical development for a while. The link to the Planning Inspectorate's webpage and copies of the DCO and associated reports can be found here:

<https://infrastructure.planninginspectorate.gov.uk/projects/north-west/preesall-saltfield-underground-gas-storage/?ipcsection=docs&stage=app&filter1=Drawings>

**10 MMO Marine Licence and other consultations this quarter:**

Fylde Coastal Protection Scheme  
Workington Slag Bank at German Tunnel  
Nethertown Wastewater Pumping Station Outfall  
Hesketh Out Marsh East (HOME) Managed Realignment Scheme  
Foxfield Water Main Diversion  
Gravel Removal Northside Workington  
Solway pSPA extension  
National Grid S 42  
EIA Regulations Consultation

**Meetings and Training attended this quarter**

MCA National Training Course on Oil Pollution Contingency Planning and Response  
Coastal Futures Conference  
IFCO Training Course – Torquay  
NWIFCA / EA Joint Working Opportunities  
Morecambe Bay SAC Draft Conservation Advice and Solway pSPA NWIFCA consultation response  
TAG (IFCA Technical Advisory Group) conference  
Solway Firth Partnership conference

**Science Officers**

**3<sup>rd</sup> March 2017**