

Extraordinary 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 on Thursday 7th July at 1040 hours in the Boathouse Business Centre, Wisbech, Cambs.

Members Present:

Cllr T FitzPatrick	(Chair)	Norfolk County Council
Cllr M Vigo Di Gallidoro	(Vice Chair)	Suffolk County Council
Cllr E Back		Suffolk County Council
Mr S Bagley		MMO Appointee
Cllr Chenery of Horsbrugh		Norfolk County Council
Mr K Copeland		MMO Appointee
Mr J Davies		MMO Appointee
Mr P Garnett		MMO Appointee
Mr T Goldson		MMO Appointee
Ms J Love		Natural England Representative
Mr K Shaul		MMO Appointee
Ms I Smith		MMO Appointee
Mr S Williamson		MMO Appointee

Eastern IFCA (EIFCA) Officers Present:

Jason Byrne	IFCO
Luke Godwin	Senior IFCO (Regulation)
Julian Gregory	Chief Executive Officer (CEO) & Clerk
Ron Jessop	Senior Marine Science Officer
Jason Pegden	IFCO

Minute Taker:

Jodi Hammond

EIFCA22/38 Item 1: Welcome

The Chair welcomed members and thanked them for travelling to the additional meeting.

EIFCA22/39 Item 2: Apologies for Absence

Apologies for Absence were received from Cllrs Adams (NCC), Coupland (LCC) and Skinner (LCC), Messrs Bowell and Mogford (MMO Appointees), and Mr J Rowley (MMO Representative)

EIFCA22/40 Item 3: Declaration of member's interests

The Chair reminded members that pre-recorded Declarations of Interest and been registered meaning Messrs Bagley, Garnett and Williamson had a dispensation to take place in discussion but would not be able to vote.

EIFCA22/23 Item 4: Wash Cockle Fishery and mussel Re-Laying Fishery 2022

Cockle Fishery

The CEO began the meeting by reminding members on the route that had been gone down to reach the current situation. Following the previous Authority Meeting Officers had met with industry members and NE Representatives, further investigation had concluded the number of birds being catered for in the Bird Food Model was inaccurate, industry had identified areas of stock not previously taken into account and Year0 cockle could now be included in the stock for the model. These combined suggested there would be sufficient stock for a cockle fishery, although there was still concern about the density of adult stock.

Members were then faced with risk management balanced against industry viability if a fishery was not opened in the current year, as it was anticipated a large number of fishers would move to alternative employment.

SMSO Jessop gave a presentation on the survey results for an area of mussel which had been identified by fishers and a further 51 cockle stations, he then indicated the areas which he felt were most at risk and should remain closed due to low density of adult's and high levels of juvenile cockles and spat. SMSO Jessop expressed concern that by taking Year 0 stock there was a risk for future fisheries as they will have less chance to spawn and future fisheries could become reliant on annual spatfall which the Wash did not get every year, and stock levels became too low the fishery would not be a viable option for fishers.

When considering the Risk Management SMSO Jessop advised that whilst not opening the fishery would produce difficulties for the industry, it should also be acknowledged that with the stock available even an open fishery may prove to be unviable for fishers. He also expressed concern about displacement of fishing effort to other fisheries if there was no cockle fishery which could put those fisheries in jeopardy.

Members questioned what effect thinning out an area by fishing would have on the growth of cockles, if it was felt it would not encourage growth but may prevent loss of stock through ridging out. It was noted that usually the Authority are informed by the industry of areas likely to be

lost due to ridging out and measures can be taken for the stock to be fished during the cockle season, rather than lost.

Members discussed the Bird Food Model and whether fishing this year would leave enough for the birds in future years, SMO Jessop advised it was not possible to state with certainty as there was no indication of how many birds there would be next year, the only thing EIFCA could do as Managers was to ensure there was enough dominant year class left each year.

Mr Goldson acknowledged to ensure fisheries in the future decisions made this year could be crucial, he questioned what mitigation was being looked into to ensure the small cockle was left on the ground for future growth and spawning. The CEO advised that taking year 0 cockles which had yet to spawn was inevitable this year, if a fishery went ahead, but if the Authority became aware of areas where large numbers of small cockle were being taken the area could be closed, he felt opening a fishery this year might protect the industry, but it may not be protecting a fishery next year.

Senior IFCO Godwin advised members a consultation had taken place with industry members regarding the proposed management measures for a fishery this year which included some voluntary measure such as using rakes and nets only, no shovels, nothing smaller than 10mm being landed and use of iVMS on all u10m vessels. The latter would be ahead of the national roll out for iVMS and would require an additional ping rate which would incur a cost of around £150/year. Of the consultation letters sent out the response was only 18% and many of the answers were not unified, with so few responses it was questioned how representative they were.

