

Consultation on the 2024/25 NWIFCA Cockle Fishing Season Open dates.



Background

TSB 15th of August 2023 - Stakeholder's express interest in changing the districts cockle open season dates for an earlier opening

TSB 7th November 2023 – officers submit a ‘feasibility study’ looking into the implications of a change in the open season on:

1. **Survey timings** and results
2. HRA and **protected area management** considerations
3. **Decision making timescales**
4. **Industry considerations**

Background

Key considerations of the study were:

1. Timings of other fisheries

Other main UK cockle fisheries open in the summer and close by the winter

2. Survey implications

Surveying earlier means lower biomass, and changes to the longstanding dataset. Concern over double surveys.

3. Implications for protected features

Earlier opening increases the duration of bird disturbance. To mitigate this, an earlier closing is necessary – and aligns with justification of other UK fisheries.

4. Potential benefits

Potential for industry to access cockle when yields are best.

Main UK cockle fishery opening times												
Fishery	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
The Wash*							█	█	█	█		
The Dee							█	█	█	█	█	█
Thames Estuary							█	█	█	█		
NWIFCA	█	█	█	█					█	█	█	█
Poole Harbour						█	█	█	█	█	█	█

Background

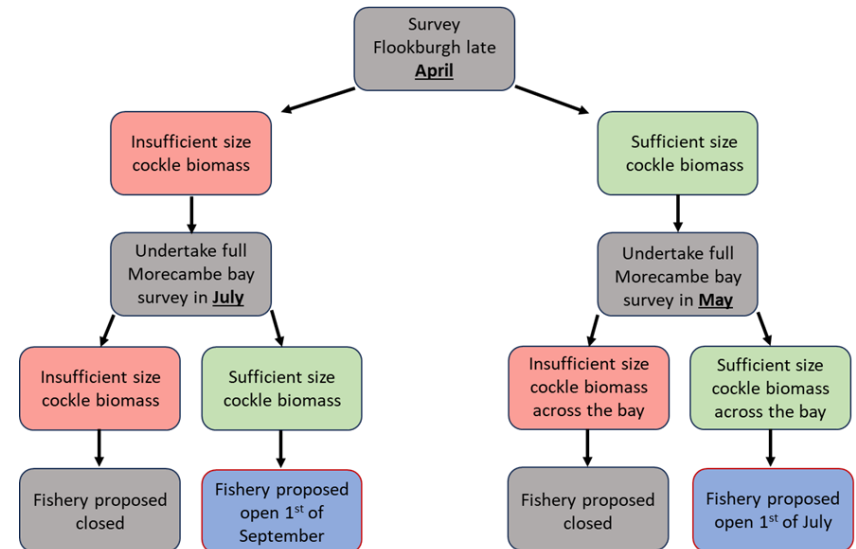
Given these considerations Officers **presented a plan** that could facilitate a potential early opening for the districts cockle beds whilst reducing the risk of double surveying.

Revisited previous data to predict the likely outcome for each cockle bed across the district.

Developed a **consultation questionnaire** that was disseminated to the main stakeholder group.

Trial 2024/25 season – further consultation post fishery.

Decision matrix



Questionnaire

Participants were asked whether they, **agreed, disagreed** or were **not sure** with the following statements, and asked to **provide reasoning** for their answers.

Question 1: The NWIFCA Districts cockle open season for 2024/25 should be from **1st July 2024 to 28th February 2025**

Question 2: The NWIFCA Districts cockle open season for 2024/25 should be from **1st September 2024 to 30th April 2025**

Consultation

Consultation opened on the 2nd of February

Industry notified via the website and text messaging service

Three options provided for engagement:

1. Attend in-person event (Carnforth, Chester and Southport)
2. By phone call
3. By online questionnaire

All participants were asked to complete the questionnaire.

Further text reminder 19th and email on the 22nd February

Closure on the 23rd of February at 3pm.



Consultation – NWIFCA 2024 Cockle Open Season Dates

2nd February 2024

Call to all Byelaw 3 permit holders, buyers and other relevant stakeholders to consult on the NWIFCA District's cockle open season dates for 2024/25.

