

CHIEF INSHORE FISHERIES AND CONSERVATION OFFICER A B BROWNE QUARTERLY REPORT ENDING 31 MARCH 2017

Once again all the Authorities IFCOs have been very busy this quarter, the officers have been splitting their time from working on 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 been working in the office or being tasked to crew the Authority's vessels at sea. The Environmental Team and some of the Enforcement Team have been involved in various surveys including the Mussel Survey at Holy Island to Fish Surveys at Beadnell and Long Nanny to name a few. The enforcement team have been concentrating on targeted, intelligence led enforcement; as well as engaging with recreational fishers, shore gatherers and anglers.

Both IFCOs D.Graham's and M.Docherty's, Quarterly Reports give a good overview of what has been happening throughout the Authority's District this quarter. Interestingly when the weather has been calm and local fishers have been able to shoot their pots closer inshore large numbers of juvenile Lobsters have been seen, and when IFCOs have carried out Fleet Surveys they have also noticed the amount of juvenile Lobster on the ground. As normal for this time of the year some fishermen have been getting their boats out of the water and carrying out much needed maintenance before the busy spring/summer season begins.

Miscellaneous

There has been quite a lot of correspondence with regards to the Authority beginning the Procurement procedure for the purchase of a replacement Cabin RIB. As the Committee are aware EMFF Funding has been set aside for IFCA vessel replacements and upgrades in total 500,000 euros. IFCA Chiefs had agreed that this should be split between 3 regions, North, South East and South West, meaning in the North a total amount of 150,000 euros could be split between NIFCA, NEIFCA and NWIFCA. The Authority was informed by both NWIFCA and NEIFCA that they weren't going to bid for any of the money meaning that NIFCA would potentially be able to bid for 70% of the cost of a New Cabin RIB. A Sub Committee Group Meeting took place on Monday 27th February 2017 at the Authority's Office, Blyth, present were Committee Members Vice Chair L.Weller, D.Herriott, I.Thomas and S.Ritchie also present were Chief IFCO A.Browne, Deputy CIFCO M.Southern and IFCO J.Cooke. It was agreed at this meeting to go ahead and contact Northumberland County Council (NCC) Procurement Team and start the Procurement procedure. It has also been agreed to sell Bravo 1 and Trailer once the Authority takes delivery of the new RIB. The new Cabin RIB will be moored at Amble giving it the greater capability of patrolling both North and South to the Authority's Borders. The Sub Group were concerned that the Authority was going to lose the capability of launching a shore based RIB at various sites up and down the district, DCIFCO Southern explained that the intentions were to upgrade TT St Aidan RIB so it can work independently as well as from St Aidan. Also agreed at the meeting was to send a NIFCA Working Group down to the Sea Works Boat Show in Southampton in June 2017, this will enable them to have face to face meeting with potential RIB builders. Regular updates and reports will be circulated to all Members and Staff.

On Thursday 30th March 2017 the NIFCA Environmental Team consisting of DCIFCO Jon Green, IFCOs Vicky Rae, Nat Wallace and Justin Cooke along with

the new EMS Officer, N Brodin, R McDonald and K Barrett of NE, carried out the annual Holy Island Mussel Survey. Weather conditions were favourable and the survey went well, a report will soon be published. Also this quarter the Escape Gap Project continued, plus Fish Surveys and Bird Surveys with a full update in DCIFCO J.Green's Environmental Report.

Throughout the quarter numerous joint patrols have been carried out between NIFCA and the MMO, these included Shore Patrols, Sea Patrols on-board St Aidan and RIB Patrols using Bravo 1. Also an Environment Agency Officer has been out on-board St Aidan on a couple of occasions to gain sea time, and hopefully once the salmon season is in full swing joint patrols can be arranged using either the NIFCA vessels or the EAs RIB. CEO M.H.Hardy and CIFCO A.B.Browne arranged their annual catch up meeting with the the River Tweed Commission, this was an opportunity to meet their new Clerk, Fay Hieatt and Superintendent Eddie Weatherly and to discuss the possibility of joint working over the summer months, also it was an ideal opportunity to review the current MOU between the two Organisations.

As requested by the Committee it was arranged for 7 IFCOs to undergo 4 x 4 Training, this was carried out over 3 weekends in March 2017 with all Officers successfully completing the 1 day course. IFCO Michael Docherty and Environmental IFCO Nat Wallace also attended the IFCA Enforcement Course in Torquay week commencing Sun 29th Jan and ending Fri 3rd Feb 2017. Both officers thoroughly enjoyed the course and the reports back from the Trainers were that both of the Authority's Officers were a credit to the NIFCA, and I'm please to say both passed with flying colours. Nat has now been issued with her NIFCA Warrant Card. Also Officers completed various refresher courses to keep up to date.

