

WASH MANAGEMENT SUB-COMMITTEE

Minutes of the Wash Management Sub-Committee meeting held on **Wednesday 24th May 2006**, at 1030 hours.

PRESENT

Councillor A Turner	Chairman - Lincolnshire County Council	
Councillor R Bellham	Suffolk County Council	
Councillor R Ward	Suffolk County Council	
Councillor S F Williams	Lincolnshire County Council	
R Brewster)	
R Garnett)	
N Lake)	DEFRA Appointees
C Southerland)	
S Williamson)	
M R Mander	Clerk & Chief Fishery Officer	
D Vaughan	Deputy Clerk & Fishery Officer	
R W Jessop	Research Officer & Fishery Officer)
J C Byrne	Fishery Officer)
A J Clarke	Fishery Officer)
J C Stoutt	Environment Officer)

Present by
Invitation

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Bakewell (LCC), Baxter (NCC) and Rye (NCC) and Mr Yates (Defra Appointee).

CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman advised that further correspondence had been received relating to item 3 which he felt should be given consideration prior to the meeting. For this purpose fifteen minutes reading time was permitted. Mr Lake requested that his objection to this be minuted, he felt the letters should have been circulated prior to the meeting. The Clerk acknowledged that two of the letters had inadvertently been omitted but the others had been received after the papers were sent out. Councillor Ward was concerned at the short notice of these letters particularly as family livelihoods were at stake, however, he took the Chairman's advice and accepted the 15 minutes allocated to read through the correspondence.

At this point Councillor Bellham acknowledged the large number of members of the industry who were present and enquired if it would be possible to ask questions of the public, in order to have as much information as possible to base decisions on. Members agreed to this request.

The Chairman acknowledged that one of the letters was from a member of the sub-committee who was unable to attend, in the letter he had requested that the meeting being postponed until his return to the country. The member stated that he felt the meeting had been called at short notice. As the meeting notice and agenda had been sent out two weeks prior to the meeting the Chairman was of the opinion that sufficient notice had been given, he therefore chose not to postpone the meeting. Mr Lake requested that it be minuted that he objected to the meeting not being postponed.

DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Messrs Brewster, Lake, Garnett, Southerland and Williamson declared an interest in agenda item 3.

WM06/01 MINUTES OF THE WASH MANAGEMENT SUB-COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 23rd NOVEMBER 2005

The minutes were signed as a true record of proceedings.

WM06/02 MATTERS ARISING

There were no matters arising.

WM06/03 PRESENTATION OF THE SPRING COCKLE SURVEY AND TO CONSIDER AND AGREE THE MANAGEMENT MEASURES FOR THE 2006 COCKLE FISHERY IN THE WASH

The Research Officer gave members a brief resume of the 2006 cockle surveys and the results that had been obtained. The presentation highlighted the dense patches of adult stock and the areas from which it was suggested the 2006 dredge fishery TAC should be taken.

The surveys showed a total adult stock of 11,849 tonnes. The overall quota would be set at 33.3% of the overall adult stock, therefore the total TAC for the 2006 fishery would be 3,950 tonnes. Cockle would only be permitted to be dredged from beds with over 70% adult stock.

Following the presentation the Clerk explained that the prospects for a significant cockle fishery during 2006 were good but it would require co-operation from the industry regarding various operational aspects of the fishery. The Clerk explained that two meetings had been held with the industry, the outcomes of which, were set out in the paper. Whilst it was obvious there was support for a hand worked fishery there was also resistance to any change being made.

The Clerk made reference to a letter received from a firm of solicitors which questioned whether the excessive use of propeller wash whilst handworking was damaging to the fishery. The Clerk advised that handworking had been employed during the previous autumn for the removal of 500 tonnes and no detrimental effect had been seen on the sands. He also emphasised that this was not the same as the previously banned method of fishing referred to as "blowing out", which would not be permitted. However he was also conscious that it was not about choosing one method of fishing cockles over another, both methods of fishing could be carried out without causing damage to the fishery.

