

CHIEF INSHORE FISHERIES & CONSERVATION
OFFICER A.B.BROWNE QUARTERLY REPORT
ENDING 31st MARCH 2016

All of the Authority's IFCOs and Office Staff have been very busy this quarter. The enforcement officers have been splitting their time from working on the shore carrying out port inspections, checking recreational fishers, anglers, visiting wholesalers, angling and dive shops, talking to fishermen and the general public. They have also when necessary been working in the office or being tasked to crew the Authority's vessels at sea. All have been involved in the various surveys the Authority has been carrying out, from Mussel Surveys at Blyth and Holy Island to Fish Surveys at Druridge Bay and Beadnell. The enforcement team have been concentrating on targeted, intelligence lead enforcement; as well as engaging with recreational divers and anglers whilst on the coast, handing out Minimum Reference Size (MRS) Cards and Fish Size Stickers. Numerous different types of 'Fliers' have also been created and distributed throughout the Authority's District, informing Divers, Anglers, Bait Collectors and the General Public of the do's and don'ts within the Authority's District.

The environmental team have been very busy with a multitude of tasks including IFCO Sally Stewart-Moore's continuation of her Lobster Project, various Mussel and Fish Surveys, working with students on projects including meeting fishermen and for any further details please read DCIFCO Jon Green's report at 3.14.2 of environmental issues including surveys and meetings attended.

IFCOs Graham and Docherty give a very good overview below of what has been happening throughout the Authority's District this quarter. As can be seen, things have been pretty quiet inshore, which is normal for this time of the year. Some of the larger potting boats have been working further off-shore and down into Yorkshire, targeting Brown Crabs. A number of our local fishermen have been getting their boats out of the water and carrying out much needed maintenance before the busy spring/summer season begins.

Environmental IFCO Vicky Rae and Part/time IFCO Ricky Willis attended the IFCA Enforcement Course in Torquay which they both successfully completed; both officers are now fully warranted and have been issued their warrant cards. Both officers also successfully completed their 6 month 'Probationary Period' and are now part of the Authority's Team, 'Good Luck'.

On Sunday 20th March the 2016 'Vernal or Spring Equinox' arrived (meaning the sun shines directly on the equator and the length of night and day are nearly equal) as a matter of interest this is also the earliest spring since 1896. I'm sure all will agree it's good to see the lighter nights resulting from the clocks springing forward.

Miscellaneous

Throughout this quarter the NIFCA Intel Officers (E. Balsdon and E. Cosimini) along with CIFCO Browne have been working with the MMO Team on fine tuning the intelligence which all the Authority's IFCOs have been feeding into the system. Since the start of the trial last October 2015, the 3 Northern IFCA's Northumberland, North Eastern and North Western along with the MMO Team (especially, Stuart Katon and Enzo Vullo) have been working very hard to get this project off the ground. Unfortunately Enzo's contract ran out in mid-March and he will be a big miss to the Project especially as it's now being rolled to the rest of the country. Coming out of the Project is the need now to have monthly 'Tasking & Coordination Group' (TCG) meetings with Ops in MMO Newcastle and since January 2016 CIFCO Browne or

DCIFCO Southerton have also attended the North Shields MMOs internal TCG meetings as well as the NIFCA having their own in-house TCG at our monthly Rota Meeting, all available IFCOs attend this meeting and most find the TCGs valuable to their day to day duties.

On Friday 11th March the Environmental Team along with assistance from a couple of ops IFCOs, Committee Member C. Hedley and 2 Natural England Officers carried out the annual Holy Island Mussel Survey, weather conditions were favourable and the survey went well, a report will soon be published.

As mentioned in IFCA M. Docherty's report the NIFCAs patrol vessel and crew were involved in the recovery of a Wave-buoy near Newbiggin by the Sea on 8th January 2016, and as they did such a good job with the recovery the company who look after these buoys asked if it would be possible to re-deploy a replacement buoy on 12th January. This was an excellent opportunity to test out the working capabilities of the St Aidan and its crew and the company involved were very impressed with the professionalism of the officers.

After a successful joint operation regarding a Diver (Case 3) it was arranged between the NIFCA and Northumbria Police for DCIFCO Southerton and IFCO Balsdon to visit Seahouses Police Station and give a talk on the NIFCAs role and duties. The Officers took copies of our Byelaw Booklets, Fixed Gauges, Vernia Gauge, Fliers, Leaflets, MRS Cards and Stickers. This was a great opportunity for IFCA Officers to meet and speak with the local Police Officer and this has created some very good links.

Together with the Authority Vice Chair, CEO M. Hardy and Environmental IFCO S. Stewart-Moore attended the Longbenton and Seaton Burn Sea Angling Club's monthly meeting, to give their members an overview on the role and duties of the NIFCA. This meeting follows on from officers attending the Seaton Sluice Open last year. By all accounts the night went very well and the club members were very interested in the NIFCA.

The finer weather has enabled joint working to commence between the NIFCA and MMO, on the 17th March an MMO officer accompanied Authority's officers on a RIB patrol launching from Amble encompassing the Coquet – St Marys MCZ and then being recovered at Blyth. Also, on 30th March 2 x MMO officers came on-board St Aidan as observers for the day. Also on Thursday 17th March CIFCO Browne and Environmental IFCO S. Stewart-Moore had a meeting with Natural England (NE) at their office in Beal to discuss joint working in regards to 'Illegal Bait-digging' in the Lindisfarne NNR. CIFCO Browne explained that the Authority would happily assist the LNNR Warden A. Craggs if he was going to carryout inspections of these bait diggers and if any diggers were found to be digging within an area with Seagrass then the NIFCA would have the powers to prosecute under Byelaw 8 Seagrass Protection Byelaw within the English section of the Berwickshire and North Northumberland Coast Special Area of Conservation (SAC).

This quarter the Authority managed to secure from North Eastern IFCA 2,500 'Escape Gaps' (free of charge). These gaps are going to be offered to Commercial Shellfish Permit holders (up to 30 gaps per fisherman) for them to trial. Can I take this opportunity to thank NEIFCA for their kind donation which has saved the Authority a considerable amount of money. New Commercial Tags and Recreational Tags should be ready for distribution by early May, the idea being the Authority will write to all Commercial Permit Holders to inform them when IFCOs are going to be at their nearest Harbour/Port, so the fishermen can pick up and sign for their new Tags. The Authority will also write to all Recreational Permit Holders inviting them into the

office to renew their permits, collect their new Tags and pay their annual fee. All Commercial and Recreational Permit Holders will receive an up to date Byelaw Booklet.

Unfortunately this quarter whilst carrying out the 1st Fish Survey at Beadnell the Authority's Land-rover became bogged down whilst trying to recover the Authority's RIB (Bravo1). Officers have recovered the RIB from Beadnell and other beaches throughout the Authority's District on numerous occasions without any problems. As the Land-rover was temporarily submerged up to the dash-board and the engine had stopped, officers were unable to re-start the vehicle and it had to be recovered by Mastora, Alnwick, along with the trailer. Since the incident correspondence between the NIFCA and our insurance company has been ongoing and a full report will follow. Thankfully no officers or the general public were injured and a number of lessons were learnt.