**SUMMARY FOR THE SOUTHERN DISTRICT
JANUARY, FEBRUARY AND MARCH 2017
IFCO M DOCHERTY**

PORT	POTTERS	TRAWLERS
North Shields	4	25
Cullercoats/Seaton Sluice	4	0
Blyth	9	11
Newbiggin	2	0
Total	19	36

*Icy water under bridges, wash away our winters past.
The oak trees felled, but not forgotten,
Point the way to brighter morns'.*

Overview:

The past quarter has been a mixed bag as far as weather is concerned with occasional Northerly gales keeping vessels of all sizes tied up for days at a time. North Shields sees the arrival of the "Tori Allana" SN 11, purchased by fleet master and established Fish Quay character Alan Cowie.

The vessel; formerly "Scorpion" LH 183 was berthed in Port Seaton and is to be skippered by Shane Stratton who is familiar in the District from his command of the Scallop dredger "Morning Star" P 8.

Meanwhile Alan 'Dopper' Dobson has taken ownership of the under 12m trawler "Trustful" SN 12 and will be trawling for prawns for the remainder of the season while he rigs the vessel for potting.

Static Gear:

The price for Lobster has fluctuated between a low of £16 and a high of £18 and potters have capitalised on this by leaving gear inshore, risking potential damage from weather for the chance of a fruitful yield.

Potters targeting Prawns have seen a drop off in catch rates but prices are high (£7 per kilo for the smaller grade) and so the fishery has remained viable throughout the winter.

Only 2 boats in the District have attempted gill netting but have reported very poor catches. New Bass regulations have been a sore, if not confusing topic for said operators.

Recreational gear is yet to appear but with the arrival of Spring and high Pressure weather systems it is only a matter of time.

Mobile Gear:

Smaller local vessels have reported inconsistent catches from established grounds but have made the most of the days that weather and tide allowed operations to commence. The vast majority of visiting vessels have now departed the District.

There have been no vessels indigenous to the Southern District operating Scallop Dredges this quarter.

Recreational Activity:

Charter boats in the District have been inactive this quarter due to spells of bad weather and general lack of interest. Shore anglers will be abandoning the beach in due time and moving to the rivers in anticipation of a 'spring run' of Codling.

**SUMMARY FOR THE NORTHERN DISTRICT
JANUARY, FEBRUARY AND MARCH 2017
IFCO D GRAHAM**

Port	Potting Boats	Trawlers	Approx. no of crew
<i>North of border</i>	9	<i>None</i>	16
<i>Berwick</i>	7	1	9
<i>Holy Island</i>	7	<i>None</i>	14
<i>Seahouses</i>	12	1	20
<i>Beadnell</i>	3	<i>None</i>	4
<i>Newton</i>	1	<i>None</i>	1
<i>Craster</i>	2	<i>None</i>	2
<i>Boulmer</i>	3	<i>None</i>	5
<i>Amble</i>	20	7	51
<i>Totals</i>	64	9	122

Weather

Weather this quarter has been as expected for this time of year, with the coast being hit by high winds and turbulent seas, but with periods of un-seasonally calm weather.

As the new year began and the festive period ended Westerly winds prevailed, allowing fishermen working gear close in periods of calm to work. As January progressed the wind backed to the south and eased in strength, bringing periods of calm at the end of January and beginning of February. Light southerly winds started February but soon increased in strength towards the middle of the month as storm "Doris" hit from the west, as the storm passed the wind eased and continued to come from the west which continued throughout March, veering towards the end of the month to come from a southerly direction.

Lobsters

Lobster landings seen during this quarter have been consistent with previous years, during January average landings seen by ourselves were between 20 and 50, with the odd exception of 151 seen being landed. February the average number seen landed dropped to between 10 and 30 lobsters but once again there were two exceptions throughout the month where approximately 100 lobsters were seen landed from fishing vessels. March continued in the same vein as February with average landings sighted as between 10 and 30. Prices per kilo were between £17-18 during January, dropping slightly during February to between £16.50-£18 which remained steady throughout March at approximately £18 per kilo.

Brown Crabs

Brown crab landings as with the Lobsters have been consistent with this time of year, and have depended on gear type and area worked for the fishermen. Average landings during January being between 1 box and 7 boxes but with a couple of exceptions where 15 boxes were seen landed. The beginning of February saw a slight dip in numbers landed which rose again after storm Doris had passed us by. Average numbers seen landed throughout February were between half a box and 5 boxes, but again a couple of exceptions seen landed where approximately 20 boxes were seen landed. March saw average landings of Brown Crabs stabilise throughout the whole month with average landings sighted of between 1 box and 4 boxes. Brown Crab prices per kilo have remained consistent with between £1.00 and £1.40 per kilo being quoted to ourselves from the fishermen.

Velvet Crabs

As with the Lobsters and Brown Crabs the Velvet Crab landings have been consistent with this time of year. with average landings for those skippers choosing to land them of between half a box and 1 box. Landings seen were few and far between throughout the whole quarter, with not many fishermen landing them. Prices per kilo have remained steady with £1.00 being quoted to ourselves.

During this quarter there have been two landings of approximately 20 Spider Crabs seen landed, one vessel from Amble and Boulmer, neither fisherman knew what sort of price per kilo they might expect to receive.

Northern District in the news

Reckless Anglers were blamed for setting fire to Amble Pier as reported by The Ambler on the 11th January 2017 causing approximately £2000 worth of damage, the fire was spotted and reported by a local fisherman.