Discussions had also taken place with the industry regarding daily quotas and minimising the discard rate by reducing the bar spacing, as there was evidence of significant mortality of cockles which go back on to the sand and then are dredged and discarded again.

Having regard to the views expressed by the industry the Clerk had arrived at a set of proposals for the members to consider. However, further representations had been made to the Clerk which showed a variation in opinion on daily quotas which the Clerk felt should be considered before a final decision was made.

It was suggested that with the increased support for the handworked fishery a larger percentage of the TAC should be allocated to this method of fishing. Having also given consideration to research carried out by Cefas in to the impact of suction dredging on the intertidal communities the Officers had arrived at a suggestion that the dredge fishery should take place on Friskney sand and a TAC of 2,500 tonnes should be applied, being 63% of the overall TAC. This would leave 37%, which amounted to 1,450 tonnes to be hand worked from all areas of the regulated fishery.

Mr Lake expressed concern that as there was only 2,500 tonnes of adult stock on Friskney Sand it would be very difficult to actually land the permitted dredge TAC from this bed,

he also enquired what would happen in the event of no significant spatfall occurring on this sand to restock it. The Clerk advised that in the event of the dredge fishery producing less than 1 tonne in a hour then consideration would be given to the remaining TAC being taken from the northern part of the Wrangle sand. He also advised that should there not be significant spat fall on Friskney Sand ESFJC were already looking in to the feasibility of conducting a relaying programme using stunted cockles from other areas of the regulated fishery, to restock the bed.

Opening dates had been considered with the suggestion that the handwork fishery should open one month prior to the dredge fishery. This would however be subject to advice received from English Nature. There was also a proviso that no vessel could take part in both methods of fishing in any one calendar day. To ensure this did not happen vessels engaged in handworking with dredges on board would need to leave the flexi hose from their dredge ashore. It was suggested that the dredge fishery would open for a 4 day week from Sunday to Wednesday and the handwork fishery would in theory be open 7 days a week although in practice it would be subject to the constraints of tides and weather. Usually these vessels worked 10 days on and 4/5 days off.

Daily quotas were proposed to be 6 tonnes per day for dredging and 2 tonnes per day for handworking. However there had been many requests that the dredge quota be reduced to 4 tonnes per day.

Mr Lake questioned the legality of amending Regulation No.2 of the Wash Fishery Order, which stated that 8 tonnes per day could be removed from the fishery. The Clerk firmly believed that the regulations had been worded to allow flexibility to the management of the fishery and written amendment could be made to vary the quota, as had been done in the past.

It was also proposed to amend the Schedule to Regulation 1 of the Wash Fishery Order, so that the bar spacing on both the riddle and the dredge were not greater than 12mm. This would be inspected by Committee's officers prior to the fishery opening and also during the fishery. There was some concern that this would result in additional shell being landed, which the Clerk acknowledged. With this in mind Officers would take samples from the catch to assess what level of shell was being taken on board, if it proved to be a significant amount then there would be consideration given to amending the quota to reflect the level of shell being landed. Councillor Williams was concerned that by carrying excess shell individuals would get less financial return for their catch, which would be exacerbated by the increasing fuel costs. He hoped that this possibility would be looked into during the first few days of the fishery.

Mr Brewster commented that as the area to be allocated to dredging was a particularly clean sand there should not be excessive amounts of shell caught.

The Clerk also advised that a standard bag would be available which industry members could buy direct from the manufacturers, this would hold approximately 1 tonne and would conform to safety regulations. Standard bags would provide Officers with a visual check on the weight being landed, those vessels without standard bags would need to have their catch weighed.

Prior to considering each proposal individually Defra appointees and members of the public were given the opportunity to put forward their opinions on how they felt the industry wished to see the fishery managed.

Mr Southerland having acknowledged that some members of the Committee would have little background knowledge of the fishery provided a brief history of the cockle fishery's highs and lows and the introduction of suction dredging.

