

## AIFCA Report

### Marine Natural Capital and Ecosystem Assessment (mNCEA)

The Natural Capital and Ecosystem Assessment (NCEA) programme,<sup>1</sup> is a three-year Defra-led science innovation and transformation programme. The programme is currently in its third year. The AIFCA mNCEA post is funded through two NE led mNCEA projects: Inshore Evidence, and Place Based Decision Making.

The aim in Year 3 of the programme is for projects is to bring together data to undertake natural capital assessments and to support decision making in the marine environment, whilst further testing how natural capital can be monitored.

There is a strong focus through the projects listed to integrate IFCA needs and address current policy and evidence gaps in fisheries management. Many of the projects are also direct recommendations flowing from Year 2 mNCEA projects. The following NE-led projects are of particular interest and relevance to IFCAs.

#### Measuring Balance

Working with Isles of Scilly IFCA, the AIFCA-led 'Measuring Balance' project aims to develop tools that support decision making and feedback to IFCAs that draw together social, economic and environmental criteria.

At a district level, IFCAs are required under the Marine and Coastal Access Act to 'seek to balance the social and economic benefits of exploiting the sea fisheries resources of the district with the need to protect the marine environment from, or promote its recovery from, the effects of such exploitation.'

The sustainability objective within the Fisheries Act (2020) requires that fishing is environmentally and economically sustainable and managed to achieve economic, social and employment benefits.

IFCA Committees, through representation across many sectors provide a subjective view or 'gut instinct' that can help to steer regulation and policy objectives that take into account these different needs and objectives. However, there is no established methodology that enables IFCAs to draw together economic, social and environmental data to determine the extent to which this balance is met, either at the decision-making stage or when reporting on the activities of IFCAs.

The project will be broken into two parts. Part 1 will develop the parameters that will be used to input into the tool, through working with stakeholders to define and agree social, economic and environmental targets that fit within existing local and national legislative, policy and regulatory requirements and undertaking a questionnaire to gather data.

Part 2 will use outcomes and values gathered to inform and define useable targets within social, environmental and economic dimensions, working closely with Isles of Scilly IFCA to ensure that structure is linked to useful and recognisable reporting requirements, and develop a reporting and decision support tool that can be used to provide additional insight on impact within a committee structure.

#### Crab and Lobster: Coastal Wellbeing

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<sup>1</sup>Natural Capital and Ecosystem Assessment

This AIFCA-led project will explore how the balanced management of crab and lobster fisheries can enhance the wellbeing of coastal communities. The aim of this project is to support decision making in fisheries management through providing new evidence on social benefits, particularly when management trade-offs are applied, in crab and lobster fisheries and explore how the flow of services and natural capital value is affected through balanced decision making.

The project will focus research, using an interview-based approach, around three distinct case studies:

1. The Cromer Crab fishery, Norfolk.

Research will capture the societal value as perceived by local community of the historic Cromer crab fishery, and the role played by the Eastern IFCA, in managing the fishery so as to balance effective MPA conservation (protection of capital stock) whilst maintaining the flow of services to the community (enhancing wellbeing outcomes), via a sustainable fishery and balanced management approach.

2. The Northumberland lobster fishery.

Research will focus on the role that local management approaches in the Northumberland inshore lobster fishery play in the delivery of societal benefits and fishery sustainability, drawing comparisons with management approaches recommended through the Crab and Lobster Fisheries Management Plan.

3. Whitby lobster hatchery, Yorkshire.

Research in Whitby will focus on the role played by the newly opened Whitby Lobster Hatchery as an innovative public resource which is geared to provide education and engagement with local people and visiting tourists, to stimulate the flow of ecosystem services from the local lobster fishery.

### **Crab and Lobster: Improving Stock Assessment Data Availability**

Working with the IFCA TAG and Cefas, a project to explore and trial how additional data sources, including IFCA data, could be integrated into the crab and lobster stock assessments.

Currently crab and lobster stocks assessments are undertaken nationally by Cefas. Evidence is gathered through a shore-side sampling programme. In recent years, in some regions, data availability has been low, resulting in reduced confidence in stock assessment outcomes. The current methodology does not allow for the integration of much of the relevant fishery data that is gathered by IFCAs. This project will explore and trial how additional data sources could be integrated into the crab and lobster stock assessments and new sampling techniques could be utilised to provide greater confidence in the conclusions of these assessments.

### **Morecambe Bay Cultural Values**

Working with North Western IFCA, this project aims to build understanding social value of cockle fisheries through an oral histories case study of the Morecambe Bay Cockle Fishery. The project will examine how personal values link to perceptions of and responses to change in the Morecambe Bay Cockle Fishery and therefore how decision-making might better account for different values.

Data will be gathered using oral history interview methods developed by the Exeter University Sustainable Management of Marine Resources (SMMR): Resilience of Coastal Communities (ROCC) project and a 'community voice' inspired film to present diverse personal values and how they relate to responses to management of the fishery.

### **Inshore Fish Monitoring**

This project will trial pilot areas for a national inshore fish monitoring programme to improve our knowledge of the spatial and temporal distribution of inshore fish and their supporting habitats. Working in two coastal regions, South Cornwall and North Northumberland, the project aims to:

- Develop the marine natural capital evidence baseline for inshore fish communities.
- Identify and test replicable methods suitable for natural capital-appropriate fish community assessments in a variety of inshore habitats.
- Trial best practise approaches for inshore fish monitoring in protected areas and fragile habitats.
- Explore how some of our essential inshore fish habitats and associated fish communities respond spatially and temporally to both natural and anthropogenic pressures including climate change.
- Test innovative methods for natural capital data collection and monitoring.

