

## 19th Eastern IFCA Meeting

*"Eastern IFCA will lead, champion and manage a sustainable marine environment and inshore fisheries, by successfully securing the right balance between social, environmental and economic benefits to ensure healthy seas, sustainable fisheries and a viable industry".*



A Meeting of the Eastern IFCA took place at The Boathouse Business Centre, Wisbech, Cambs, on 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2015 at 1000 hours.

### Members Present:

Cllr Tony Goldson	Chair	Suffolk County Council
Cllr Hilary Cox	Vice Chair	Norfolk County Council
Shane Bagley		MMO Appointee
Roy Brewster		MMO Appointee
John Davies		MMO Appointee
Conor Donnelly		Natural England Representative
Cllr Richard Fairman		Lincolnshire County Council
Paul Garnett		MMO Appointee
Ian Hirst		Environment Agency Representative
Ceri Morgan		MMO Appointee
Tom Pinborough		MMO Appointee
Keith Shaul		MMO Appointee
Rob Spray		MMO Appointee
John Stipetic		MMO representative
Cllr Tony Turner MBE JP		Lincolnshire County Council
Cllr Margaret Wilkinson		Norfolk County Council
Stephen Williamson		MMO Appointee
Stephen Worrall		MMO Appointee

### Eastern IFCA (EIFCA) Officers Present:

Philip Haslam	Chief Executive Officer (CEO)
Julian Gregory	Deputy Chief Executive Officer (DCEO)
Ron Jessop	Senior Research Officer
Jason Byrne	IFCO

### Minute Taker:

Jodi Hammond

### EIFCA15/53 Item 1: Welcome by Clerk

The Clerk welcomed members to the meeting.

### EIFCA15/54 Item 2: Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from: Cllrs Baker (Norfolk County Council) and Patience (Suffolk County Council) and Dr Bolt (MMO Appointee).

### EIFCA15/55 Item 3: Declarations of Members Interest

Messrs Brewster, Bagley, Garnett and Williamson declared an interest in items on the agenda in line with the declarations already held by the Clerk

**EIFCA15/56 Item 4: Election of Chair of the Authority**

As the term of office for the current Chair had come to a conclusion the Clerk advised a new Chair needed to be chosen from amongst the elected members.

**It was Resolved that Cllr Tony Goldson be elected to the position of Chair of EIFCA.**

**Proposed: Cllr Cox**

**Seconded: Cllr Turner**

**All Agreed**

**EIFCA15/57 Item 5: Election of Vice Chair of the Authority**

Cllr Goldson took the Chair and thanked Cllr Cox for the excellent work she had done in the role of Chair during the previous 2 years.

**It was Resolved that Cllr Cox be elected to the position of Vice Chair of EIFCA.**

**Proposed: Chair**

**Seconded: Cllr Turner**

**All Agreed**

**EIFCA15/58 Item 6: Minutes of the 18<sup>th</sup> EIFCA Meeting, held on 29<sup>th</sup> April 2015**

**Members agreed to sign the minutes as a true record of proceedings.**

**Proposed: Mr Worrall**

**Seconded: Mr Shaul**

**All Agreed**

**EIFCA15/59 Item 7: Matters Arising**

15/47 HORSESHOE POINT COCKLE FISHERY: The CEO reminded members that these cockles had survived the winter and there was sufficient stock for a fishery. The position of these cockles meant they were not accessible by boat but would be suitable for a hand gathered fishery operated from landward.

There remained some stumbling blocks to opening the fishery one of which was agreement between the fishing industry and the leaseholder of the land, which would need to be crossed to access the fishery, with regard to payment for that access.

There was also concern that the area which needed to be crossed was protected salt marsh. Any damage to this area would need to be rectified and someone needed to accept liability for such damage. The CEO asked whether, in principle, the Authority be willing to act as financial guarantor for reparation of any damage caused to the saltmarsh by the fishing activity. In addition, there was a bid from the local fishing industry for EIFCA to sponsor for the installation of a roadway at a cost of £6-7,000. All costs/liabilities to the public purse would be recouped via a permitting scheme. There was no need to decide immediately and the issue could be further debated at the forthcoming Finance and Personnel sub-committee. These were matters being discussed with the King's Lynn and Boston representatives, the CEO wished to stress that every effort was being made to ensure this fishing opportunity was exploitable.

## **EIFCA15/60 Item 8: Wash Cockle Survey Methodology**

The CEO advised that due diligence required a review of existing practice to ensure efficiency and fitness for purpose. There had also been some criticism from King's Lynn Vessel Owners and Skippers Association about the methodology used by EIFCA to carry out cockle surveys. The paper had been prepared to provide members with details of the process and to advise that a review of the survey methodology and practice had been conducted.