NWIFCA is holding a consultation to determine the thoughts of Byelaw 3 permit holders, buyers and other relevant members of the industry on changing the District's cockle fishery open season from the 1st September, April 31st to the 1st July – 28th February for the 2024/25 season.

The consultation offers the opportunity for industry members to provide the Authority with any additional information they believe to be relevant to this matter.

Important background information

At the Technical, Science and Byelaw meeting of the 15th August 2023, NWIFCA officers were asked to look into bringing forward the District's cockle open season.

Officers have investigated the possible options for doing this. Any change in the open season dates has implications on survey scheduling and HRA considerations.

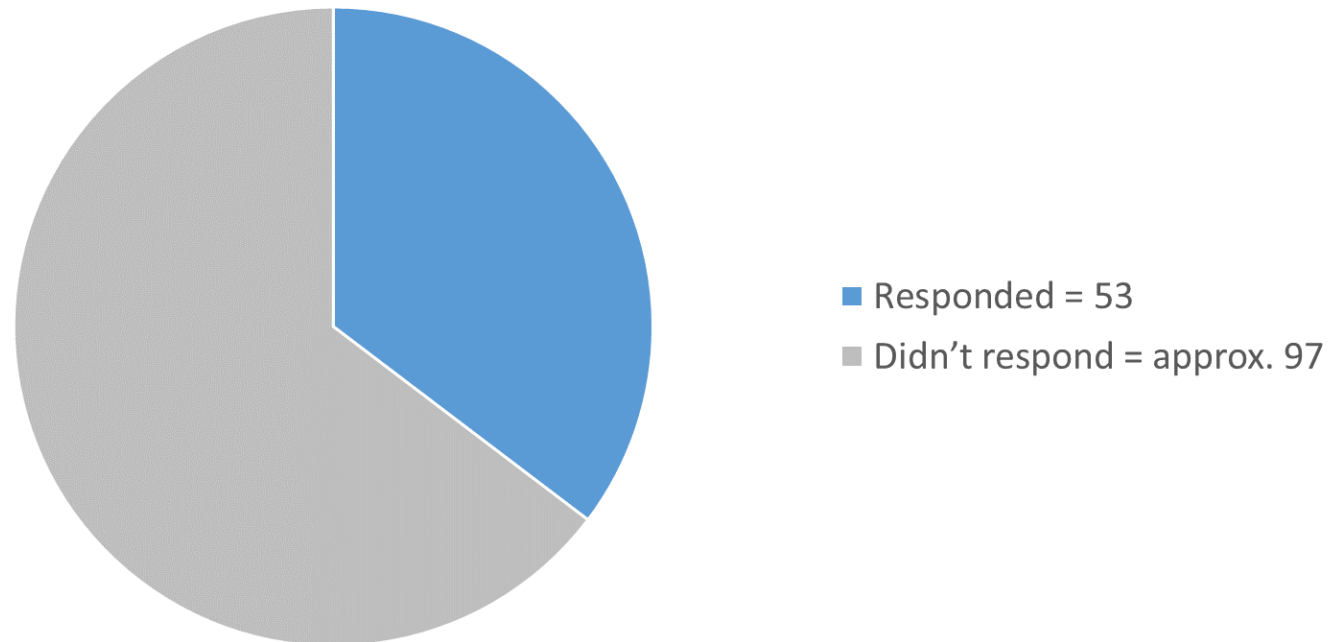
Any change will only apply to the 2024/25 cockle season at this time.

How to participate in the consultation

[Click here to view the consultation](#)

