

WASH MANAGEMENT SUB-COMMITTEE

Minutes of the Wash Management Sub-Committee meeting held on **Thursday 31st May 2007**, at 1030 hours.

PRESENT

Councillor A Turner	Chairman - Lincolnshire County Council	
Councillor D Baxter	Norfolk County Council	
Councillor R Bellham	Suffolk County Council	
R Brewster)	
R Garnett)	
C Southerland)	DEFRA Appointees
S Williamson)	
M R Mander	Clerk & Chief Fishery Officer	
D Vaughan	Deputy Clerk & Fishery Officer)	Present by
R W Jessop	Research Officer)	Invitation
A J Clarke	Fishery Officer)	
C Donnelly	Natural England)	

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Mr Yates (Defra Appointee).

DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Messrs Brewster Garnett, Southerland and Williamson declared an interest in items on the agenda as they were all Wash fishermen.

WM07/01 MINUTES OF THE WASH MANAGEMENT SUB-COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 22nd NOVEMBER 2006

As there were no matters arising, it was agreed to approve the minutes.

Proposed: Mr Brewster Seconded: Mr Williamson
All Agreed

WM07/02 PRESENTATION ON THE 2007 SPRING COCKLE SURVEYS AND TO CONSIDER AND AGREE THE MANAGEMENT MEASURES FOR THE 2007 COCKLE FISHERY IN THE WASH

The Senior Research Officer gave members a presentation of the survey work, which had been completed during April on the cockle beds within the Wash. A total of 1156 stations had been sampled with in excess of 50% of them being carried out on foot. During the sampling process additional information had been collected relating to sandworms, lugworms and macoma this information would be more beneficial to Natural England.

Having assessed the findings of the surveys it was encouraging to note that the overall stock level in the Wash at 34,696 tonnes was the second highest recorded level. Of the total stock there were 16,564 tonnes of adult stock and 18,132 tonnes of juvenile stock. Using the criteria applied in previous years 33.3% of the total sizeable catch would form

the TAC for 2007 amounting to 5,521 tonnes. This would be further split between the dredge and handwork fisheries with TACs being 3,478 tonnes for the dredge fishery and 2,043 tonnes for the handworked fishery.

As a result of analysing the sample data it became apparent that the traditionally used criteria for opening a bed to dredge fishing would be difficult to apply as the amount of juvenile stock meant there were insufficient beds with in excess of 70% sizeable cockle to make up the TAC applicable to the dredge fishery. It had previously been agreed that only in exceptional circumstances would there be any deviation from this criteria and the Senior Research Officer felt that the second highest recorded level of stock and the overall spread of spat cockles did amount to exceptional circumstances. It was therefore proposed that the dredge fishery could take place on beds which had 50 –70% sizeable stock providing the juvenile stock was very small and only in areas where spat growth was recorded to be slow.

Taking these criteria into account four beds had been identified as potential areas for the dredge fishery however, two of them proved not to be suitable leaving Holbeach and the Inner Westmark Knock beds as potential areas to be opened to the dredge fishery along with other beds which met the 70% criteria.

Following the successful 2006 handwork fishery the Senior Research Officer proposed that all the beds should be opened to handworking with the exception of the Roger Toft and the Mare Tail beds. These two beds only had 11% and 20% sizeable stock of them and it was considered that it would be detrimental to the beds if any form of fishing were to take place on them.

Following the Senior Research Officers' presentation members were made aware that a meeting had taken place with industry members the previous day at which the same presentation and proposals had been made. As a result of this some modifications had been made to the proposals before the members.

At this point the Clerk proposed to discuss each proposal separately

Level of Quota available to the Cockle Fishery

It was agreed that 33.3% of the sizeable stock should be allocated to the total TAC for the cockle fishery. This would be divided as follows:

Dredge fishery	3,478 tonnes
Handwork fishery	2,043 tonnes

Beds to be opened

Following the previous days meeting with the industry representation had been made, both to Committee members and the Clerk, that members of the industry did not consider that Daseleys sand should be opened to suction dredging, despite it meeting the 70% sizeable stock criteria. Mr Donnelly also backed this concern by highlighting surveys which had been carried out in conjunction with extraction work, these had indicated the growth on the beds was not as prolific as it should have been.

Members debated the opening of this bed and the possible cause of mortality on this sand in the past. The Clerk felt there was sufficient concern about the opening of the sand to warrant writing to all entitlement holders and requesting their views. With the expected opening date not being until July there would be sufficient time to complete this exercise. In the event that there was not a clear view from the industry then a further meeting of the Wash Management Sub-Committee would need to be convened.

Another letter was read to members requesting the opening of the Toft sand to handworking but this was not felt to be a widespread view of the industry. It was also noted that by keeping the Roger/Toft and Mare Tail closed to all forms of fishing it was protecting approximately a third of the total juvenile stock.

