

CHIEF FISHERIES OFFICER A B BROWNE QUARTERLY REPORT ENDING 31 MARCH 2018

The Authorities Enforcement Officers have been very busy this quarter, dividing their time from working on shore carrying out port inspections, checking recreational fishers, anglers, visiting wholesalers, engaging with fishers and the general public, as well as working in the office, maintaining the Authority's equipment along with their own personal safety equipment, (this is the time of year when Officers can get on top of their own equipment before the busy season starts). The Officers have also been Skippering or crewing the Authority's vessels, inspecting vessels at sea, along with carrying out inspections of 'Static Gear'. If any of the marker dahns or buoys don't conform fully with the Authority's Byelaw 5 'Marking of Fishing Gear and Keep Boxes' then they are leaving water-proof Notices, (Inspection and Seizure of Objects at Sea), on the markers informing the fishers that their gear has been inspected at sea by a Northumberland IFCA officer and giving advice on the correct way to maintain and mark their gear. The enforcement team through the monthly Regional and in-house Tactical Co-Ordinated Group Meetings (TCG) have been concentrating on targeted, intelligence led enforcement. Thankfully after an absence of 3 months and a very difficult task of selecting a replacement Enforcement Officer, the Authority were lucky to find Nick Weir who joined the NIFCA on Tuesday 2nd January 2018. Nick has settled in well, he has completed several courses and by all accounts is thoroughly enjoying the career change.

The Environmental Team, even though one officer down (sadly the Authority said farewell to Vicky Rae on the 5th January 2018, Vicky has moved on to sunnier climates looking after Turtles in the Mediterranean) had to soldier on, this included carrying out 2 Mussel Surveys, one on Tuesday 20th March 2018, at Fenham Flats and thanks to NE, Elaine Young and colleague and Emily Henderson, Newcastle University for helping out. The second survey was carried out at a new site on Holy Island on Thursday 22nd and again thanks NE, Catherine Scott and 2 colleagues and again Emily Henderson, Newcastle University. Without help from other Organisation's and volunteers, carrying out these surveys can be a drain on the Authority's resources, so once again thanks to all.

The Members will see in both Deputy Chief IFCO Mark Southerton and IFCO/Mate Darren Graham's district reports it has been an eventful quarter. It seems most Commercial and Recreational fishers have been affected by the severe weather we encountered (Beast from the East) and a large proportion of fishers are still trying to recover and repair their fishing gear. I personally can't remember having such a wet and windy start to the year for a very long time, hopefully we will have a good summer.

Miscellaneous

Throughout the quarter numerous joint patrols have been carried out between NIFCA and the MMO, these have included Shore Patrols, Sea Patrols on-board St Aidan and RIB Patrols using Bravo 1. Early in the Quarter the Authority were approached by the MMO who were looking at bringing back a retired, very experienced ex MMO Officer (Malcolm Gristwood) to train up several MEOs around the coast to the level of being

able to board fishing vessels at sea and to carry out a full inspection. This training would of course need to be carried out at sea and the MMO have limited usage from the Royal Navy so the NIFCA were asked if we could supply vessels to accommodate in the northern region. In total St Aidan (as a platform-base) and Bravo 1 (as boarding RIB) were used on 6 occasions, 11th 12th 20th 22nd and 26th January and 13th March 2018, at a good but reasonable chartering rate. The feedback from our Officers was that it was excellent training and put a very clear message out that the NIFCA carried out joint working with other Organisation's including the MMO. Well done to all IFCOs involved, including for the long hours put in.

Early in the quarter the NIFCA were approached by Newcastle University on the possible Charter of St Aidan to assist in a course they were running which involved the usage of electronic equipment, multi-beams and ground truthing, as St Aidan has all the relevant equipment they needed and after their Tutors and Technicians had visited the vessel it was arranged to charter the St Aidan for a day on 6th March 2018 to take out 4 groups of 6 students (1 hour slots) to learn and see the various pieces of equipment being used. Feedback from the Tutors was that the students found the day very interesting and this could become an annual charter. Well done to Deputy Chief IFCO Mark Southerton, IFCOs Nat Wallace and Eric Balsdon for their professional approach, a credit to the Authority.

Courses

Monday 8th January 2018 IFCO Nick Weir attended and successfully passed Standard of Training Certification and Watch-keeping for Sea-farers (STCW), Sea Survival Course held at South Tyneside Marine College, South Shields.

