Beadnell Harbour

NIFCA CEO Mike Hardy writes - it has been an extremely interesting winter for NIFCA so far. With our new byelaw package coming into operation at the end of November, we held stakeholder meetings in the district in early December and received a lot of passionate feedback from commercial fishermen in particular which we are considering and will consult further upon and consideration will be given to views expressed about our pot limitation scheme, as part of a continuous process of keeping our byelaws under review and listening to stakeholders.

The Authority also completed two prosecutions in January - one for a commercial fisherman who landed 60 undersized lobsters and was fined a total of £2,912 including legal costs. The second matter involved a diver who was fined a total of £1,134 including costs for taking 18 lobsters from the sea whereas only 1 per day is permitted for people who do not hold a shellfish permit. I think both of these sentences send a clear message from the Court showing recognition of the importance of the local lobster fishery and the place of those stocks in the local marine environment.

It is also worth mentioning that these cases were only able to be brought to Court as a result of the dedication of our IFCOs and in the latter case because of intelligence from a member of the public and action being taken initially by Northumbria Police, for which we are very grateful.

Our Officers will continue to work in an operations and enforcement capacity as well as conducting research and survey projects for the conservation of our marine environment, fisheries and coastal communities.
Lindisfarne NNR Joint Advisory Committee

Deputy Chief IFCO (Environmental) Jon Green and Environmental IFCO Vicky Rae attended the Lindisfarne Joint Advisory Committee meeting on Wednesday 18\textsuperscript{th} November at Natural England’s Reserve Office to be given an update on activities and conservation measures over the last six months. Close liaison with this committee is an important example of joint working with partner organisations across the IFCA remit.

At the meeting there were a number of interesting reports, including that 2,000 people attended the Holy Island festival and the effect on nature conservation was minimal to no effect.

Andrew Craggs, Senior Reserve manager, provided an update of projects and bird numbers for the last six months. The interaction of fishing with bird populations particularly in Special Protection Areas (SPAs) is an important subject for IFCAs and of particular interest to Jon Green and Vicky Rae. It was reported that Little tern’s had an unsuccessful start to the season with nests lost to sand blast and tidal inundation, but relays produced 38 fledglings, a record high of productivity (2.2 young reared per breeding pair on average) for Lindisfarne NNR. Of the other breeding species, 95 breeding pairs of Arctic terns successfully reared 142 chicks; 5 pairs of common terns fledged 8 chicks; and 11 ringed plovers raised more than 12 chicks. No eider ducks were recorded nesting in the formal protection areas. Passage duck and goose species (Brent geese, barnacles geese, pink-footed geese, whooper swans and wigeon), numbers were good throughout the season this year due in part to a high biomass of Zostera seagrass.

However, there are concerns of encroaching enteromorpha increasing its coverage and taking over the Zostera beds. Wader species however struggled this year, with numbers recorded down of dunlin, knot and bar-tailed godwits, all of which seem to be following the national trends. Natural England will carry out further detailed analysis into these trends.

The Natural England reserve team are continuing to work with Newcastle University to research sustainable management on invasive species including Pirri Pirri bur. Furthermore, the project will produce best practice guides for control methods. Previous work highlighted that a healthy dune system should contain about seven percent bare ground and Lindisfarne currently only has one percent. NE will be looking at increasing the amount of bare ground to improve the sand dune and reduce the spread of Pirri Pirri. Currently 136 permits for wildfowling have been given, which is about the same as last year. All bait digging observed by wildfowlers are reported to Natural England.

The next meeting will be held in June to coincide with discussions upon the creation of Northumberland’s stretch of the national coastal path.
Deputy Chief IFCO Mark Southerton and Environmental Officers Sally Stewart-Moore and Vicky Rae visited Hipsburn First School in Alnmouth on the morning of Friday 20th November 2015.

This visit was arranged after meeting an interested parent (during NIFCA’s Aln estuary fish surveys in October) who asked if the Authority would be willing to visit the school to talk about our work and the Aln estuary Marine Conservation Zone in particular, which is on the school’s doorstep. The Officers gave a short presentation to 2 year groups (Years 3 and 4) talking about NIFCA’s work and the different types of fisheries in Northumberland, with Mark demonstrating how lobster pots and fyke nets work.

The Officers also spoke about Marine Protected Areas and the Aln Estuary MCZ in particular.

There was a great response from the children and the team were really impressed with how much they already knew about native marine species when they took part in a short picture quiz.

Following the classroom sessions everyone went outside to see the NIFCA RIB (Bravo 1) and the live lobsters and crabs which the Officers had brought along, which was certainly the highlight of the morning!

