

Committee(s)	Dated:
Port Health and Environmental Services Committee	27 November 2018
Subject: 46 th City of London Thames Fishery Research Experiment	Public
Report of: Director of Markets and Consumer Protection	For Decision
Report author: Jon Avern, Port Health & Public Protection Director	

Summary

The purpose of this report is to inform your Committee of the outcome of the 46th City of London Thames Fishery Research Experiment which took place on Saturday 22 September 2018 along the foreshore of the River Thames, downriver from the Port Health Lower Thames Office in Denton, Gravesend.

Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to:

- Note the content of this report;
- Review and approve the grant of £5,460 from City's Cash to partially fund the 2019 event; and
- Approve the 47th City of London Thames Fishery Research Experiment to take place on Saturday 12 October 2019.

Main Report

Background

1. The Thames Fishery Research Experiment, which was first held in 1973, is an annual angling event held along the foreshore of the River Thames, one and a half miles downriver from the Port Health River Divisional Office in Denton, Gravesend.
2. Your Committee has a long association with this event which is organised in collaboration with the Thames Angling Preservation Society (TAPS) and the Environment Agency. Financial contributions were received this year from The Fishmongers' Company; the Port of London Authority (PLA) which supports the Schools' Trophy; Thames Water; and Tideway. The Water Conservators' Company again donated a prize for the Biodiversity Award.
3. The objective of the Experiment is to establish the environmental condition of the Thames through the number and size of fish species in evidence. Judging is based on the greatest variety of fish caught and a scoring system which rates fish according to scarcity and significance in the context of a cleaner river.

4. The Experiment encourages sustainability and conservation through the rules of the competition which require young and undersize fish to be returned immediately to the river once recorded.
5. The results of the Experiment provide valuable data to the Environment Agency, Thames Angling Preservation Society and members of the river community. It has the unique advantage of linking the recreational angling sector with conservation and scientific study. The event also encourages young people to take part in angling and develop an awareness and interest in the environmental condition of our rivers.

Current Position

6. On Saturday 22 September 2018, 64 adult anglers representing eight teams competed for the Lady Howard Trophy which was awarded to the team with the highest score. Additionally, school teams consisting of pupils from the City of London School for Girls and Gravesend Grammar School competed for the PLA-sponsored Schools' Trophy. Details of all the competing teams are shown in the summary of results provided in the Appendix to this report.
7. Prizes were also awarded for the largest/best fish and the best individual catch by an adult and by a member of a school team. In addition, the angler with the overall catch judged to most demonstrate the continuing health and improvement of the River Thames was presented with the Biodiversity Award, which is sponsored by the Worshipful Company of Water Conservators.
8. Fishing took place between 09:00 and 13:00 and was followed by judging of the largest/best fish by the TAPS and The Fishmongers' Company. Competitors and guests then gathered in a marquee for lunch and the presentation of awards by esteemed guests. Commemorative badges were presented to all newcomers by your Chairman.
9. The event was attended by:
 - Alderman Sir Andrew Parmley
 - Alderman and Sheriff Timothy Hailes
 - Sheriff Neil Redcliffe
 - Sheriff-Elect Elizabeth Green
 - Chief Commoner, Mr John Scott
 - Chairman of Policy and Resources Committee, Deputy Catherine McGuinness
 - Sheriff's Consort, Mrs Fiona Adler
 - The Deputy Mayor of Gravesham, Cllr Lesley Boycott
 - Mr Simon Catford, Master of the Worshipful Company of Water Conservators
 - Dr Roger Watson, Master of the Worshipful Company of Fletchers
 - Members of the Port Health and Environmental Services Committee

Results

10. 51 fish of 5 species were caught this year, fewer than the previous year's total of 95 fish. The number of species represented in the catch was slightly lower than average of 6 species.
11. Details of the fish caught were recorded by stewards and points were awarded based on the recognised scoring system.

Number Caught	Species	Minimum Size		Maximum Size	
		cm	inches	cm	inches
10	Bass	9	3.5	29	11.4
7	Eel	27	10.6	46	18.1
5	Flounder	17	6.7	26	10.2
1	Sole	31	12.2	31	12.2
28	Whiting	9	3.5	30	11.8

Feedback from stakeholders

12. Representatives of the Institute of Fisheries Management and the recreational angling community have provided feedback on the Thames Fishery Research Experiment and its results. They acknowledge its importance in terms of providing valuable information about the environmental condition of the River Thames and in supporting river users.