Members discussed in detail the responses received and ways to enforce the suggested management measures, whether iVMS or drones would prove a deterrent to bad behaviours, the effects of prop-washing, the benefits of nets and rakes to prevent the taking of very small cockle, the additional cost of iVMS and could vessels fish if a unit was broken, whether processors could refuse to buy small cockle and whether other areas were encountering the same issue with die-off in their cockle stocks.

Ms Smith was particularly concerned that taking cockle below 14mm would affect future spawning, she did not think 10mm was large enough to be fished. SMO Jessop advised that 44% of the very small stock would be protected and a lot of the remaining 56% would probably not been seen by a fisherman but it would have to be accepted that some of the small cockles would be taken. He did, however, advise that the cycle of taking smaller and smaller cockles needed to be broken as the taking of small cockles was partly the reason the fishery was where it was now.

Mr Bagley expressed concern about adult stock not being replaced, this was an ongoing problem every year, but leaving them closed they

could be lost, he felt they should be fished. SMSO Jessop gave members a resume of the thought process for closing certain areas.

Discussion was also had on the possibility of a standard size riddle, but it was noted there is no MLS as the growth rates are so variable and unpredictable.

Mr Williamson expressed concern about opening a fishery this year but felt the Authority would be wrong not to open it, and wrong to have opened it if it affects next year's fishery. He felt if there was some growth in August it could enable a good fishery in September/October.

General consensus was that if a fishery was opened it would require both fishers and processors to be conscious of the management measures and to adhere to the voluntary measures, to help protect the future of the fishery.

Members Resolved to:

- **Note the contents of the report and the presentation on results of the consultation with fishery stakeholders**
- **Agree to option 2 in relation to a cockle fishery**
- **Agree to delegate authority to the CEO in consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chair to introduce, vary or revoke all management measures for the Wash Fishery Order cockle fishery including the TAC, open dates, areas open or closed to the fishery, the operating times, Licence Conditions, including without 7-days' notice, where it is judged necessary to do so to meet the conservation objectives of the marine protected areas of The Wash or for the sustainability or the viability of the fishery**
- **Agree to close the Wash Fishery Order cockle fishery on the exhaustion of the Total Allowable Catch or to enable the start of the 2023 cockle surveys**
- **Agree to delegate authority to the CEO, in consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chair, to close the Wash Fishery Order cockle fishery, including without 7-days' notice, where it is judged necessary to do so to meet the conservation objectives of the marine protected areas of The Wash or for the sustainability or the viability of the fishery**

Proposed: Mr Goldson

Seconded: Mr Shaul

All those who were able to vote voted in favour.

The meeting was stopped for 5 minutes to allow members a break. It reconvened at 1242 hours

Kieran Copeland left the meeting

Mussel Fishery

Members were advised the consultation responses indicated that in general there was little support for a dredge mussel relaying fishery, but there was recognition such a fishery supported a small number of industry members.

Key concerns expressed were that taking stock now for seed may remove the potential for a harvestable fishery next year and would removal of seed affect the Bird Food Model in 2023 and therefore the potential for a cockle fishery next year. It was suggested the proposed 900t tac could be reduced to 200t as the end product of these re-laid mussels would be of high value.

The CEO reminded members the Authority were duty bound to balance the needs of all involved in the fisheries, whilst noting a large number of fishers would not pursue such a fishery and therefore would not support the opening of it, there was a need to balance the needs of the small business models who rely on re-laid seed mussel to operate.

Mr Bagley stated that he would like a 200t handworked mussel relaying fishery for the North Norfolk Coast Mussel fishers, he felt a 900t dredge mussel fishery would soon be mopped up and the mussels would be best left on the sands to spawn.

Some members were not aware of the dredge method of fishing and enquired how destructive it was, the CEO advised that before a fishery could be opened it would have to pass a HRA which would mean the fishery was within acceptable environmental parameters.

Members Resolved to:

- **Agree to option 2, subject to satisfactory completion of a Habitats Regulations Assessment and agreement with Natural England, to open a mussel re-laying fishery**
- **Agree to delegate authority to the CEO in consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chair to introduce, vary or revoke all management measures for the Wash Fishery Order mussel re-laying fishery including the TAC, open dates, areas open or closed to the fishery, the operating times or Licence Conditions, including without 7-days' notice, where it is judged necessary to do so to meet the conservation objectives of the marine protected areas of The Wash or for the sustainability or the viability of the fishery**
- **Agree to close the Wash Fishery Order mussel re-laying fishery on the exhaustion of the Total Allowable Catch or to enable the start of the 2022 mussel surveys**
- **Agree to delegate authority to the CEO, in consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chair, to close the Wash Fishery order mussel re-laying fishery, including without 7-days' notice, where it is judged necessary to do so to meet the conservation objectives**

of the marine protected areas of The Wash or for the sustainability or the viability of the fishery

Proposed: Mr Goldson

Seconded: Mr Shaul

All those who could vote were in favour.

The meeting closed at 1300 hours.