

# NWIFCA Technical, Science and Byelaw Committee

6<sup>th</sup> of February 2023: 10:00 a.m.

Agenda Item

7

## SCIENCE REPORT FOR INFORMATION 7<sup>TH</sup> OF NOVEMBER – 6<sup>TH</sup> OF FEBRUARY 2024

**Purpose:** To provide an update on the work of the Science Team in the quarter.

**Recommendation:**

- a) Receive the report

### UPDATE FOR THIS QUARTER

This quarter, the main priorities of the science team have been to complete analysis of whelk samples for the MCRS study, complete drone training and requirements for use in surveys, liaise with partner organisations regarding the national fisheries management plans, preparatory work for the HPMA surveys, transition from MapInfo to QGIS and developing a proposed approach for an early cockle season opening.

### Key achievements since the previous TSB meeting:

- 1) Completed preliminary whelk MCRS research analysis.
- 2) Completed drone training and flight practice.
- 3) Developed methodologies for new QGIS software use and transition from MapInfo.
- 4) Progressed HPMA work with Natural England and Defra.
- 5) Responded to two consultation requests and one dispensation request.

### ONGOING WORK STREAM UPDATES:

#### 1. **POTTING PERMIT BYELAW**

##### a) **Permit database**

The science team have been working to set up a database for the suitable logging and analysis of returns data. It is now agreed that a new database will be introduced by the end of the financial year. Science officers are contributing to the returns section to improve recording returns and new ways of analysing the data to help management.

#### 2. **COCKLES AND MUSSELS**

##### a) **Survey drone procurement**

In 2023 officers completed the theory and practical training and are now progressing with acquiring the relevant approvals to take the drone out on survey. Work can now begin to develop survey methodology for 2024 mussel surveys using the drone and associated analytical software.

##### b) **Morecambe Bay bird food model**

Natural England have contracted Professor Richard Stillman from the University of Bournemouth to develop a bird food model for Morecambe Bay. NWIFCA have been providing data from their longstanding cockle and mussel survey datasets. The aim of the work is to develop a baseline biomass of cockle and mussel required by the protected bird species in the area.

### **3. NWIFCA RESEARCH PROJECTS**

#### **a) Whelk Fisheries in the North West**

A new sampling schedule for determining the size-at-maturity for whelks was developed for the summer of 2023. The aim was to identify the size-at-maturity for whelks in the NWIFCA District as previous work has not provided a consistent dataset and it was important to assess the appropriateness of the MLS stipulated in the flexible permit conditions. The results of this work are provided in Agenda Item 9.

### **4. MARINE PROTECTED AREAS IN THE NWIFCA DISTRICT:**

#### **a) Highly Protected Marine Areas (HPMAs)**

NWIFCA have been in discussions with Natural England regarding establishing a baseline monitoring program for assessing the changes in Allonby Bay HPMA alongside local fishers. The research project is currently in the early stages of development, and a Memorandum of Understanding and preliminary method statement have been developed. NWIFCA will lead in collecting data and undertaking potting surveys from North Western Protector to gain an understanding of the levels of crab and lobster in the HPMA. The project will likely last for >3 years and aims to begin July 2024 due to delays in last years procurement. Further information on the project will provided once methodologies and schedules are finalised.

#### **b) Marine Natural Capital**

Morecambe Bay is the focus of marine Natural Capital study through the Association of IFCA's and Natural England. NWIFCA has provided information and historical data on the Bay to provide to the Association. The evidence collated will be combined with additional evidence on associated socio-economic value data to develop local placed-based natural capital assessments of fisheries and Morecambe Bay. No further update.

### **5. FISHERIES MANAGEMENT PLANS**

#### **a) National (excl. cockle)**

No further update

#### **b) Cockle fisheries management plan**

NWIFCA is working alongside the Association to contribute to the development of the national cockle management plan. The early stages have involved discussions around development and structure of a plan that must consider multiple different

cockle fisheries (Thames cockle fishery, Morecambe Bay, The Wash fishery etc.) and develop clear objectives.

NWIFCA is developing it's own cockle fisheries management plan applicable to the District. Both projects will complement the other with the aim of developing a framework for future data collection and management, a decision-making framework, a research plan and management review. In time the Districts cockle management plan will be presented to the TSB for review.

## **6. MMO MARINE LICENCE AND OTHER CONSULTATIONS FOR THE QUARTER**

### **a) Morecambe Bay Offshore Wind**

No further update

### **b) Mersey Tidal Power Project**

No further update

#### **Consultations this quarter:**

- Jubilee Bridge painting works variation – MMO
- Signaling Power Renewals – Acton Grange

#### **Dispensations this quarter:**

- Natural England – Allonby Bay HPMA fish surveys

## **7. WORKING GROUPS AND EXTERNAL PARTNERSHIP WORK**

### **a) Technical Advisory Group**

At the most recent TAG meeting, IFCA's discussed the possibility of a joint science training scheme for new officers, similar to that provided for the IFCO roles. Survey protocols and kit were discussed and AIFCA work was presented.

### **b) Whelk Working Group**

No Further update

**17<sup>th</sup> of January 2024**