

<b>Committee(s)</b>	<b>Dated:</b>
Port Health and Environmental Services Committee	22 November 2016
<b>Subject:</b> 44 <sup>th</sup> City of London Thames Fishery Research Experiment 2016	<b>Public</b>
<b>Report of:</b> Director of Markets and Consumer Protection	<b>For Decision</b>
<b>Report author:</b> Jon Averbs, Port Health & Public Protection Director	

### Summary

The purpose of this report is to inform your Committee of the outcome of the 44<sup>th</sup> City of London Thames Fishery Research Experiment which took place on Saturday 15 October 2016 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 from City's Cash to partially fund the 2017 event.
- Approve the 45<sup>th</sup> City of London Thames Fishery Research Experiment to take place in 2017

### 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 were received this year from the Fishmongers' Company; the Port of London Authority (PLA) which supports the Schools' Trophy; Thames Water; and Tideway (Thames Tideway Tunnel). 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 caught as well as providing data to the Environment Agency, Thames Angling Preservation Society and members of the river and angling communities.

- 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

- On Saturday 15 October 2016, 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.
- 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.
- Fishing took place between 09:00 and 13:00, and was 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.
- The event was attended by Members of the Port Health and Environmental Services Committee; Sir David and Lady Valerie Howard; Alderman and Sheriff Peter Estlin; Mayor of Gravesham, Cllr Greta Goatley; Keith Tozzi, Master of the Water Conservators' Company; and Jim Trimmer, the PLA's Director of Planning and Environment.

### Results

- 135 fish of 6 species were caught this year. This was lower than the previous year, when 591 fish of 7 species were caught, yet higher than the catches of 2014 and 2013 (101 fish of 8 species in 2014; 99 fish of 5 species in 2013).
- 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
1	Sole	32	12.6	32	12.6
5	Pouting	12	4.7	24	9.4
6	Bass	19	7.5	36	14.2
17	Eel	26	10.2	66	26.0
20	Flounder	16	6.3	29	11.4
86	Whiting	9	3.5	34	13.4

## **Feedback from stakeholders**

11. Representatives of the Environment Agency 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 typically caught marine and estuarine species. However, the mild weather may have affected the number of whiting caught; more would normally be expected in late autumn as fish migrate into the estuary.
13. It was encouraging to see smaller eels present but, as was the case last year, large numbers of bass or sole were not caught. Both of these species showed strong abundance in the Environment Agency's own autumn fish surveys.

### **The recreational angling community**

14. A warm summer and early autumn resulted in higher than average water temperatures for this time of year meaning that the normal influx of winter species such as cod and whiting has been delayed. As result, this year's Thames Fishery Research Experiment was a challenging competition for the anglers because the target species required different angling techniques, bait and presentation to improve catch rates.
15. It was, however, encouraging to see the variation in species, which demonstrates the importance of the Experiment in demonstrating the diversity of marine life in the middle Thames. We were particularly pleased to see seven bass and seventeen eels caught. These are currently two of the most endangered species in UK waters and international protection measures have been introduced for both.
16. A positive improvement this year was the reduction in fish mortality. Anglers were encouraged to follow best practice fish handling techniques, especially with the more fragile species such as whiting. Seventy six whiting were caught and released over the event and not one was seen on the surface.
17. From an angling perspective, the health of the River is indicated by the numbers and variety of species in evidence over time. Common sole numbers have been in decline for two to three years, probably as a result of rain water levels, overfishing offshore and capital works such as dredging, wind farms and cable laying. In contrast, cod returned in good numbers through last winter and stayed feeding on shrimp and small fish until late January 2016; some of these fish weighed in at 7lb. Flounder catches remain intermittent, but numbers increase further upriver. The eel also appears to be making a comeback, and this was underlined by the high number caught during this year's Experiment.

18. 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.

### **Financial summary**

19. Funding was provided through a grant of £5,332 from City's Cash, together with anticipated contributions of £750 from the Fishmonger's company; £250 from the Port of London Authority; £500 from Thames Water; and £500 from Tideway (Thames Tideway Tunnel). The latter two contributions were offered following a direct approach to both organisations earlier this year.
20. The total cost of this year's event was £8,602 and the projected cost to my local risk budget is therefore £1,270 (£2,230 less than in 2015). These figures do not include staff costs or use of in-house resources.

### **Proposals**

21. 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. Each commitment must be reviewed and reported back to Policy and Resources Committee no later than December 2016.
22. As a result of this transfer, your Committee will now need to review and approve the annual grant from City's Cash (currently £5,332, and increased annually in line with inflation) to deliver the Thames Fishery Research Experiment. A report will then be submitted to Policy and Resources Committee to enable the payments to continue.
23. 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 45<sup>th</sup> City of London Thames Fishery Research Experiment may take place in 2017.

### **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 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.
25. The continued support of your Committee has demonstrated the City's commitment to supporting communities as The City Together Strategy.

## **Conclusion**

26. The 2016 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

## **Background Papers**

- Implementation of Grants Review  
*(Policy and Resources Committee 17 March 2016)*

## **Jon Averns**

Port Health & Public Protection Director  
Department of Markets and Consumer Protection  
T: 020 7332 1603  
E: [jon.averns@cityoflondon.gov.uk](mailto:jon.averns@cityoflondon.gov.uk)