

**NWIFCA Technical, Science and Byelaw  
Committee**

**17<sup>th</sup> August 2021: 10:00 a.m.**

**Agenda Item  
9**

**SURVEY AND INSPECTION REPORT INCLUDING UPDATE ON COCKLE AND MUSSEL  
FISHERIES**

**Purpose:** To report survey and inspections in the last quarter.

**Recommendation:** Approve the following:

- a) Receive the report
- b) Management of the Morecambe Bay cockle beds was agreed at the extraordinary TSB meeting in June. For the rest of the beds within the district implement NWSFC Byelaw 13a and CSFC Byelaw 18 closures due to lack of stock.

**1. MUSSELS**

A full report for the Solway side scan sonar is provided in Annex A and all other survived mussel beds provide in Annex B. An update on mussel stock in Morecambe Bay was provided at the extraordinary TSB in June and only data collect since then has been provided.

**a) Solway Subtidal Mussel Survey April**

The method for survey has been refined and the results are assisting with increasing the understanding of the stock, the functionality of mussel whilst increasing the confidence in analysis the side scan sonar data. A future survey is planned in the coming month.

**b) Duddon Estuary Mussel Inspection**

The mussel still persists and officer have been in contact with environmental health regarding classification. Officers will continue to monitor the bed.

**c) Morecambe Bay Mussels**

**I. Fisheries Update**

Perch and Black Scar – The mussel was inspected on 26th July and is currently not in a condition suitable for dredging, NWIFCA will carry out further inspection in two weeks' time to assess the condition.

Heysham Flat – The mussel was inspected on 23rd July has already started to scour and is very loose across a large percentage of the bed. The hand gathered seed fishery will open as soon as permits and access has been agreed with the council.

Falklands – The mussel was inspected on 25th July, from the area inspected there has been a decrease in stock with areas of exposed hard substrate and *Sabellaria alveolata* consistent across the bed. Due to the fishery not being HRA compliant the fishery will remain closed and NWIFCA will carry out further inspections to monitor the situation.

South America – The mussel was inspected on 26th July, the mussel is very loose and on a mixture of sand, sandy mud and mud. The fishery has undergone a HRA with formal advice from Natural England agreeing with officer assessment of potential impacts. As of 30th July South America is open by authorisation to Byelaw 3 permit holders and by a permitted dredge fishery.

**d) Dee Estuary**

Report provide in Annex B for information on stock levels.

**2. Cockles**

An inspection and survey report is provided in Annex C. An update on cockle stock in Morecambe Bay was provided at the extraordinary TSB in June and only data collect since then has been provided.

**a) Morecambe Bay Cockles**

After the resolution to open Pilling cockle bed as soon as possible and to consider Newbiggin on 1<sup>st</sup> September subject to HRA, a HRA was submitted to Natural England on the 5<sup>th</sup> July.

As this is the first year of reduced cockles stock in Morecambe Bay since cockle fisheries reopened in 2016, and due to the adult and juvenile stock composition, the HRA has been escalated within Natural England for further discussion. It is not expected to get formal advice before the 18<sup>th</sup> August after which we will know whether a fishery would be HRA compliant or not.

**b) Ribble Estuary**

The bed at Lytham and Southport have been inspected with very little adult stock observed. There is evidence of a settlement on both sides of the Ribble. The spat varies in density and is patchy. Officer will plan to inspect the area again in early 2022 to assess if the spat has survived the winter.

**c) Leasowe**

Leasowe has a range of cockle sizes on the bed with some large older cockle present, some 5-10mm cockle and some less than 5mm cockle. Due to stock levels, previous HRAs due to completed and the decision for the bed to remain closed in 2020, a fishery on the bed is unlikely to be HRA compliant.

**3. Leasowe Large Bivalves**

A full survey report is provided in Annex D. For this survey the resolution of the survey grid was increased and the total survey area reduced to focus on the area known to have otter clams and sand gapers. This approach has increased the success of survey for the clams with a greater number of shows detected. Officer will continue with the increased resolution and reduced area to identify trends over the next two years.