Both Cornwall IFCA and Northumberland IFCA will be involved in the delivery of the survey work, including baited fish traps, Baited Remote Underwater Video (BRUV) and seine netting, whilst further techniques, such as dive surveys and otter trawling will be delivered across the ALBs.

### **The Wash Cockle Fishery Health**

Working with Eastern IFCA, a reassessment will be carried out of the Bird Food Model for the Wash Cockle Fishery, adding in more recent data from stock assessments and mortalities, to see whether these thresholds are still suitable for the current population.

In connection to this further evidence collection will be funded to aid an investigation into shellfish mortality in the Wash.

### **Taw-Torridge Bird Food Modelling**

Working with Devon and Severn IFCA, this project will build evidence relating oystercatcher feeding preferences and strategies in the Taw-Torridge Estuary and undertake a bespoke bird food model to inform the management of the area's mussel and cockle fisheries.

### **Celtic Sea and Western Approaches Pelagic Fisheries Management Plan (FMP)**

The Celtic Sea and Western Channel Pelagic Fisheries Management Plan (FMP) is a joint plan between Defra and the Welsh Government due for publication in 2025. The plan covers herring, pilchard, greater silver smelt, horse mackerel and anchovy within ICES areas 7e, 7f, 7g, 7h (Welsh and English waters only).

This FMP will be developed by considering the benefits we receive from the stocks covered by the FMP (economic, social and environmental), the ways we depend on them, the impact we have on them, and their value (or importance).

The first 'partnership' meeting for the FMP was held on 26<sup>th</sup> March 2024, at Penzance, Cornwall, with attendance from both Cornwall IFCA and Devon and Severn IFCA Officers. Both Tim Smith and I have taken part in Technical Working Group meetings for this FMP.

## Cockle Fisheries Management Plan

Since the AIFCA members forum in December 2023, engagement presentations and discussions on the draft objectives for the cockle FMP were completed with key IFCA Authorities with cockle fisheries. These meetings proved valuable in refining the scope and content of the FMP, whilst also ensuring members were familiarised with the ambitions of the FMP. It is hoped that this familiarisation will enable further input from members during future consultation stages and the development of national fora to progress the FMP in the future.

Following these Authority meetings, a series of in-person stakeholder engagement events were held during January 2024 to further test industry opinions on the draft FMP objectives. Throughout the development period of the draft cockle FMP, the AIFCA also engaged with existing industry representation bodies and fora, government and environmental non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and wider stakeholders. Industry engagement and feedback on draft objectives was particularly sought through:

- The Shellfish Association of Great Britain (SAGB) – both Processors and Mollusc Committee meetings
- Further meetings with regional cockle fishery representatives
- Industry groups with an interest in the fishery
- Seafish facilitated Shellfish Industry Advisory Group (SIAG) meetings
- MMO facilitated Regional Fisheries Group meetings
- Natural England, Historic England, Blue Marine Foundation and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds.
- Welsh government and Natural Resources Wales

In general, initial views concerning the concept of a national FMP for cockles prior to presentation of the aims and objectives questioned the need for a national approach, given the regional and inshore nature of these fisheries and current, local management arrangements. There was also concern communicated that a national FMP would add further layers of bureaucracy and limit the development of new fisheries.

After presentation of the draft FMP objectives, rationales and discussion of issues facing the cockle industry, most stakeholders saw benefits associated with a national FMP. They accepted that a national approach would raise awareness of cross policy issues associated with water quality and shellfish certification and improve the evidence base for the stock and help to address wider environmental interactions and socioeconomic considerations.

Incorporating this feedback and in consultation with Defra policy, the draft goals have been reorganised to present an overarching vision supported by three goals around the themes of stock, environmental and socio-economic sustainability. A series of five actions then outline how the FMP will achieve these goals through the identification of high level evidence needs and specific deliverables linked to Fisheries Act objectives and UK Marine Strategy (UKMS) descriptors. The linking of actions to UKMS descriptors has arisen as a result of the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) process being applied to all FMPs.

The vision, goals and actions are shared below for members information in confidence at this stage but may be subject to minor change before public consultation dependant on further Defra comment.

### Vision

Long term vision for cockles is to ensure fisheries in English waters are managed to achieve environmental, social and economic sustainability for the benefit of coastal communities and wider society.

## Goals

1. The FMP will contribute to stocks being environmentally sustainable in the long term and are not overexploited.
2. The FMP will improve the evidence base to ensure identified fisheries are managed utilising adaptive management cycles using an ecosystem-based approach.
3. The FMP will deliver a framework to support the cockle industry, recognising their contribution to coastal communities and the skilled employment they provide.

## Actions

Action 1 (Goals 1 and 3): To develop a framework to support the role of the FMP in realising sustainable cockle fisheries in English waters.

Action 2 (Goals 1 and 2): Consider developing national monitoring and reporting mechanisms to detect inshore and offshore emerging fisheries.

Action 3 (Goal 2): Review the data collection framework and evidence base relating to interactions between cockle fisheries and designated bird prey requirements.

Action 4 (Goals 1, 2 and 3): Assess the data collection framework for social and economic data used to inform management decisions.

Action 5 (Goals 1, 2 and 3): Consider establishing a national cockle FMP forum.

The Cockle FMP is undergoing final preparations for public consultation. Final timings are yet to be decided, however it is Defra's ambition to undertake further regional stakeholder engagement meetings for all Tranche 3 FMPs.

**End.**