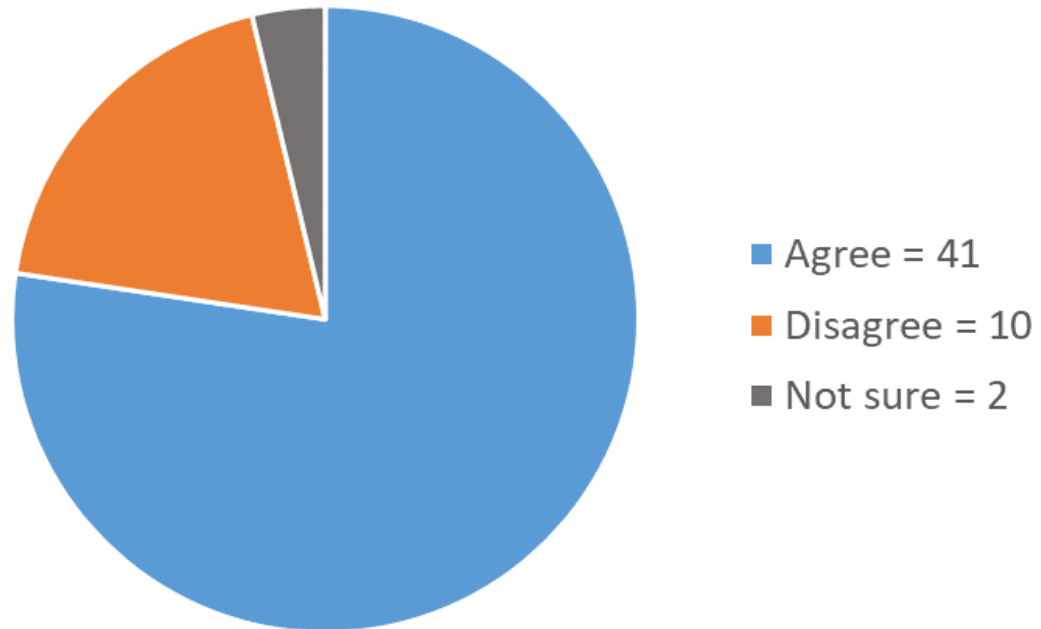
Results

Out of 150 current permit holders, **53 responded to the survey** either via the online questionnaire, through in-person meetings or via phone conversations.



Results

Question 1: The NWIFCA Districts cockle open season for 2024/25 should be from 1st July 2024 to 28th February 2025



Results

Agree (41/53)

7 Key themes identified:

1. Safer working conditions (19 / 41)

2. Better daylight hours (18 / 41)

An earlier opening was associated with longer days in the summer, which was favourable as fishers could access more tides and were not limited by daylight – therefore, they would likely be more productive.

3. Better cockle meat yields (17 / 41)

The meat in cockles was considered to be better in the earlier months and therefore potentially more profitable.

4. Better prices and more marketable stock (11 / 41)

This theme was linked with better cockle yields, and the availability of cooking plants being open.

5. Coinciding with other UK fisheries (9 / 41)

Favourable for two reasons, 1) other cooking plants were open and so stock was marketable, and 2) Effort would be spread among other UK fisheries.

6. Loss of the live market (5 / 41)

The loss of the live export market was noted as a reason move towards the cooked market. Additional concerns were raised regarding the lack of consistency in cockle classification, and therefore reliability of the live winter market.

7. Poor cockle yields in winter (4 / 41)

Results

Disagree (10/53)

3 Key themes identified:

1. **Coinciding with other UK fisheries** (4 / 10)

Limited competition for buyers may drive down the price of cockle.

2. **High fishing pressure** (4 / 10)

If opened in the summer, high pressure in the early months due to more daylight hour and tides, would result in the bulk of stock being removed, and the season shortened. Concerns also raised regarding incentive to riddle in summer compared with winter due to export requirements – implications for sustainability.

3. **Good winter live markets** (3/10)

When classifications are favourable, the price for cockle is high in the winter live market and it can provide for a consistent living.