The Institute of Fisheries Management

13. In 1992, the Environment Agency devised the modern Thames estuary fish survey programme, which became the national role model to meet the requirements of the Water Framework Directive. Historic data sets are invaluable in the context of understanding how fish ecology functions in highly dynamic places such as estuaries.
14. Before that work began, the only historic data sets that existed in the Thames were from power station intakes, most now closed. The Thames Fishery Research Experiment, with its long and consistent history back to 1973, stood out as a best practice example.
15. The Institute promotes and encourages more sustainable fisheries management. This has to be based upon a sound evidence base. Estuaries are some of the most productive ecosystems on the planet, supporting major marine fish nursery grounds as well as acting as vital migration corridors for a broad range of life stages and species. However, they are also highly dynamic, with most fish moving continuously in response to rapidly changing flows, salinity, temperature and their own seasonal rhythms. Long term data sets are vital to our growing understanding. The Thames Fishery Research Experiment remains a best practice example for others to follow.

The recreational angling community

16. This year's experiment was held earlier than usual due to the poor tides available during October. The disadvantage of fishing in late September is that there is an overlap between summer fish migrating out and winter fish migrating into the river Thames; this was reflected in the results.
17. Whiting was the dominant species, but it was good to see reasonable numbers of eels being landed and released. The once common Eel is under pressure as a species and it does seem that current protection measures are beginning to have an impact on their recovery.
18. This section of the River Thames provides an important and safe feeding habitat for juvenile Bass, as demonstrated by the 10 recorded this year. Bass is another species that has been exploited in recent years. Protection measures introduced from 2016 are beginning to show results and there are good numbers of fish between 30cm and 40cm throughout the river. These fish will reach spawning maturity in the next 18 months to two years and will play their part in the recovery of this important species.
19. Around the river there have been reports of Black Bream being landed in the Gravesend reach and Wrasse have been seen in fairly good numbers at Southend. These fish, normally associated with the clearer waters of the South and South West coast of England, are rarely found in muddy estuaries and should be regarded as further evidence that water quality has improved.
20. It was good again to see the school teams taking part in the event. This year, the team from the City of London School for Girls achieved an outstanding result, catching four Bass and an Eel to win the Schools' Trophy. Volunteer anglers again provided the pupils with first class coaching and one of the other adult angling teams provided them with tackle and bait. This type of support is growing amongst the event participants who feel they are playing a part 'putting something back' into this great event.

Financial summary

21. Funding was provided through a grant of £5,332 from City's Cash, together with contributions of £750 from The Fishmongers' company; £225 from the Port of London Authority; £500 from Thames Water; and £500 from Tideway.
22. The total cost of this year's event was £10,495 and the projected cost to my local risk budget is therefore £3,188 (£1,682 more than in 2017). The increased cost was largely due to the necessary replenishment of our stock of commemorative badges which should now be sufficient for at least two more years. These figures do not include staff costs or use of in-house resources.

Proposals

23. The March 2016 Policy and Resources Committee agreed the transfer of funding commitments from Finance Grants Sub Committee to the relevant Committees for ongoing administration.
24. As a result of this transfer, your Committee is required to review and approve the annual grant from City's Cash (which will be £5,460 in 2019/20) to deliver the Thames Fishery Research Experiment.
25. I propose that your Committee approves the continuation of funding from City's Cash towards this event, which provides valuable scientific information and supports the angling community, so that the 47th City of London Thames Fishery Research Experiment may take place on Saturday 12 October 2019.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

26. The City of London Thames Fishery Research Experiment encourages sustainability and conservation through the rules of the competition which require young and undersize fish to be returned immediately to the river once recorded. Eels are not permitted to be taken away from the riverside due to the low numbers in the Thames and, in accordance with Marine Management Organisation rules, each angler may retain only one bass.
27. The continued support of your Committee has demonstrated the City's commitment to supporting communities.

Conclusion

28. The 2018 City of London Thames Fishery Research Experiment was a successful event which was well supported and received by Members and guests. It again provided valuable data and information to associated organisations and the recreational angling community.

Appendices

- Appendix – Summary of Results

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