

# WASH MANAGEMENT SUB-COMMITTEE

Minutes of the Wash Management Sub-Committee meeting held on **Wednesday 25<sup>th</sup> November 2009**, at 1030 hours.

## PRESENT

Councillor J Dobson	Norfolk County Council	Sub-Committee Vice Chairman
Councillor K Sale	Suffolk County Council	
Councillor A Turner	Lincolnshire County Council	Sub-Committee Chairman
Councillor S Williams	Lincolnshire County Council	
Councillor R Ward	Suffolk County Council	
R Brewster	DEFRA Appointee	
R J Garnett	DEFRA Appointee	
N A Lake	DEFRA Appointee	
C Southerland	DEFRA Appointee	
S Williamson	DEFRA Appointee	
M Yates	DEFRA Appointee	
M R Mander	Clerk & Chief Fishery Officer	
Conor Donnelly	Natural England	)
Duncan Vaughan	Deputy Clerk & Fishery Officer – ESFJC)	Present by
R W Jessop	Senior Research Officer - ESFJC	) Invitation
J C Stoutt	Marine Environment Officer	)

## APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Goldson (SCC)

## DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Messrs Brewster, Lake, Garnett, Southerland and Williamson declared interests in the items on the agenda as they were WFO Entitlement holders.

### **WM09/14 ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN**

Two nominations were made for the position of Chairman, where were put to the vote.  
Councillor Turner - 6 votes in favour  
Councillor Dobson - 4 votes in favour

**It was Resolved that Councillor Turner take the position of Chairman of the sub-committee.**

**Proposed: Councillor Williams**

**Seconded: Mr Garnett**

### **WM09/15 ELECTION OF VICE CHAIRMAN**

**It was Resolved that Councillor Dobson take the position of Vice Chairman of the sub-committee**

**Proposed: Mr Southerland  
All Agreed**

**Seconded: Mr Garnett**

**WM09/16 MINUTES OF THE WASH MANAGEMENT SUB-COMMITTEE MEETING HELD 24<sup>th</sup> JUNE 2009**

There were no matters arising. Members agreed to sign the minutes as a true record of proceedings.

**WM09/17 CLERK'S REPORT ON THE POSSIBLE USE OF BUFFER ZONES AROUND THE LAY GROUND JIN THE WASH SEVERAL FISHERY**

The Clerk advised that the subject of buffer zones had been raised previously. Lay holders had requested a no fishing buffer zone be allowed between private lay ground and public fisheries. Whilst the Clerk accepted this would protect the interest of the lay holders he was concerned that by imposing buffer zones it would remove some of the opportunity to fish the public beds, as well as being difficult to enforce. The Clerk felt the Committee should be careful not to remove the key principle of the public's right to fish because of a Several fishery. He did not believe permanent buffer zones should be put in place, however, he did believe the fishery could be carefully considered on an annual basis and if the value of the stock in close proximity to the lays was minimal then the area could be closed to fishing.

Mr Lake quoted the Clerk as having stated during the Eider Duck Inquiry that the lays were more important to the Wash than the intertidal bed in the Regulated fishery. Mr Lake added that under the current policy of keeping 25% of the stock on a bed had resulting in beds of mixed class which were un-saleable and therefore private lays were of more importance to the Wash. He believed common sense needed to prevail, if 25% of the bed was to remain then that 25% could be the area adjacent to the lays, and once the area had remained closed for a few years the mussels would be too big to sell and would therefore police themselves.

The Clerk advised Mr Lake it was not 25% area which must remain, it referred to keeping a minimum density of 25 tonnes/hectare across the bed.

Following a previous request for buffer zones the Clerk and Senior Research Officer had walked on the bed in question and it was evident that mussels were not present, in any significant numbers, right up to the edge of the beds, with the exception of one area.

Mr Brewster advised that previously the larger mussels had been left in favour of relaying the smaller stock onto private lays, if public fishing was permitted right up to the lays then those industry members who had investing in relaying could find the stock on their lays being poached. He was concerned that historical events of disputes on the sands could be re-enacted if the committee did not give the lay holders a little bit of help considering the amount of money which had been invested.

The clerk reiterated that he was not saying nothing could be done but that he felt it should not be buffer zones set in stone. If a survey indicated the best mussel abutted a lay then that area should be open to public fishing, but when there was minimum gain from fishing close to the lays then that area could remain closed to fishing, this matter should be considered on an annual basis following the result of the surveys.

It was also noted that to put a buffer zone round all the lay ground in the Wash would considerably reduce the area available to public fisheries.

After lengthy discussions, members **Resolved not to have buffer zones *per se* but following the annual surveys and whilst discussing the management measure for the fishery if it was considered necessary for the protection of lays, closed areas may be incorporated. However, if there was a lot of good quality mussel close to the lays which would benefit the public fishery the area would remain open.**

**Proposed: Councillor Williams  
All Agreed**

**Seconded: Councillor Ward**

**WM09/18 SENIOR RESEARCH OFFICERS PRESENTATION ON THE 2009 AUTUMN MUSSEL SURVEYS**

The Senior Research Officer gave a resume of the surveys carried out to ascertain the stock for the 2009/2010 mussel fishery. The results indicated that the total area of mussel ground fell short of the 500 hectares required by the Conservation Objectives, however, if had been advised that this level would not be achieved quickly. However, the total stock available was well above the 12,000 tonnes required by the same conservation Objectives.

