

16 August 2017

Notes of an Industry meeting held in Dabchicks Yacht Club, West Mersea, Essex on 16 August 2017 at 6pm

Present: Mr Russel Pitt, Mr James Elbra, Mr Graham Baker (Blackwater Oystermen Assoc), Mr William Baker, Mr Stephen Wass, Mr Allan Bird (Blackwater Oystermen Assoc), Mr Richard Haward (Blackwater Oystermen Assoc), Mr Sean Tasker (Gladwell Oysters),

In Attendance: Dr W Wright (CIFCO), Mr D Bailey (ACIFCO), Mr R Dyer (IFCO) Mrs D O'Shea (Office Manager)

This meeting was called to update fishermen with the progress made since meeting with them on 20 February 2017. Information would be provided on the results of two meetings with stakeholders which included some representatives of the Industry as well as a meeting of Members of the IFCA.

Key points presented to the meeting

The questionnaire that had been sent to those who attended the meeting in February had been returned (7 responses received). The information from these had been provided to IFCA Members at their last meeting and published on the website. The results of the questionnaire showed a high degree of variation in effort and gear used. It was important that the gear that would be specified to be used reflected that which the Industry worked. The ideal solution would be for the Industry to come to agreement internally and provide the IFCA with details of the prospective size of dredges.

Current sampling across the whole site suggested that the stock was approximately 300 tonnes. This stock needed to increase and needed to prove that it was stable at that increased amount for 2 to 3 years. It would be necessary to fix a stock level that all parties would agree to. The fisheries management plan would have a certain amount of flexibility and could be reviewed every 3 years. It was envisaged that specific projects could be undertaken with the Industry and Essex University to analyse stock data and refine this figure if required. Without a figure it would not be possible to open the fishery. NE and NGOs had found this figure of 800 tonnes satisfactory. The research priority would be to see if 800 tonnes were accurate.

Data was available from the surveys the IFCA had undertaken although currently it was in its raw form and was being analysed by a PhD student that the IFCA was part sponsoring. This information would be passed on to the Industry.

With regard to the byelaw measures some of these would be fixed, some aspects would be flexible:

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1. Anyone fishing for native oysters on public oyster beds would be required to have a permit - **fixed**
2. The permit would be restricted to one per person per vessel - **fixed**
3. The fishery would be open for a limited period each year – **flexible** – it was envisaged that the fishery would be open for 1 to 2 weeks per year around March/April
4. The byelaw would divide the MCZ into a number of different fishing areas. A specific area or areas would be opened.
5. Each permit would be allocated an equal percentage of the overall Total Allowable Catch (TAC) - **fixed**
6. There would be a fee charged for a permit - **fixed**
7. The adult size would be controlled by ring size – **flexible** – it was likely that it would be fixed at 70mm but could increase to 80mm or decrease to 60mm if required
8. There would be controls on vessel size, gear size and dimensions - **fixed**
9. Each permit holder would be required to complete a detailed landing declaration - **fixed**
10. Vessels would be required to have vessel tracking whilst taking part in the fishery- **fixed**
11. A management plan would look to set trigger points at which the fishery would be opened; guidelines or an expert officer assessment process that would consider the following
 - the composition of the oyster population in terms of
 - number (including biomass and density)
 - age (age range typical of a natural population)
 - sex ratio
 - the quality and quantity of the habitat

With regard to managing the native oyster beds, the Industry were reminded that oyster beds as a feature were also protected. The definition of a native oyster bed was 5 per m² which realistically was a high aggregation of oysters. If recovery was successful and an oyster bed was established, then NE advice would be to close that bed. One method of dealing with this potential situation would be to set aside areas in each fishing area where mixed sediment was found that would not be fished and classed as oyster beds. All areas around these set aside areas could be fished. NE and NGOs had, in principle, accepted this solution.

These set aside areas were in addition to the restoration box that had been established by E-NORI which would have its coordinates written into any byelaw.

With regard to a question regarding adaptive management, it was advised that NE would require a byelaw to be written that explains how that byelaw would work together with an Appropriate Assessment (AA). It was not possible to write a byelaw that said it would be amended in the future. If changes were required, then it needed to say when they would take place and why.

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A consultation paper requiring written responses would be distributed to all stakeholders which would run until October 2017. The Industry were reminded that IFCA Officers would not be making the decision on how the byelaw was structured nor the requirements of the management plan. This would be a decision made by Members of the IFCA, although Officers would make recommendations based on the response to the consultation. It was therefore important that the Industry made every effort to respond to any consultations and attend the Technical Panel meeting so that their views and opinions could be considered by Members when making their decision.

Meeting closed 7.45pm