

80 EXTRAORDINARY MEETING OF THE TECHNICAL, SCIENCE AND BYELAW SUB-COMMITTEE on 6<sup>th</sup> MARCH 2024 AT TRUCKHAVEN, CARNFORTH 10.00 AM.

PRESENT – MEMBERS

Mr. B. Leigh	Chair	MMO Appointee
Mr. N. Baxter		MMO Appointee
Mr. S. Manning		MMO Appointee
Mr. S. Brown		MMO Appointee
Mr. K. Thompson		MMO Appointee
Mr. L. Browning		Natural England
Mr. S. Johnston		MMO
Mr. J. Turner		Environment Agency

NWIFCA OFFICERS ATTENDING

J. Moulton HOE, A. Plumeridge HOS, L. Loud Science Officer, A. Nicholson HOA, C. Silverwood Admin Officer, S. Reid Admin Officer

MEMBERS OF INDUSTRY PRESENT

Mr. M. Rowlings, Mr. P. Harrison, Mr. C. Bryden, Mr. G. Foster, Mr. D. Williams, Mr. M. Hughes, Mr. G. Wells

81 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Dr. J. Andrews, Mr. P. Capper, Mr. R. Benson, Mr. M. Taylor CEO

82 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS (Agenda Item 1)

The Chair extended a welcome to all members present. He welcomed Miss Lucy Loud, the new Science Officer who will be based at Carnforth. The Chair reported that Dr. Mihailovici had resigned from the Authority due to other commitments, he thanked Dr. Mihailovici for her time and contributions during her tenure.

The Chair reminded members to sign the attendance register and complete declarations of interest slips if required.

83 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (Agenda item 2)

Mr. Manning declared an interest in Item 3.

84 COCKLE OPEN SEASON (Agenda item 3)

HOS presented a PowerPoint Presentation which covered the background to why the consultation had taken place, the results of the consultation and additional information for the members to consider.

The consultation asked participants if they agreed, disagreed or were unsure with the following statements, and asked them to provide reasoning for their answers.

Option 1: The NWIFCA District's cockle open season for 2024/25 should open from 1<sup>st</sup> July 2024 to 28<sup>th</sup> February 2025

Option 2: The NWIFCA District's cockle open season for 2024/25 should open from 1<sup>st</sup> September to 30<sup>th</sup> April 2025

The report had been circulated to members prior to the meeting. HOS stated that any change to the cockle open season was a trial for this year and there would be a post-trial consultation with members of the fishing industry.

The Chair thanked HOS for her report and reminded members that the IFCA is a conservation authority and sustainability needed to be considered when voting on the

proposals. The Chair reiterated that the proposal is a trial for the Authority and for the fishers.

Mr. Brown thanked the HOS for her report. He felt that the closed season is not linked to conservation and the only way to manage a fishery is for it to remain open due to the different cockle beds and circumstances within the district. He acknowledged that this would require a change in the byelaw and would need to be put as a long-term proposal. He felt that this year, as a trial, the members should agree with the majority. However, he felt that there needs to be a review of the overall management strategy. The Chair responded by thanking Mr. Brown for his input and recognised that all cockle beds are different and unique and do require different management approaches, but the Authority is currently not at this juncture.

Mr. Johnston asked how the proposals would affect the enforcement regime and its resources. HOE responded that Option 2 would be an easier approach, as that is how it is currently enforced. He stated that an elongated season, which had not been proposed, would put pressure on resources, as the management of fisheries is resource intensive.

The Chair reminded members that the proposal is not a definite outcome because it is dependent on an initial cockle survey in Flookburgh. HOS agreed with the Chair. Mr. Thompson asked why Flookburgh had been chosen for the initial survey. HOS explained that officers had undertaken a review of the historical survey data and determined it was likely Southport will not be recommended to be opened this year. HOS was unsure if the cockles at Leasowe will be at size by September, therefore, Morecambe Bay would be the focus however this may not be the case for subsequent years.