The main findings from the review were:

- The surveys needed to be carried out as part of EIFCA's duties under the WFO 1992 and statutory Birds and Habitat regulations.
- The surveys could be conducted on any tide but were constrained by neap tides. The most efficient practices were to co-ordinate activity with spring tides.
- Any reduction in the number of survey station samples would have a direct correlation to the accuracy of the data.
- Significant efficiencies had been achieved by digitising the processing of raw survey data on board the Research vessel at the time of collection which effectively saved a week of office based effort.
- The current method used for collecting, processing and interpreting cockle survey data was a distillation of best practice gained from over 20 years experience.

Members were advised the current round of surveys had met with concern that they had been carried out too early, as surveying later would have found more adult stock allowing for a larger TAC. This was however, counterbalanced with the fact that later surveys would mean later opening dates for the fishery.

The frequency of sample sites was also questioned, moving the sites closer together would effectively mean either less sands would be surveyed or the surveys would take twice as long which would be a disproportionate amount of time to spend on the cockles.

The SRO advised members that various surveying options had been looked at but there were risks attached to each one. As the method currently being employed by EIFCA used to be used by CEFAS and as other bodies asked EIFCA for advice on how they carry out surveys the current method was considered to be best practice.

Members discussed the implications of changing surveying methods and dates but felt the current method should continue to be used.

### **Members Resolved to**

- **Note that the current survey methodology reflected the best practice and was recognised nationally as an appropriate means to gather stock abundance data, and**
- **Agree that the current survey methodology should be maintained.**

**Proposed: Mr Worrall**

**Seconded: Mr Garnett**

**All Agreed**

**EIFCA15/61 Item 9: 2015 Wash cockle fishery**

Prior to the presentation of the 2015 Wash cockle survey data the Chair thanked the SRO for the hard work and effort which had gone into completing the surveys and producing the data.

*At this point Mr Spray arrived*

The Senior Research Officer worked through the cockle surveys results and proposals for the fishery.

During the course of the surveys 1219 stations had been sampled over 21 beds. From the samples taken assessment was made of the cockle size, weight and frequency as well as a range of environmental data.

The level of adult stock was below average but there was estimated to be in excess of 19,000 tonnes of spat.

*At this point Mr Donnelly arrived*

A variety of proposals were put forward, amongst them was the proposal to protect year 0 spat as well as the proposal to open some areas later in the fishery to allow further growth to take place.

Members were advised that questionnaires had been circulated and a similar presentation had been made to local fishermen who had made suggestions where proposed closed areas could be amended without affecting the areas to be protected which the SRO felt in some cases were acceptable amendments.

*Tom Pinborough left the meeting at 1045 hrs*

Following the completion of the presentation members raised questions regarding the allocation of one third of adult cockle stocks being left untouched for feeding birds and how this calculation was reached. Mr Donnelly advised that 1/3<sup>rd</sup> is a rule of thumb which allowed a sustainable level for all parties. This level had been achieved following scientific investigation by Cefas. The SRO advised there were also safety measures in place to ensure food was available for the birds such as minimum thresholds for opening a fishery.

It was also questioned whether some of the spat could be included in the equation of thirds in exception years like this. Mr Donnelly reminded members that in previous years the risk of ridging out had been factored in and monitored with the option being available to open areas if this occurred. He also agreed to enquire whether in years when there was exception spat levels a large TAC could be applied.

Mr Bagley was concerned that the following year there was the potential for a large stock of adults of which only 1/3<sup>rd</sup> could be taken and the rest would be likely to be lost to 'atypical' mortality. Mr Donnelly again believed in those circumstances it was a possibility to monitor and open areas likely to be a risk of dying off due to disease.

Mr Williamson added that whilst he was amongst those who praise the work which had gone into the surveys he had some concerns with the proposals. He felt the Authority should be ensuring a Maximum Sustainable Yield from the cockle fishery. Each fisherman at sea represented 5-8 jobs ashore, for those to be maintained the fishermen need to be fishing. If the cockles were allowed to grow more each cockle would be worth more making the fishery more lucrative for all concerned,

he would like to see a later opening time to allow that growth. However, Mr Williamson also respected the thoughts of other members of the industry.

During the presentation it was noted that some industry members had requested the fishery take place with a minimum 6.0m tide rather than the proposed 6.4m tide. Mr Worrall questioned what effect this would have. The DCEO advised that in the past few years the fishery had opened with the 6.4m tide at the request of sectors of the industry. If this year the agreement was to open with a minimum 6.0m tide it would make working patterns more reasonable. With a view to balancing the needs of all within the fishery, a question was asked as to whether the smaller tides disadvantaged some vessels. Mr Garnett advised that a 6.0m tide meant there was less time for larger vessels to prop wash before settling on the sand, and on a larger tide there was less time to fish during the working day. Mr Bagley advised that the evening tide would need to be 6.0m as well as the morning tide.