Results

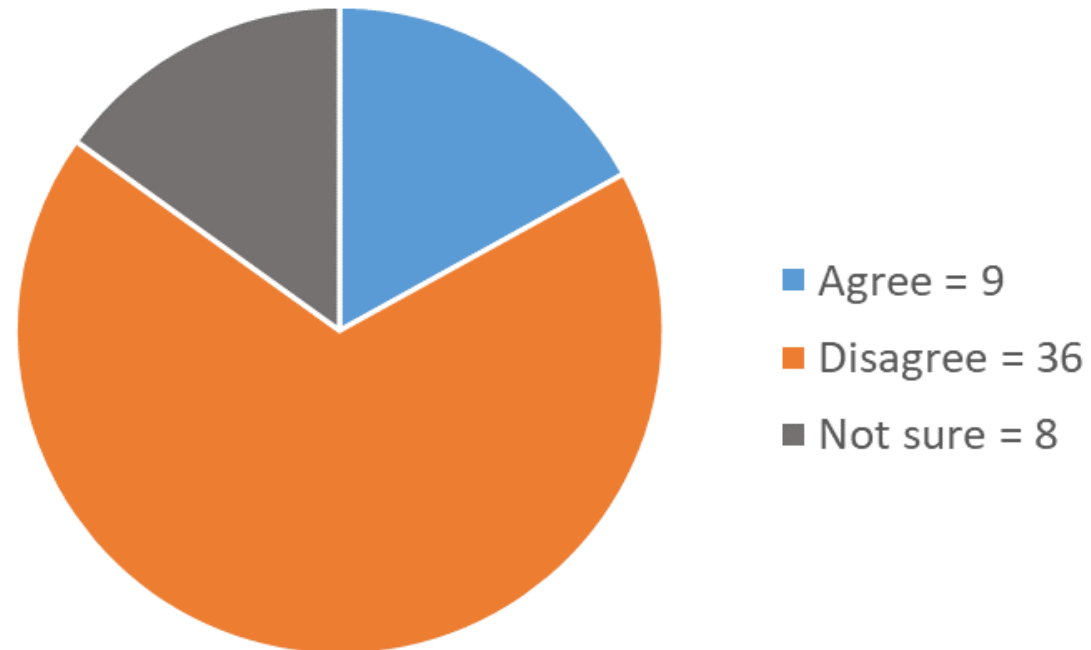
Not sure (2/53)

Key themes identified:

The main reasoning for those who were unsure as to whether to agree to the statement related to the concern over 1) coinciding UK fisheries could drive down the price of cockle, and 2) the winter market for classified cockle is good.

Results

Question 2: The NWIFCA Districts cockle open season for 2024/25 should be from 1st September 2024 to 30th April 2025



Results

Agree (9/53)

3 Key themes identified:

1. Leaving the beds until September will allow them to reach size (3/9)

Concern beds wouldn't reach size by July, and it was important they were allowed to do so

2. The current season works (3/9)

The winter fishery has allowed for a consistent living, and operates during a time where other fishing opportunities are not available.

3. There is a good winter fishery (3 / 9)

Classified beds go to live market which has a better price.

Results

Disagree (36/53)

5 Key themes identified:

1. Working conditions in the winter not as safe or favourable (14/36)

There is a limited amount of daylight and often worse weather which can lead to unsafe or undesirable working conditions.

2. Limited daylight (11/36)

Less time to access the beds results in lower productivity.

3. Lower meat yields in the winter (9/36)

4. Loss of the live market (6/36)

It is difficult to get orders in the winter unless the beds are classified, and this is unpredictable.

5. Worth a trial (5/36)

Some respondents felt that given the changing market and stock conditions it may be worth trailing a different season.

A small number of respondents disagreed with the statement due to preferring an early opening but retaining the current closed date

Results

Not sure (8/53)

2 Key themes identified:

1. Different opening times to the ones proposed should be considered (4/8)

Comment was made over the need to apply management differently across the district beds. Other comment related to opening the fishery all year, by June, or different times for specific beds.

2. Live markets are important (3/8)

Live markets are an important source of income or additional opportunity.

Results

Additional information for consideration

2 Key themes identified:

1. Limitations on tides (17/53)

Responses referred to the need to reduce the number of available tides, prevent the bulk of stock being removed over a short period and stretch out the fishery.

2. No limitation (on tides, TAC or openings) (7/53)

A number of respondents mentioned the need for no limitation on either, quotas, days of the week or timing of the year

The importance of a sustainable and consistent fishery was referenced by many of the respondents, though it was linked to several differing recommendations regarding how to achieve this (*i.e.* through a sustained winter fishery, or prolonged summer fishery). The most consistent factor linked to this was the use of limitation on tides, and a TAC (5 / 53).