

Committee(s):	Date(s):
Port Health and Environmental Services Committee	24 November 2015
Subject: 43 rd City of London Thames Fishery Research Experiment 2015	Public
Report of: Director of Markets and Consumer Protection	For Decision
<p style="text-align: center;">Summary</p> <p>The purpose of this report is to inform your Committee of the outcome of the 43rd City of London Thames Fishery Research Experiment which took place on Saturday 10 October 2015 along the foreshore of the River Thames, downriver from the Port Health Lower Thames Office in Denton, Gravesend.</p> <p>Recommendation(s)</p> <p>Members are asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Note the content of this report • Approve the 44th City of London Thames Fishery Research Experiment, to take place in 2016 	

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, 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 are received from the Fishmongers' Company and the Port of London Authority (PLA) which supports the Schools' Trophy. The Water Conservators' Company donates 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 caught as well as providing data to the Environment Agency, Thames Angling Preservation Society and members of the river and angling communities.

4. Judging is based on the greatest variety of fish caught and a scoring system originally devised by Dr Wheeler of the Natural History Museum which rates fish according to scarcity and significance in the context of a cleaner river.

Current Position

5. On Saturday 10 October 2015, 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 four pupils each from the City of London Girls School, City of London School and Gravesend Grammar School competed for the School's Trophy. Details of all the competing teams are shown in the summary of results at Appendix A.
6. Prizes were also awarded for the largest/ best fish, best individual catch by an adult and by a member of a school team, and a biodiversity award for the overall catch which most demonstrated the continuing healthiness and improvement of the River Thames.
7. Fishing began at 09:00 and finished at 13:00, followed by judging of the largest/best fish by the TAPS. 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.
8. The event was attended by Alderman Sir David and Lady Valerie Howard; Alderman and Sheriff Charles Bowman; Sheriff Dr Christine Rigden; Mayor of Gravesham, Cllr John Wenban and Mayoress of Gravesham, Fiona Strike; Peter Hall, Master of the Water Conservators' Company; and Julian Parkes, PLA Deputy Chief Harbour Master.

Results

9. 591 fish of 7 species were caught this year. This was higher than each of the previous three years (101 fish of 8 species in 2014; 99 fish of 5 species in 2013 and 550 fish of 5 species in 2012).
10. 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
8	Cod or Codling	44	17.3	60	23.6
4	Sole	29	11.4	39	15.3
2	Dab	22	8.6	28	11.0
2	Eel	38	14.9	61	24.0
14	Flounder	21	8.2	31	12.2
17	Pouting	13	5.1	30	11.8
537	Whiting	15	5.9	36	14.1

Feedback from stakeholders

11. Representatives of the Environment Agency, 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 especially in terms of providing valuable information about the environmental condition of the River Thames and in supporting river users.

The Environment Agency

12. This year's results comprised a wide variety of typically caught marine and estuarine species. The conditions and tidal state were more favourable than they were in 2014 and this was potentially evident in the results. Many of the species follow the tidal cycle and feed much more readily as the build up to high water accelerates.
13. It was very encouraging to see a number of Cod caught considering the mild weather.
14. Sea bass were noticeably absent this year, but they have been present in a mixture of different year classes in the Environment Agency's own fish surveys.
15. This year did not see a massive influx of fresh water in the river, and the salinity data the Environment Agency recorded whilst conducting its own fish surveys was consistent with previous years.

The Institute of Fisheries Management

16. 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.
17. 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.
18. 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. In that context, the Thames Fishery Research Experiment remains a best practice example for others to follow.

The recreational angling community

19. The 2013 and 2014 Thames Fishery Research Experiments saw poor fish landings, but this year there was a return to normal numbers of fish and species recorded, indicating that the river has indeed settled down following

three years of disruption from capital projects such as dredging, wind farms and cable laying.

20. Good numbers of adult Flounders and Soles have been taken all summer from the shores both sides of the river and there has been a good show of Codling moving into the middle reaches as a reaction to the general recovery in North Sea Cod stocks. The Experiment provides a public confirmation of these recoveries and complements predictions that rivers can return to normal following capital works.
21. The first phase of the Thames Tidal Tunnel will soon be commissioned and the results of future Experiments should reflect further changes in species and numbers of fish responding to improved water quality. This provides a positive impact for London and the works connected with improving the river environment.
22. In 2012, Defra conducted a national survey on Recreational Sea Angling which found that in Essex alone, there are some 21,210 sea anglers. A recent PLA survey confirmed the huge amount of recreational activity taking place on the Thames. The Thames Fishery Research Experiment has the unique advantage of linking the recreational sector with conservation and scientific study.

Proposals

23. I propose that the continuation of this event, which provides valuable scientific information and supports the angling community, be approved by your Committee so that the 44th City of London Thames Fishery Research Experiment may take place in 2016.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

24. 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 no longer to be taken away from the riverside due to the low numbers in the Thames.
25. The continued support of your Committee has demonstrated the City's commitment to supporting communities as The City Together Strategy.

Implications

26. Funding was provided through a grant of £4,700 from City's Cash, together with anticipated contributions of £750 from the Fishmonger's company and £200 from the Port of London Authority.
27. The total cost of this year's event was £9,149.72 and the projected cost to my local risk budget is therefore £3,499.72. These figures do not include staff costs or use of in-house resources.

Conclusion

28. The 2015 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 A – Summary of Results

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