Mr Lake expressed his view that handworking was only seeing an increase in popularity because the Clerk had permitted a form of "blowing" to be carried out. He felt that this method of fishing was new and that English Nature should have been contacted and an Appropriate Assessment on its effects carried out. The Clerk reiterated his opinion that the method of fishing taking place was a far cry from the old method of "blowing out", and that Committee's Officers would monitor the fishery and any evidence of banned fishing methods taking place could result in the fishery being closed.

Mr Lake questioned whether smash rates would be adjusted in line with the smaller bar spacing. The Clerk responded that the industry had been in favour of the reduced bar spacing as it would mean less damaged cockle going back on to the seabed. Mr Lake then expressed his belief that the Clerk was contradicting himself by stating restocking could take place on Friskney as this would be putting cockles back on to the sand which had been dredged. The Clerk advised that by relaying two year old bucks they would only pass through the cockle dredge pipes once and he believed growth would outweigh mortality.

Mr Williamson expressed his opinion that he would like to see the dredge fishery daily quota reduced to 4 tonnes per day, with the shell content closely monitored. He felt this would ensure the fishery would last for approximately four, 4 day weeks. Referring to the handworked fishery as an individual he would also like the quota to be set at 4 tonnes per day but he believed the majority of the industry would like the daily quota to be set at 2 tonnes per day.

At this point Members of the public spoke. Mr J Lake expressed his belief that the Clerk was "totally biased" to what he referred to as the 'propeller' fishery. Unfortunately his comments became a personal tirade against the Clerk and the Chairman had to ask him to end his offensive personal attack. It was also explained that the Clerk worked as part of a team, and it was not the Clerk who had ignored the request to postpone the meeting it was a decision the Chairman had made.

Mr Everitt commented that there was a wonderful set of cockles to draw on which he felt was largely due to the fishery being opened to handworking the previous season, had it been open to dredging there would probably be no stock to fish this season. He also felt that by limiting the handworked fishery to two tonnes per vessel it would negate the rumours of large numbers of people being brought in to work the fishery and would also provide the opportunity for more of the industry to be involved for a longer period of time.

Representatives from Boston were also in favour of a lower quota and more emphasis being put on the handworked fishery.

Members then worked through each individual proposal put before them.

Level of Quota available to the Cockle Fishery: It was Resolved that a quota amounting to 33.3% of the available adult stock would be allocated to the 2006 cockle fishery. The TAC would therefore be set at 3,950 tonnes.

63% of the total TAC to be allocated to the dredge fishery, ie. 2,500 tonnes.

37% of the total TAC to be allocated to the handwork fishery ie. 1,450 tonnes

Beds to Open

Only beds with over 70% adult stock would be potentially opened to the dredge fishery. For the purpose of the 2006 cockle fishery the Dredge TAC would be taken from Friskney sand (as defined by the ESFJC surveys). However, if catch rates fell below 1 tonne per hour then consideration would be given to extending the area available to the dredge fishery further south into Wrangle sand.

All areas of the Regulated fishery would be open to handworking.

Opening Dates

The handwork fishery would open at 0001 hours on 1st June 2006

The dredge fishery would open at 2200 hours on 1st July 2006

Opening dates would be subject to advice received from English Nature.

Number of days the fishery will be open

The dredge fishery would operate on a 4 day week from Sunday to Wednesday.

The handwork fishery would operate on a 7 day week.

No vessel could work both methods of fishing in any one calendar day. Vessels fitted with a dredge must leave the 'flexipipe' ashore when taking part in the handworked fishery.

Daily Quotas

An amendment was made to the original proposal: The dredge fishery daily quota should be set at 4 tonnes per day with the proviso that the shell content be assessed early in the fishery and if necessary the daily quota could be reconsidered.

**Amendment Proposed by: Councillor Williams Seconded by: Councillor Bellham
All Agreed**

The daily quota for handworking would be set at 2tonnes per vessel per day

Bar Spacing

Under the schedule to Regulation No 1 of the Wash Fishery Order it would be a requirement for the bar spacing on both the riddle and the dredge to be no greater than 12mm.

All members able to vote, voted in favour of these proposals.

There being no other business the meeting closed at 1250 hours.