

NORTH EASTERN INSHORE FISHERIES AND CONSERVATION AUTHORITY

SCIENCE ADVISORY GROUP – DRAFT MINUTES

4 March 2022

Present

Prof Mike Elliott (Chair)
Dr Stephen Axford
Dr Claire Fitzsimmons
Mr Graham Collins
Mr Michael Montgomerie
Mr Bob Houghton
Miss Rebecca Lynam
Mr Mark Cole
Miss Emma Brown
Mr Paul Slater
Alison Miles
Hannah Westoby
Mr Chris Evans
Mr Christian Proud
Louise Hopkins
Mr Adam Baker

Representing

MMO Appointee
MMO Appointee
MMO Appointee
MMO Appointee
MMO Appointee
MMO Appointee
MMO Appointee
MMO Appointee
Natural England
Environment Agency
Environment Agency (Guest)
Environment Agency (Guest)
CEFAS (Guest)
MMO
MMO (Guest)
DEFRA (Guest)

Senior Environmental & Scientific Officer Tim Smith, Environmental and Scientific officer Ralf Bublitz and Deputy Chief Ian Davies also attended the meeting.

The group met via Teams. The meeting started at 9:30am.

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Chief Officer David McCandless.

2. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON THE 19TH AUGUST 2021

Resolved - That the minutes of the Science and Governance Working Group Meeting held on the 19 August 2021 be confirmed and signed as a correct record by the Chair.

3. TEES AND NORTH YORKSHIRE SHELLFISH MORTALITIES

The Senior Marine Advisor for the EA, Alison Miles, began with an in-depth presentation on the Environment agencies response and findings from the beginning stages of the mortality incident (Oct 2021) to the current day.

The presentation highlighted the individual elements that were sampled at the beginning of the investigation and the reasons behind this as well as discussing theories from the early stages about the possible causes of the event whilst keeping in mind the main mortalities have arisen in the crab and lobster population.

Pyridine was discussed at length, after being pinpointed as a possible cause by an external report and picked up by media outlets and the industry. The EA have, through extensive research and analysis, ruled out pyridine as a likely cause.

Because of the in-depth nature of the presentation given by the EA, members discussed how to convey the findings to industry in the best way. DEFRA, in particular, are keen to engage with industry about how communication are having an impact and to improve on this where necessary.

Adam Baker from DEFRA was introduced as the new lead of the Shellfish Mortality Industry Working Group.

CEFAS representative, Chris Evans gave a presentation to members discussing CEFAS involvement in the testing and a further explanation about the main theories to causation that have been discussed since the beginning. Particularly looking at heavy metal analysis, dredging, pyridine and algal blooms and CEFAS' analysis and findings from all of these areas.

The Senior Environmental & Scientific Officer Tim Smith provided an update on the current involvement of NEIFCA in the next steps as the investigation moves towards sustaining the fishery for the future. Tim outlined the NEIFCA's commitment to analysis of catch and effort data from previous years, looking at shellfish health and sending out questionnaires to industry to collate this information, working closely with effected fishermen and having officers constantly on the ground.

Members were informed about the introduction of the Industry Working Group, to better communicate directly with industry.

Resolved – (a) Members noted the presentations

(b) Members noted each agencies involvement and agreed with the strategy going forward

4. **EUROPEAN LOBSTER SETTLEMENT INDEX PROJECT**

The Senior Environmental & Scientific Officer Tim Smith presented members with an update on the successful bid for funding for the European Lobster Settlement Index project (ELSI) in conjunction with HFIG. Members were advised that the project will primarily be focused on lobsters but could, in time, include other species. The project is the first of its kind in Europe and will be used for developing a predictive metric for the future of the species. Initial stages of the project will be to develop the equipment needed to conduct the research. A member suggested North Western IFCA could have some monitoring information that could be useful.

Resolved – (a) Members noted the presentation.

(b) Members supported the plan for the project.

5. **NEIFCA ANNUAL RESEARCH PLAN 2022/2023**

The Senior Environmental & Scientific Officer Tim Smith presented the draft annual research plan for 2022/2023. The plan includes additional evidence gathering in response to the Tees and North Yorkshire Shellfish Mortalities. Some workstreams have been removed from the plan as they are considered development areas with no specific outputs planned for the coming years. The newly funded ELSI project has been added to the plan.

There will be a workshop in the coming months focusing on Aquaculture Strategy.

New NEIFCA scientific officers Ralf Bublitz and Samira Anand were introduced to members.

Resolved – Members approved the annual plan

6. **HUMBER FISHING BYELAW REVIEW – SPURN EELGRASS**

The Senior Environmental & Scientific Officer Tim Smith discussed the proposed extension to the Spurn Point Seagrass area. Annual surveys of the eelgrass bed have been conducted in conjunction with Yorkshire Wildlife Trust since the introduction of the byelaw, with data compared across years to determine the stability (number of years present) of the eelgrass bed. The initial boundary of the protected areas was defined based on the presence of the eelgrass bed in 2014. There is now sufficient data to indicate stable presence of eelgrass outside the existing protected area. To ensure sufficient protection of the designated feature officers propose altering the offshore extent of the protected area.

Resolved – (a) Members noted the presentation

(b) Members voted in favour of suggested boundary changes

7.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Members enquired whether the number of permits for scallop can be increased before June and whether the grounds and season could be altered.

Members expressed a concern that communications could be improved upon in general, with the need to have minutes available sooner than the next meeting.

The meeting closed at 12:10

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