

Wash Cockle Fishery Working Group

22nd June 2022

Outcomes of meeting

Present

Fishermen	Eastern IFCA members	Eastern IFCA officers
Steven Bagley	Shane Bagley	Julian Gregory
John Poll	Ian Bowell	Jon Butler
Leigh Lake	Steven Williamson	Ron Jessop
Wayne Brewster	Paul Garnett	Judith Stoutt
Lee Doughty	Jen Love (via Teams)	
Martin Garnett	Cllr Melanie Vigo di Gallidoro	
	Inge Smith	

Summary

A Working Group of Wash fishermen and Eastern IFCA members and officers met again on 22nd June 2022 to discuss prospects for a cockle fishery in The Wash this summer. Officers reported on updated conservation advice they have received relating to the number of oystercatchers recorded in the site, which is used to calculate the amount of shellfish stocks needed to support protected birds in The Wash. Officers also presented the findings from additional stock surveys conducted between 15th-17th June 2022. The revised advice, which included the ability to now include smaller year-0 cockles in the 'bird food model', and additional stocks identified meant that previous concerns about bird food requirements had been resolved. However, concerns remain over the sustainability of the fishery, because of low levels of adult stocks in low densities and risks to future fisheries if small cockles are targeted in 2022.

Outcomes / points agreed:

A summary of items raised and outcomes/points agreed is set out in the table below.

Item	Action / Agreement
Notes of previous meeting (13 th June 2022)	Agreed
Recording of outcomes only for current meeting (22 nd June 2022)	Agreed
Applicability of the “rule of thirds” of adult stocks when setting total allowable catch (TAC)	Eastern IFCA remain open to future discussions on this. An option may be to use a sixth of all cockles
The way the conservation advice works, higher oystercatcher numbers could completely “squeeze out” future cockle and mussel fisheries	Natural England ornithologists are considering their approach to advising on conservation requirements if bird numbers are consistently very high.
Seasonality of bird numbers should be taken into account	Eastern IFCA and Natural England will continue to work with the bird food modellers and are looking at the possibility of using bird counts for the over-wintering months to inform shellfish food requirements, rather than peak counts from any time of year
After probing by fishermen, Eastern IFCA officers, Natural England and RSPB, it was found that there was an error in the bird count recorded in one area of The Wash in August 2019. This had resulted in the peak bird count in 2019/20 being wrongly recorded in the Wetland Bird Survey report, which forms the basis for Natural England’s advice on the conservation target for oystercatchers, and therefore for bird food requirements. This has now been amended.	Eastern IFCA officers will continue to work closely with stakeholders and Natural England, and will carefully scrutinise conservation advice and query advice if in any doubt.

Item	Action / Agreement
<p>Prospects for a cockle fishery in 2022:</p> <p>With bird food requirements no longer an issue this year, it was agreed that a limited cockle fishery could be considered.</p> <p>Eastern IFCA officers advised, however, that a fishery this year would be to the detriment of any fishery next year.</p>	<p>All agreed it is critical that juvenile cockles are protected to safeguard future years' fisheries.</p> <p>An outline proposal for a limited cockle fishery was developed by fishermen and Eastern IFCA officers. The proposal included closed areas to protect juvenile cockles, workable tides, options for fishing in Holbeach Range, and best practice measures (e.g. using a net to riddle catch, and not using shovels) to minimise damage to juvenile cockles.</p> <p>It was agreed that Eastern IFCA would:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • risk-assess this proposal, • consult with the wider fishing industry, • complete the Habitats Regulations assessment, and • consider how the decision should be taken (using delegated Authority or convening a full Authority meeting to make the final decision on whether the fishery should be opened in 2022, or whether the risk to juvenile cockles is too high.
<p>Opening of the cockle fishery 2022 following completion of HRA and receiving NE formal advice.</p>	<p>Following discussions, industry stakeholders generally felt that the normal 7days notice prior to the opening of the fishery was not needed for the fishery this year only. Suitable opening dates were discussed with Tuesday 26 July being proposed as the earliest date the fishery work likely open, subject to feedback from industry and receipt of formal advice from NE.</p>
<p>Responsibility for protecting juvenile stocks</p>	<p>It was agreed that it is the joint responsibility of Eastern IFCA, fishermen and processors to undertake best practice to minimise impacts on juvenile cockles.</p>
<p>Closure of fishery if too many juvenile cockles are landed</p>	<p>It was agreed that if a cockle fishery is agreed for 2022, Eastern IFCA should close the fishery if fishermen land too many small cockles.</p>

Item	Action / Agreement
Evaluating the benefits of closed areas to protect juvenile cockles	Eastern IFCA will evaluate the stocks found in the 2022 survey in areas that were closed to the 2021 cockle fishery, to gauge the effectiveness of those closures.
Additional industry/Eastern IFCA surveys	Eastern IFCA will continue to work closely with fishermen to re-assess areas that could potentially be opened in a 2022 cockle fishery or could need closing to protect juvenile stocks. Survey trips will be arranged for week beginning 27 th June 2022.
Maintaining the Working Group	It was agreed that the current meeting format worked well, and that the group should continue to meet as necessary to discuss Wash cockle and mussel fisheries.