It was agreed that in conjunction with the above agreement the following beds would be opened:

Dredge fishery: Holbeach, Inner Westmark Knock. Daseleys (subject to consultation responses)

Handwork fishery: All beds with the exception of Roger/Toft and Mare Tail

Opening Dates

Having accepted the need to close the current handwork fishery at midnight on 31st May 2007 the industry were anxious to see the fishery open as soon as possible. The proposal being Monday 4th June 2007. This would be subject to receiving approval from Natural England.

The proposed opening date for the dredge fishery would be 16th July again subject to approval from Natural England.

Number of days the fisheries will be open

It would not be acceptable to target both fisheries on any one calendar day and there would be a requirement that all dredge equipment (pipes and dredge head) must be removed from vessels targeting the handwork fishery.

Dredge fishery: open 4 days/week Monday – Thursday

Handwork fishery open 7 days/week

Daily Quotas

Following a previous poll of the entitlement holders the Clerk had been in contact with Defra in the hope of amending Regulation No2 of the Wash Fishery Order so that daily quota could be amended annually dependent on the amount of stock available. Unfortunately this request had been declined due to the fact that it was Defra's legal opinion that this would delegate too much power to the sub-committee away from the Minister.

Consequently the Clerk had taken the approach that the regulation could be worded so that the daily quotas were set at 2 tonnes for handworking and 4 tonnes for dredging. The Clerk had been optimistic that this variation would be achieved but at the eleventh hour Defra had received letters from NFFO and J Lake Shellfish objecting to the amendment, and stating ESFJC had not accurately reported the outcome of the consultation process. A further letter was read to members from John Lake Shellfish which implied that neither of the two local processing companies were in favour of the change to the regulation and that they represented over 50% of the Wash Entitlement Holders. As a compromise the letter suggested the Committee could implement individual transferable quotas, and that entitlement holders should be asked to consider this option.

Mr Williamson representing the 'other' processing company was offended that J Lake Shellfish had written implying he was writing on behalf of both companies. Mr Williamson accepted that currently he was happy with quotas set at 2 and 4 tonnes but would prefer it to be variable as it would not be viable to fish if the price of cockles were to decline.

At this point Mr Brewster made the point that the Clerk should not have included in his figures to Defra the entitlement holder who would be likely to object but who had not bothered to return his voting slip. The Clerk explained this was done to prove the point that even taking into account all parties against the proposal the majority were still in favour.

Continuing on the subject of the lower daily quota Mr Brewster advised that with a lower daily quota there would be less damage to the fishery, as vessels would take longer to handwork two tonnes and get a better quality product than they would if they were permitted to land 8 tonnes. He felt there would also be more chance of vessels illegally

blowing out in an attempt to achieve the 8 tonne quota. The Clerk acknowledged this and reminded members that the Committee's responsibility was to the fishery. The cockle fishery was the mainstay for the future of the Wash. If a high daily quota was set the dredge fishery would be over in possibly as little as 2 weeks which would mean additional pressure would be put on other species in the Wash. A lower quota would also allow more time for fishing to take place.

Mr Donnelly advised that Natural England had been contacted by Defra regarding the daily quotas and he agreed that a lower daily quota would have a less detrimental impact on the fishery.

Whilst the Clerk was optimistic the lower daily quota would be achieved it seemed unlikely it would be in writing before the proposed opening of the handwork cockle fishery. Members present discussed the possibility of postponing the opening of the handwork fishery until such time as the reduced daily quota was in place, but they were confident that the majority of those fishermen taking part were in support of the reduced quota and would continue to land a maximum of 2 tonne/day from the handwork fishery.

It was agreed the handwork fishery would open on the 4th June 2007 subject to approval from Natural England, with the proviso that if any reports or observations of blowing out, or more than 2 tonnes being landed were received then the fishery would be closed until the revised regulation was in place.

Riddles and Dredge Head

It was agreed that the 12mm bar spacing would be applied for the forth coming fishery, this would apply to both dredge heads and riddles, with no meshing up being permitted.

The Clerk proposed that prior to the opening of the dredge fishery, on the 11th, 12th & 13th July, all vessels would be invited to try their suction dredge gear with a Fishery Officer on board who would also assess the smash rate.

Members present were in agreement with these proposals and complimented the Officers for completing the survey work in difficult circumstances. It was also noted the Industry and Officers were again working together to achieve the best possible scenario for both parties.

It was Resolved to accept the management measures for the 2007 cockle fishery as set out and amended during the course of the meeting.

**Proposed: Councillor Baxter Seconded: Councillor Bellham
Agreed.**

There being no other business the meeting closed at 1225 hours.