

Agenda Item No:

SUBTIDAL MUSSEL FISHERY – SILLOTH CHANNEL

Report by the Chief Fishery Officer

1 Purpose of the report

- 1.1 To inform Members that a substantial bed of seed mussels that became established in the Silloth channel earlier this year have grown on, and are now predominately over the Committee's minimum landing size (MLS) of 45 mm.
- 1.2 To inform Members that after further consultation with the local fishing industry, Officers intend to issue authorisations (on a date yet to be decided) to owners or skippers of qualifying vessels, to dredge for mussels on this bed (under the terms of byelaw 23 mussel – permit scheme and byelaw 24 mussel – daily catch restrictions).

2 Recommendation

- 2.1 That Members formerly endorse action taken by the Chief Fishery Officer (CFO) to issue authorisations to dredge for mussels in the Silloth channel and agree for the CFO to set the daily catch restriction in line with on-going stock assessments.
- 2.2 That the report be received.

3 Detail

- 3.1 In early 2008 Officers were alerted by local shrimp fishermen that a bed of seed mussel may have become established in the upper part of the Silloth channel in the vicinity of Lees Scar lighthouse. It was decided that a study of the area should be carried out as soon as weather and tidal conditions proved suitable.
- 3.2 The area was first surveyed on 5th June 2008, by Officers using a small sample dredge from "Protector Bravo" and the "Day Grab" from "Solway Protector". This confirmed that mussels were indeed present in the area, although the majority were, as expected in the size range of 30 – 35 mm shell length. From past experience Officers would expect sub-littoral mussels in this size band to attain the MLS of 45 mm within the following 4 – 5 months, subject that is if managing to avoid excessive predation by starfish and shore crabs.
- 3.3 Regular samples have therefore been taken from the bed since the original survey in June, both by Officers using our sample dredge and also an experienced local fisherman. From this work it has been possible to map out with reasonable accuracy the area in

the channel where mussels are present, but without the aid of underwater camera equipment it is not possible to estimate the percentage cover of mussels on the seabed. As such it is extremely difficult to establish with any accuracy the total amount, (biomass) of mussels that may be present in a given area. Nonetheless, in consideration of our knowledge of previous mussel fishing in the channel, Officers are confident that there is presently a substantial stock of mussels on this bed, now close to, or above the MLS of 45 mm.

3.4 Officers have continued to liaise with local Shellfishermen, and it is intended in the near future to meet formally with Members of the Solway Shellfishermen's Association and other interested parties, to discuss prospects for the fishery and the conditions that would be attached to authorisations.

3.5 Officers have also discussed the proposed fishery with the Marine Conservation Officer for Natural England, and Environmental Health Officers at Allerdale Borough Council who are responsible for enforcing EU Shellfish Hygiene Regulations.

D T DOBSON

Chief Fishery Officer

25th November 2008