

## **Zonation and Code of Conduct Review Crab Tile Meeting**



### **Minutes**

**09:30-11:30 Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup> December 2016**

**Location: Royal British Legion, Starcross**

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### **Attendees**

Stephanie Clark, Exe Estuary Management Partnership (EEMP)

Owen Perkins, Lower Exe Crab Tilers Association

Mike Western, Lower Exe Crab Tilers Association

Martin Jones, Lower Exe Crab Tilers Association

### **Agenda**

To introduce the review of zonation and codes of conduct to the crab collectors in the Dawlish Warren area. Feedback was requested of the proposed Dawlish Warren Voluntary Exclusion Zone (VEZ).

### **Minutes**

#### Other users of area:

- Bait diggers / winkle collectors (some from Cornwall)
- Cockle pickers (some of Chinese origin) – seem to use area above NNR
- Fishermen / anglers (high and low tide) – lure fishing becoming popular, work area along top of NNR.
- Schools (e.g. Radcliffe School)
- Disability groups
- Tourists
- Local dog walkers (about two or three) – keep north of Cockwood Steps, most keep dogs on leads
- Tourist dog walkers – many allow dogs off leads
- Kayaking – right over NNR
- Jet Skis in summer
- Drones – flush birds from the NNR
- Large hovercraft – takes core samples from mud annually in summer

#### Background:

Crab collecting has taken place for over 100 years on the Exe.

Crab collecting takes place all year round. The season depends on which area the tiles are on (water temperature makes a difference).

All crab collecting takes place outside of IFCA byelaw line.

Usually 2-3 crab collectors at Dawlish Warren at a time (activity increases on weekends).

Nine crab tile owners at Dawlish Warren:

- Two that earn a living:
  - Martin Jones
  - Mike Richardson, Exmouth Dock next to Myles (access by boat)

- All others as a hobby:
  - Mike Western
  - Owen Perkins
  - Big Mike
  - Andy Norrish
  - Martin
  - Keith (Ginge)
  - 1 other

About 8,000 tiles in area, Martin works about 2,000 of them.

Get there when water is high to ensure no one else turns their tiles, tide drops and collectors wait for birds to move and fly away, which can take about 2.5 hours.

Collectors are usually there for about 5 hours.

Don't take juvenile or berried crabs.

Note: under-rider, where male carries female.

#### Issues:

Issues with voluntary code of conduct – no enforcement and other tilers came in to the area.

Question about why the golf course isn't included in the VEZ, since it's a feeding area for birds.

Decreased value of crab: mostly smashed up for whelk pots.

Decreased growth rate, possibly due to silting up of estuary: growing of stock up to 12 months instead of 2-6 months.

Used to get one mature crab from every four pots, not one from about every 50.

Concerns about decrease in nutrients.

Concerns about fertiliser and diesel polluting the area.

Concerns about reduction of fresh water coming downstream due to flood alleviation (e.g. water diverted at Exeter), which may be the cause of increase in algae.

Can't report incidents, as authorities don't react immediately and they are targeted by those that they are reporting.

**ACTION:** Contact details of Habitat Mitigation Officers (HMOs) and D&SIFCA should be distributed amongst crab collectors.

**ACTION:** Investigate tiler from Teign that has approximately 1,000 tiles at Starcross and has acted aggressively.

Relocation: if move a tile, it can take up to four years to re-establish completely (in the meantime they earn nothing).

Various options for VEZ: It would be difficult to collect on a smaller area, as two collectors have to make a living.

Can remove old tiles, but there may be negative effects on sediment and creatures.

Issues with a seasonal VEZ:

- Other people turn tiles and take crabs if they are not used.
- They maintain tiles all year round – clean mud out from tiles so crabs can still make use of them.

Potential closure of layby at Cockwood Steps: concerns of increased congestion with additional parking in Cockwood, perhaps when children are dropped off for school.

Observations:

Lots of birds at high water, not many at low water.

Food source released when tiles scooped out by collectors (e.g. birds follow them).

Mainly gulls and crows at low tide.

Andy may have (disused) tiles under IFCA byelaw line.

**ACTION:** Send better map and IFCA byelaw line, with visual points to identify.

Suggested Amendments/Additions to Code of Conduct:

- Contact details of Habitat Mitigation Officers (HMOs) and D&SIFCA
- Wear dark colours
- 2 hours either side of low water
- Wait for birds to disperse before approaching
- No dogs off-lead
- Signs at steps
- National Federation now National Trust
- Agree with blue part of existing code

**ACTION:** Request that John Goss-Custard helps to review code of conduct.

Other Suggestions:

Permit system in place:

- Carry permit when collecting
- Give code of conduct when receive permit
- If don't adhere to the code of conduct, don't get permit the following year
- Regulate number of users
- Need for policing
  - HMO contact details for tilers to report incidences, if can't attend then tilers can take details to pass on (can help HMOs as Voluntary Wardens, with some kind of identification, such as an armband)
- Winkling should also require a permit
- Don't use the word 'licence'
- Should be free – if there is a cost, they want to see the money go towards policing
- Owen happy to give out permits.

If exclude bait diggers, they will need another area to dig (but which area) and should also have permits and a code of conduct.

Winkle pickers should also be considered.

Possibility of permits for local anglers in area?

**ACTION:** Send crab collectors existing code of conduct.

**ACTION:** Organise next meeting for January.