

NWIFCA Technical, Science and Byelaw Committee

24th of May 2024: 10:00 a.m.

Agenda Item

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SCIENCE REPORT FOR INFORMATION 6TH OF FEBRUARY – 24TH OF MAY 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 an early survey of the Morecambe Bay cockle stocks, complete drone training and requirements for use in surveys, liaise with partner organisations regarding the national fisheries management plans and ongoing marine natural capital work, preparatory work for the HPMAs surveys, and undertake mussel inspection and surveys where necessary.

Key achievements since the previous TSB meeting:

- 1) Completed first in-the-field drone flight on South America inspection.
- 2) Finalized methodologies for new QGIS software use and transition from MapInfo.
- 3) Completed five cockle surveys, and five mussel inspections with associated reports.
- 4) Progressed HPMAs work with Natural England and Defra.
- 5) Responded to eleven consultation requests and four 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. Science officers are contributing to the returns section to improve recording returns and new ways of analysing the data to help management. Officers are also leading on the roll-out of the returns database to the Byelaw 4 permit holders, initiating a trial-run period and informative materials to help fishers with the transition to the new system.

2. **COCKLES AND MUSSELS**

a) **Survey drone procurement**

Officers completed all the relevant requirements for taking the drone out for survey work in North Morecambe Bay and undertook their first flight out on South America. Work has begun 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. This work is anticipated to be completed by June 2024.

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 2024. The aim is 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 were presented at the meeting on the 6th of February.

b) Shrimp research in the North West

Our new science Officer, Lucy, will be leading on developing a summary report for the state of the NWIFCA shrimp fisheries. There is a need for the Authority to better understand the current and historical state of the fishery, in order to best focus future research efforts and projects. Historical declines in the number and size of shrimp caught has lead to concern among some stakeholders as to the condition of the fishery.

4. MARINE PROTECTED AREAS IN THE NWIFCA DISTRICT:

a) Highly Protected Marine Areas (HPMAs)

NWIFCA have agreed a baseline monitoring program for assessing the changes in Allonby Bay HPMA with Natural England.

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. Officers will measure and tag lobsters as part of the project. The project will likely last for >3 years and aims to begin June 2024.

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.

NWIFCA have been working with the Association of IFCA and Natural England to develop a project looking into the social values of stakeholders, and how this can be used in management decision making. As part of the project, NWIFCA is assisting NE in setting up interviews with local stakeholders, and Exeter University will be

analyzing the interviews to identify social values. There will be further engagement with the Authority as this project progresses, to see how this type of data could be used to assist with cockle fishery management decision making.

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:

- St Annes Seawall Coast Protection Scheme
- Shiplift sediment sampling for contaminant testing - Barrow
- West Kirby Beach Management Operations
- Walney Walkway Repairs
- Hambleton Flood Risk Management Scheme
- River Esk/Esk Viaduct - Maintenance of existing works
- HyNet carbon dioxide transportation and storage project - offshore
- Mostyn Energy Park Extension (April)
- Mersey Tidal Power Project - Baseline surveys
- MOD Eskmeals Artillery Trial Year 2-4
- A595 Grizebeck improvement scheme

Dispensations this quarter:

- CEFAS Clean Seas Monitoring Programme 2024

- Bangor University
- Westinghouse Springfields Fuels Limited
- Wyre Rivers Trust Bioblitz 2024

7. WORKING GROUPS AND EXTERNAL PARTNERSHIP WORK

a) Technical Advisory Group

No further update

b) Whelk Working Group

No Further update

13th of May 2024