



■ Finding facts – Richard Benyon MP, who is the shadow fisheries minister, talking to Mersea oysterman David Gladwin.

Islanders to get a seat at conservation table?

MPs meet fishermen on Mersea fact-finding tour

MERSEA Island's oystermen and fishermen have been outlining their views on the future of their industries to shadow fisheries minister Richard Benyon.

The Conservative MP for Newbury joined North Essex colleague Bernard Jenkin for a fact-finding tour of West Mersea.

Marine conservation zones and the prospect of a new nuclear power station in nearby Bradwell topped the list of concerns voiced by two of the island's oldest trades.

Oystermen are also worried that important grounds remain vulnerable to overfish-

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ing by boats which come to the area seeking a quick profit.

Mr Jenkin said: "The revival of the West Mersea oyster fishery is a remarkable achievement, led by dedicated and professional fishermen, who have a real vocation for what they do. They are a wonderful example of what can be achieved at local level.

"Ministers need to understand that inshore conservation is intensely local and cannot be done by remote quangos and distant Government departments in London.

"I will make sure that West Mersea oystermen get a seat at

the table."

Mr Jenkin said he was in favour of nuclear power in principle, but would not back plans for Bradwell unless they protected the marine environment.

The two MPs, accompanied by James Marsden, marine director of English Nature, and Essex Wildlife Trust representatives, spent two hours aboard Stephen Wass's oyster dredger.

Alan Bird explained the oyster production process from net to plate, and the party went on to visit a dredger belonging to David Gladwin, who demonstrated his oyster haul in the creek.

The politicians also met West Mersea's inshore fisher-

men, whose plight over decreasing quotas has been highlighted by the Colchester-based National Under-Tens Fishermen's Association.

Mr Jenkin said: "The problem is that the Dutch now own 80 per cent of UK North Sea quota, and the EU will not let the UK take it back.

"We must find a way of preserving this vital traditional aspect of our coastal communities."

Mr Benyon, who has been touring the country's fishing centres, said he shared islanders' concerns over a new nuclear plant, and praised Mersea's oystermen and fishermen for their passion for and investment in their industries.