**Eastern IFCA Whelk Management Measures**

Information for stakeholders

Eastern IFCA has launched formal consultation for two byelaws proposed for the protection of whelk fisheries within the district.

The deadline for your feedback is the **4th January 2016** – these should be written responses in the form of a letter or by completing a questionnaire (which can be found by clicking [**here**](Whelk%20Questionnaire.docx)) sent either by post or via email to the addresses below:

Email: mail@eastern-ifca.gcsx.gov.uk

**If you have any questions regarding the byelaws or the formal consultation please feel free to contact the office on:**

Tel: 01553 775321

Postal address

Eastern IFCA

6 North Lynn Business Village

Bergen Way

King’s Lynn

PE30 2JG

Please also forward any comments or completed questionnaires to the Marine Management Organisation at either of the following:

Postal Address

Marine Conservation and Enforcement Team

Marine Management Organisation

Lancaster House

Hampshire Court

Newcastle-Upon-Tyne

NE4 7HY

**Or**

Email: IFCAbyelaws@marinemanagement.org

Key links (click the link to open):

[**Eastern IFCA Permitting Byelaw**](Permitting%20Byelaw%20Ver%2010.pdf)

[**Eastern IFCA Permitting Byelaw – Permit Condition Notice (Whelks)**](Permit%20Cond%20Notice%20Ver%203.pdf)

[**Eastern IFCA Whelk Byelaw**](Whelk%20Byelaw%20Ver%207.pdf)

[**Whelk measures Impact Assessment**](Whelk%20Draft%20IA.pdf)

Why are whelk measures necessary?

The whelk fishery within Eastern IFCA’s district suffered from a drop in catch per vessel in 2014. Landings data indicates that effort rose dramatically in 2014 as more vessels joined the fishery and more pots were used per vessel. Eastern IFCA investigated the potential for the fishery to be at risk and also identified that the minimum landing size for whelk is potentially far below the size at which whelks are sexually mature – i.e. whelks were being removed from the fishery before they spawned.

Whelks are thought to be very vulnerable to over-fishing, a reflection of their slow growth and low mobility. In addition, there is very little data on fishing activity for whelks. As such, an emergency byelaw was introduced in April of 2015, the objective of which was to prevent further damage to the whelk fishery.

The issues which surrounded the fishery in 2014 are still prevalent – the minimum landing size for whelks is still thought to be too low and without Eastern IFCA intervention, there is no mechanism to limit effort to sustainable levels. As such, Eastern IFCA has proposed measures to replace the emergency byelaw (which expires on 29th April 2016) with permanent measures.

What are the proposed whelk measures?

The proposed whelk measures are designed to fulfil four main objectives:

* Limit effort to sustainable levels;
* Reduce or prevent the removal of pre-spawning whelks;
* Collect data to determine the ‘health’ of the stock; and
* Allow for effective enforcement of the measures.

To achieve these objectives, the following restrictions have been proposed:

Effort limitation

* Limit the number of pots which can be used per vessel to 500 for commercial fishers and 5 for recreational fishers;
* Limit the internal pot volume of whelk pots to 30 litres.

Reduce or prevent the removal of pre-spawning whelks

* Minimum landing size (for whelks caught within the district) of 55mm length;
* Requirement to sort catch using a riddle with bar spacing of a minimum space of 24mm;
* Requirement for pots to have a minimum of two escape holes of at least 24mm.

Collect data to determine the ‘health’ of the stock

* Requirement to complete monthly catch returns;
* Catch logs to be returned to Eastern IFCA by the 10th day of each month.

Allow for effective enforcement

* Pots must be tagged with tags provided by Eastern IFCA;
* Set whelk gear must be marked with buoys or dhans which are visible at all states of the tide and are marked with the vessel PLN and permit number.

How will these measures be implemented?

It is proposed that the above measures are implemented through a combination of fixed byelaw provisions and flexible permit conditions. Some of the measures require flexibility to be effective fisheries management tools.

To achieve this, Eastern IFCA has proposed the new **Eastern IFCA Permitting Byelaw** which will allow for permits to be granted. These permits will have associated permit conditions which must be adhered to. The Permitting Byelaw will also contain a provision for the permit conditions to be introduced, revoked or varied through a proportionate process (which is outlined in the byelaw). Through this process, Eastern IFCA can amend permit conditions to reflect the needs of the whelk fishery – e.g. if the level of effort is too high, the number of pots per vessel can be reduced. The permit conditions will be issued through a **Permit Conditions Notice**.

In addition, Eastern IFCA will be able to limit the number of annual endorsements – which are required to fish for certain species under a permit – by following a proportionate process as set out in the byelaw. This can also be used to reflect the needs of the fishery.

In addition to the Permitting Byelaw, Eastern IFCA has proposed the **Eastern IFCA Whelk Byelaw**. This byelaw will contain those measures which do not benefit from flexibility and will contain a provision to charge for permits – allowing Eastern IFCA to partially cost recover public money spent to manage the whelk fishery. The charge is proposed to be set at £0.50 per pot for commercial fishers and £5 per pot for recreational fishers.

What will the impacts of these measures be?

Eastern IFCA is obliged to weigh up the cost/benefits of any measures it introduces. This has been assessed in the associated Impact Assessment which can be viewed by clicking [here](Whelk%20Draft%20IA.pdf).

The Impact Assessment has determined a cost to the fishing industry in the short term – reducing effort and increasing the minimum landing size will reduce the amount of whelk landed. This is thought to be offset in the longer term by a continuous fishery by fishing at sustainable levels. Historically, the fishery has operated under a ‘boom-and-bust’ mentality which leads to only short-term gains. By preventing this, and managing the fishery at maximum sustainable yield, the fishery will provide jobs and income for the local economy at a more continuous, stable rate.

Have your say

If you have any comments or objections to the measures please use the information at the top of this information to respond by the **4th January 2016**. Please also forward representations to the MMO.