Mr Davies questioned whether small tides would cause damage to the sands when vessels try to leave before sufficient water is available to float. Mr Garnett advised that the Code of Conduct states the vessel must be floating at anchor before moving off, if not, it is bad practice. In the event of evidence of damage the CEO would have the option to close the fishery.

Mr Worrall questioned how much stock was lost during the last winter and whether there was any correlation to the season. The SRO advised that historically survival of the first winter was critical, however since the onset of atypical mortality spat settlement seemed to have a biennial cycle. He believed that the cockle had already put so much effort into spawning that once it caught the disease it was unable to fight it and died. Mr Garnett felt the NE winds keeping the spat in the Wash and milder winters were playing a part in spat survival.

Mr Donnelly questioned whether the cockles were still encountering as high levels of atypical mortality as they had originally. Mr Garnett advised that the previous year an area on Holbeach Sand had turned to shell between the survey and the fishery opening, and a further bed had encountered slow die off to the point it was reduced to below the fishable density. The SRO added that in areas of small density it is not so noticeable until the surveys are carried out. He believed 2017 would be critical and felt there would be a lot of mortality on faster growing beds.

Mr Brewster advised that the last time there was good recruitment the fishermen took 6,000t and lost 20,000t. The 19,000t of spat currently in the Wash had the potential to become 30,000t he felt the beds needed to be monitored and if there was quick growth they should be fished.

The CEO was concerned there was not a lot of adult stock compared to the level of juveniles and questioned what effect it would have on the price if juveniles were targeted. Mr Williamson advised the juveniles would be bought but for a much lower price.

Members questioned how difficult it would be for vessels to stay away from the closed areas, the SRO would be able to provide positional data for plotters so these areas could be avoided.

Mr Morgan noted the proposal was for a four day fishery, Mon – Thurs, which would preclude work in the bombing ranges. The CEO advised that previously no effort had been put into fishing these areas however, it was always possible for fishermen to individually contact the range and enquire whether the area was available for fishing.

**Members Agreed to:**

**Note the content of the 2015 Wash cockle survey report.**

**Note the responses to Entitlement Holder consultation**

**Note the risks associated with hand worked harvest methods**

**Note that the results of the 2015 cockle survey indicated that there was only the potential to support a hand worked fishery. A dredge fishery or combination of both methods was not possible owing to stocks not meeting agreed WFO management policy thresholds.**

**Members Resolved to agree to a Total Allowable Catch of 2,079 tonnes.**

**Proposed: Mr Morgan**

**Seconded: Mr Worrall**

**All Agreed**

**Members Resolved to agree to open a hand worked fishery in accordance with the recommendations on a date to fit in with the most appropriate set of tides.**

**Proposed: Mr Morgan**

**Seconded: Cllr Turner**

**All Agreed**

**Members Resolved to delegate to the officers the task of determining opening times for the fishery based on preferences of Entitlement Holders, appropriate tides, regular breaks in the fishery by operating a four day week and an extension to a five day week should atypical mortality be judged to be a significant factor.**

**Proposed: Mr Stipetic**

**Seconded: Cllr Fairman**

**All Agreed**

**Members Resolved to delegate powers to the CEO to immediately (without seven days' notice) close a fishery or parts of a fishery should malpractice and/or unacceptable levels of sediment damage be observed.**

**Proposed: Mr Worrall**

**Seconded: Cllr Turner**

**All Agreed**

**Members Resolved to delegate powers to the CEO to close the fishery when it was estimated the TAC had been exhausted.**

**Proposed: Mr Stipetic**

**Seconded: Mr Worrall**

**All Agreed**

**Members Resolved to delegate powers to the CEO to restrict access to cockle beds if juvenile stocks were judged to be disproportionately targeted.**

**Proposed: Mr Davies**

**Seconded: Mr Worrall**

**All Agreed**

**EIFCA15/62 Item 10: Any Other Business**

Mr Williamson questioned whether there would still be a standard bag for landing cockles. His initial thought was that by using the standard bag there would be no risk of prosecution for landing over weight cockles but as this was not the case he was unsure why there was a need for a standard bag. The DCEO advised that the WFO 1992 did not allow assessment by volume, to do so would require a change in the wording of the Order. In the interim landings must be assessed by weight. So whilst cockles must be landed in a standard bag the onus was still on the fisherman to ensure they got the weight right.

There being no other business the meeting closed at 1145 hours.