All in all it was a very successful and enjoyable morning and NIFCA hope to do more visits like it in future.
Bass

As we are going to press there has been a debate in parliament on 11th February regarding Seabass and “the effect of related EU measures on the UK fishing industry”. The debate particularly covered the situation of recreational sea anglers with comments from a lot of MPs on both sides of the House, reflecting the importance of this subject and with a lot of concern expressed about the prohibition on recreational sea anglers (RSAs) landing any Seabass until the end of June 2016 (“catch and release”). From 1st July 2016 RSAs can land 1 Seabass a day above the minimum conservation reference size of 42 cm.

Further details of the position in relation to commercial and recreational Bass fishing can be found on the NIFCA Website.

European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF)

The fund opened in January for projects focusing on a number of areas - CFP reform, improving health and safety on vessels, enhancing the quality of value of catch, investing in port and harbour infrastructure and helping the processing of seafood and aquaculture products or general investments in aquaculture. In addition, Fisheries Local Action Groups (FLAGs) will be selected for help with communities adapting to the reformed CFP and to support sustainable economic growth. NIFCA has been instrumental in the commencement of discussions in the district regarding a bid for funding to the EMFF for a Northumberland FLAG. Those discussions commenced in February with a number of interested parties. A FLAG in Northumberland would be of considerable benefit to the local fishing industry and economy and hopefully a bid to the EMFF may be possible.

Saving the lost Buoy...

On Friday 8th January while returning to North Shields, NIFCA patrol vessel St Aidan was contacted by Fugro EMU, an environmental monitoring company, who had a wave rider buoy off Newbiggin which had broken free in the recent storms and was heading to be washed up on Cambois beach. St Aidan attended to the last known position of the beacon and after a short time identified the lost buoy and retrieved it using the vessels A Frame.

The company asked if we would be interested in re-deploying the buoy the following week, which was agreed. On Tuesday 12th January the crew met up with 2 of Fugro’s personnel and using the A frame swapped the two buoy’s and lifted the anchor on-board St Aidan. With the crew briefed on the safe deployment we headed back to Newbiggin and the buoy was carefully set back in its original position. This provided some great training for all of the IFCOs involved and the staff from Fugro were more than happy with the outcome and the suitability of the St Aidan as a platform to carry out this task.
Joining Forces at the River Wansbeck

In October 2015, Chief IFCO Browne received a telephone call from an Authority Member who explained that a gill net had been seen set up under the Spine Road Bridge and that it was actually attached to the bridge. CIFCO Browne assured the Member that it would be investigated thoroughly.

CIFCO Browne contacted the Environment Agency (EA) informing them of the information received. It was decided that the EA Officers in the vicinity would be asked to get confirmation of the nets location and that to assist with a joint operation CIFCO Browne would prepare and brief his Officers to load the Authority’s small Inflatable Boat onto the trailer ready to be deployed.

Confirmation of the net was received and it was decided that the two EA Officers would join the NIFCA Officers at their office to begin the joint work on recovering the net.

The NIFCA and EA Officers travelled to the site where the net was located and the inflatable boat was launched. Deputy Chief IFCO Southerton and EA Officer Douglas manned the boat, which proceeded to the end of the net attached to the bridge leg. They untied the net and brought it on board the boat; at the same time the other Officers started to retrieve the end of the net which was set in the shore.

Once the net was recovered, it was placed into a large sack after 8 Sea Trout, 1 Flounder and numerous Green Crabs were removed. Unfortunately, all of the Sea Trout were dead; the Flounder and most of the Green Crabs were released back into the river alive and EA took charge of the dead fish which had to be disposed of correctly.

This was an excellent example of joint working between various Organisations and is good validation of the use of intelligence leading to positive results. NIFCA were able to initiate a successful joint operation at very short notice, work well as a team and successfully recover an illegal net.

Once back at the office, the Member was informed of the operation and EIFCO Rae put the report of the incident on Social Media, resulting in some very positive feedback.

Well done and thank you to all of the Officers involved on this day!
Marine Conservation Zones

The Coquet to St Mary’s MCZ came into force on 29th January 2016 (Ministerial Order 2016 no. 3 Wildlife Environmental Protection Marine Management The Coquet to St Mary’s Marine Conservation Zone designation order 2016). The Coquet to St Mary’s site protects specified features which are found in the MCZ including various types of intertidal rocks and sediments, sand and mud, sub-tidal and other features. The general management approach is that all features should be maintained in favourable condition. Authority byelaws 1-6 will continue to apply to this area and any additional management measures will be considered and fully consulted upon over the next 2 years.

Further details can be found on the NIFCA website.

Northumberland Marine Special Protection Area Consultation

Natural England are seeking views on proposals to designate the above SPA. The consultation runs until 21st April and this will be carefully considered by NIFCA Officers and Members with a view to a response being made to the consultation.

Date of next public Authority meeting

The Authority AGM will be held at County Hall, Morpeth at 2pm on Monday 25th April 2016.