

Committee(s)	Dated:
Port Health and Environmental Services Committee	21 November 2017
Subject: 45 th City of London Thames Fishery Research Experiment 2017	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 45th City of London Thames Fishery Research Experiment which took place on Saturday 21 October 2017 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 2018 event
- Approve the 46th City of London Thames Fishery Research Experiment to take place in 2018

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 (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.

4. Judging is based on the greatest variety of fish caught and the scoring system rates fish according to scarcity and significance in the context of a cleaner river.

Current Position

5. On Saturday 21 October 2017, 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 five pupils each from the City of London School for Girls and Gravesend Grammar School competed for the School's Trophy. Details of all the competing teams are shown in the summary of results provided in the Appendix to this report.
6. Prizes were also awarded for the largest/ best fish, 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.
7. 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.
8. The event was attended by:
 - The Lord Mayor of London, Alderman Dr Andrew Parmley, and the Lady Mayoress, Mrs Wendy Parmley
 - Chief Commoner, Mrs Wendy Mead OBE
 - Chairman of Policy and Resources Committee, Deputy Catherine McGuinness
 - Members of the Port Health and Environmental Services Committee
 - Sir David and Lady Valerie Howard
 - Alderman and Sheriff Timothy Hailes
 - Sheriff Neil Redcliffe
 - Sheriff's Consort, Mrs Fiona Adler
 - The Mayor and Mayoress of Gravesham, Cllr Harold and Mrs Veronica Craske
 - Mr Mike Williamson, Master of the Water Conservators' Company

Results

9. 95 fish were caught this year. This was lower than the previous year's total of 135 fish. However, the number of species remained the same at 6 in each year.
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
14	Bass	17	6.7	45	17.7
1	Dab	25	9.8	25	9.8
1	Eel	27	10.6	27	10.6
9	Flounder	16	6.3	28	11.0
2	Sole	31	12.2	33	13.0
68	Whiting	14	5.5	32	12.6

Feedback from stakeholders

11. 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

12. 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.
13. 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.
14. 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

15. The water temperatures on 21 October were higher than average for the time of year which explains why approximately one third of the fish landed were those normally associated with the summer seasons. In fact, during the same week, in the lower reaches of the Thames, anglers saw increased numbers of mackerel and some rare visitors such as squid and anchovy.

16. It was encouraging to see a healthy number of small bass being landed. It has now been confirmed that bass are truly endangered throughout the UK so it is pleasing to see reasonable numbers of juveniles frequenting the middle Thames. This confirms the importance of the marine habitat found at Gravesend which supports this important species.
17. Participants in this year's experiment encountered some of the most challenging fishing conditions seen in its history. Fishing commenced following a low tide, and anglers had, therefore, expected that a long cast would be required to reach the water for the first hour. However, a combination of a spring tide and a strong south westerly gale across the area compounded in slowing the flood tide and extending the time for which long casting was necessary. Occasional heavy rain showers did not improve conditions. Nonetheless, those who persevered were rewarded with fish.
18. During the event, anglers continued to apply best practice in fish handling skills resulting in reduced mortality, particularly with whiting, which tend to be a little fragile.
19. Across the country, increasing numbers of local people are taking part in what are being described as 'citizen science' projects. These involve members of the public working alongside marine scientists to assist in data collection for research. It could be said that the City of London Thames Fishery Research Experiment, now in its 45th year, is one of the oldest such projects of this type in the UK.
20. Using the method of sea angling to demonstrate the health of the river not only helps to prove the variety and numbers of the visiting species, but also engages a large group of individuals who are eager to play their part in gathering data for the experiment.

Financial summary

21. Funding was provided through a grant of £5,332 from City's Cash, together with anticipated contributions of £750 from the Fishmonger's company; £225 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.
22. The total cost of this year's event was £8,946 and the projected cost to my local risk budget is therefore £1,639 (£369 more than in 2016). 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 (currently £5,332) 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 46th City of London Thames Fishery Research Experiment may take place in 2018.

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 2017 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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