Mr. Manning said that he had visited the Flookburgh bed and he had seen a mixture of cockle sizes. He felt that it would be beneficial if there were a mixture of sizes when the bed is opened to avoid overfishing. He also felt that the bed should not be closed at the end of February due to Flookburgh being a Class A bed during the months of January, February, and March. Mr. Manning explained that some of the cockle beds in Flookburgh are dangerous and hard to access, and by controlling which tides are fished would reduce the risk to fishers.

Mr. Johnston asked for further clarification on the survey regime. HOS explained Flookburgh would be surveyed in April and if the cockles were of sufficient size biomass then officers would progress to surveying the other beds. However, if conditions did not look favourable, the cockle bed in Flookburgh would be resurveyed, along with further beds in Morecambe Bay in July.

The Chair invited contributions and questions from the members of industry. Mr. Bryden asked if the same open season would be applied to Pilling. HOS confirmed that the open season would be applied to Pilling. He felt that the cockle market would see low prices due to the abundance of cockles in the South Wales area. He felt that the cockle beds should be open all year round.

Mr. Wells asked if Pilling could be opened early and Flookburgh remain closed until September due to differences in the live and cooked fishing market. HOS explained that Morecambe Bay is a protected site, and the proposals reflect this. She further explained that the Authority cannot elongate the open season due to HRA considerations and that there needed to be some compromise. HOS reiterated that this is a trial and further points would be considered when the trial is reflected upon. Mr. Wells felt cockle prices would be driven down and there would be a greater chance of illegal, undersized cockles being removed from the beds. The Chair thanked the members of industry for their input.

Mr. Brown referred to the input from the members of industry and he felt that consideration needed to be given to the long term and that the byelaw should be amended, allowing cockle beds to be opened and managed all year round. The Chair thanked Mr. Brown for his point but recommended that this is something which would need to be discussed at a

further meeting. Mr. Manning added that he felt the Authority should not have a fixed closing date for the cockle beds and stocks should be assessed periodically.

The Chair gave an initial proposal for resolution to be voted on. Further discussion took place around the timescale with regards to the proposal being a trial. HOS stated that the trial would be reviewed in February 2025.

Mr. Browning referred to previous TSB meetings which had explored protected sites and features. He said that this provided additional requirement to understand cockle growth rates however some work had already been done around this. Also conducting a trial would provide the committee with a greater understanding of how the open season impacts the welfare and breeding of birds.

Mr. Brown requested that the word 'provisional' was added to the proposal with regards to the cockle bed closure date, therefore adding more flexibility. HOS referred to the original proposals which had been discussed throughout the consultation process. Further discussion took place about the different timescales required for the live and the cooked markets and the need for flexible permit conditions.

Mr. Manning felt that the two proposals were too rigid, and more options should be considered. The Chair highlighted those members of the TSB sub-committee had agreed on the detailed proposals at the last TSB meeting, and it was these proposals which members of industry have been surveyed on. The Chair and HOS reiterated that the proposal was a trial and further points would be discussed during the review process. The Chair said that the proposal had been brought forward by the Authority to reflect the views of commercial fishers and the survey showed that a majority are in favour of the proposal, which is for a trial period. Mr. Turner agreed and said that the Authority must stick to the original statements proposed in the consultation.

The Chair drew the attention back to the survey results and the responsibilities of the Authority regarding sustainability. Mr. Hughes asked what percentage of the cockles surveyed in Flookburgh in April were undersized. He felt that the cockles at Pilling would not make size by July. HOS said that it is a possibility for Pilling to open in July, but it was not a guarantee. HOS referred to the contingency plan where beds would be resurveyed if required.

Mr. Brown said the topic could be revisited in six months' time by the TSB sub-committee, giving members the time to learn and to consider other options.

The Chair read the amended proposal:

*The proposal is to open the cockle fishery from 1<sup>st</sup> July 2024, subject to satisfactory survey results in accordance with the methodology laid out in the report to TSB on 6<sup>th</sup> February 2024. Further, for the fishery to close on 28<sup>th</sup> February 2025. The sub-committee approves the resolution, subject to be understanding that the initiative is 12-month trial and that its outputs will be reviews by TSB no later than February 2025.*

Proposed: Mr. Leigh, 6 in favour, 1 abstention, carried

The Chair thanked everyone for attending – meeting closed at 10.50am.