Within the Conservation Objectives there was an undertaking for a bed to retain a stock level of 25 tonnes/hectare. The Senior Research Officer recommended that on beds with primarily sizeable stock they should only be fished to a level that left 35t/hectare, whilst the beds recommended for relaying could be fished to 25t/hectare as juvenile mussels grew more rapidly than mature mussels, therefore the stock biomass of the bed would recover more quickly where the mussels were smaller.

Mr Lake advised that some of the areas surveys contained mussels covered in barnacles, he questioned whether these barnacles were removed when carrying out the stock assessment. The senior Research Officer advised that in an ideal world they would be but as the Industry would remove them from the fishery with the barnacles on as part of the biomass the mussels were surveyed including the barnacles.

**WM09/19 CLERK'S REPORT ON PROPOSED MANAGEMENT MEASURE FOR THE 209/2010 WASH MUSSEL FISHERY INCLUDING FEEDBACK FROM THE INDUSTRY**

Results of the surveys had been circulated to all of the WFO Entitlement Holders, along with a questionnaire for them to complete. A meeting had also taken place with representatives from the local associations, which gave an indication of the industry's requirements. From the meeting it had been noted that the global market for mussels was very poor so the need for large mussels was almost negligible, any quota that was allocated would probably end up on private lays.

Suggests made by the industry representatives at the meeting were that a harvestable fishery of 85 tonnes should be opened to handworking only on the Gat Sand and all beds identified in the survey results as having sufficient stock for relaying should be opened as well as the Toft sand. Opening the Toft sand raised queries of how much of the TAC could be taken from the sand.

**It was Resolved that the following Management Measures would be put in place for the 2009/2010 mussel fishery:**

**HARVESTABLE FISHERY:**

The Gat Sand would be opened for handworking with a TAC of 85 tonnes. A daily quota of 4 tonnes would be in place with the fishery operating over 7 days per week.

The Appropriate Assessment would propose the area of the bed to be opened would be extended to reflect the stock densities on the bed.

**Proposed: Councillor Williams  
All Agreed**

**Seconded: Councillor Ward**

## RELAYING FISHERY:

Quota: Dredging 950 tonnes  
Handworking 50 tonnes

Opening Date 1<sup>st</sup> March 2010 (*to be reviewed if there has been a particularly hard winter*)

Beds to be opened: North Mare Tail, South Mare Tail, Holbeach, Trial Bank,  
West Breast, Mid Breast, East Breast, Toft

NB(*The area to be opened on the Toft bed would be decided once a further survey of the bed had been carried out and a scientific approach could be taken as to where to open and how much stock could be removed from the bed*)

Days Fishing: Dredging 5 day week (Monday to Friday)  
Handworking 7 day week

### Maximum Daily Quota:

It had been noted that the industry did not feel a 4 tonne daily quota for relaying was viable. The Clerk was asked to consult the WFO entitlement holders to get a consensus of opinion on what they would like as a quota, once that was ascertained the Clerk would contact Defra with a view to amending the 4t daily quota currently in place.

### Opening Date:

Industry response suggested that the relaying fishery should be open in the spring with the 1<sup>st</sup> March 2010 being the earliest date it should open. It was agreed that the fishery would only be open after officers had carried out an assessment of the beds following the winter months to determine when the mussel was suitable for relaying.

## **WM09/20 ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

VMS Tracking: The Chairman was in receipt of a letter from the GWFIG which detailed the results of a meeting held to discuss the proposed issue of VMS black boxes on board all WFO licensed vessels. The outcome of the vote was that the majority of those present were not in favour of having the boxes onboard their vessels. Concerns were expressed that the result of the vote was not an accurate view of how all members of the local industry felt.

Mr Brewster added that two years ago when the suggestion was first made, the Boston fishermen would have been in favour of the boxes, however, the majority of them would not now want them on board. They believed they would be persecuted for being entitlement holders, whilst others who worked within the confines of the Wash for species other than cockles and mussels would be able to go where they like without fear of retribution. A series of scenarios where they felt they would be penalised were put forward, including issues regarding cost, monitoring activity outside the WFO, incompatibility with systems being used by the MFA/Coastguard etc, and loss of days at sea due to break down of the unit.

The Clerk advised that all the concern may prove to be academic as the Committee had still not been advised whether or not they had been successful in their bid for European funding. He also advised that the equipment would be used under strict conditions, as set out by the Committee, and he felt the industry's fears were unfounded.

**It was Agreed to defer the discussion to the next Statutory Meeting, by which time it was hoped a decision would have been made on funding. The Clerk would prepare a letter for all entitlement holders which would set out to the best of his ability answers to the issues which had been raised.**

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