Week commencing Sunday 28th January till Friday 2nd February Chief IFCO Al Browne and IFCO Nick Weir attended the Annual IFCA Enforcement Course in Torquay. The Course has been running for approximately 27 years and has always been considered an excellent way for officers to get the opportunity to meet and work with other officers from around the coast and different IFCA's. The main topic of the course is the training and updating of officers in the basic Legislation and Enforcement skills they will need as Fisheries Officers and to give a re-fresher to more experienced officer who attend. As I'm sure the Authority Members are aware CEO Mike Hardy is part of the current Training Team, can I take this opportunity to thank Mike and the other Training Team Officers (from other IFCA's around the coast) for all their hard work and professionalism in putting together a well-structured weeks training. Finally, both Nick and I passed with flying colours, resulting in Nick becoming a fully Warranted Officer.

On Monday 5th February 2018, IFCO/Mate Darren Graham attended an Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (IOSH) Course at Maersk Training, Tyne Tunnel Trading Estate, North Shields, the course was held over 4 days resulting in Darren gaining greater knowledge in Health & Safety especially whilst skippering St Aidan and the welfare of the crew and passengers.

IFCO Nick Weir once again attend South Tyneside Marine College in February this time to attend a 3-day STCW Firefighting Course.

Chief IFCO A.B. Browne

IFCO DARREN GRAHAM
SUMMARY FOR THE NORTHERN AREA
OF THE DISTRICT JANUARY, FEBRUARY AND MARCH 2018

PORT	POTTING BOATS	TRAWLERS	APPROX NO CREW
<i>North of border</i>	9	<i>None</i>	16
<i>Berwick</i>	3	1	4
<i>Holy Island</i>	6	<i>None</i>	13
<i>Seahouses</i>	10	1	19
<i>Beadnell</i>	3	<i>None</i>	4
<i>Newton</i>	1	<i>None</i>	1
<i>Craster</i>	2	<i>None</i>	3
<i>Boulmer</i>	3	<i>None</i>	4
<i>Amble</i>	22	7	51
<i>Totals</i>	59	9	115

Weather

The weather this quarter has been a major talking point for many of the district's fishermen, with long periods of big seas and high winds dominating especially the last six weeks of this quarter. As the festive period ended and the new year began the weather was calm for this time of year, with a light south easterly wind and a calm sea, but as January continued the wind veered towards the west, increasing in strength as it went, lifting the sea once it was out the shelter of land. Towards the latter end of the month and early February the wind backed to come from a predominantly southern direction but kept its strength. As February wore on the Authority's district was hit by storms which had been tagged in the media as "The Beast From The East" which brought a weather front from Siberia. Low temperatures, snow, high winds and big seas all hit the district, with very little let up. This pattern continued into March, where along with the Beast from the East, Storm Emma also hit the UK from the South West causing major disruption between the two weather systems. The weather abated for a short period of time before the "Beast from East II" struck the district once again bringing raised seas, heavy snow flurries and freezing temperatures. Once this had blown its course, we had a small period of relative calm, allowing some of the districts fishermen to head to sea and try to attend their gear. After the very short respite, the UK was hit by the final part in the trilogy that was the "Beast from the East III". As with

the previous two incarnations, high winds, big seas, freezing temperatures along with snow showers were its calling card, bring disruption to many of the districts fishermen and stakeholders. During and after the storms we saw during our patrols the disruption caused by the sea, with washed up sea creatures (lobsters, crabs, flat fish, round fish along with many octopuses etc) along the shore lines, fishing gear (pots, dahns, pellets and a net) being washed in and many fishermen losing fleets of gear. We have also been told by fishermen that gear set off in deeper water, which has been moved 1.5 miles away from where it was set.

Lobsters

As is the trend for this time of year, the number of lobsters seen landed by ourselves decrease, and this year has been no exception to that trend. This year has seen a number of variables that could explain the lack of lobsters being seen landed such as, the number and ferocity of storms to hit the coastline, the drop in temperature from thawing snow/ice or the fact not many of the districts fishermen have been able to get to sea and tend their gear with many of the fishermen reporting many pots lost or washed up on the shore. Average landings seen were between 5 lobsters and 15, but with a couple of the districts bigger fishing vessels landing 30+. Price per kilo quoted to ourselves was £20 at the beginning of January but unusually it increased to £23 per kilo towards the end of March.

Edible Brown Crabs

Brown crab landings have followed in the same vain as previous years, with some of the districts fishermen targeting them as the lobsters become elusive. Landings seen over the quarter have been between 3 boxes and 8 boxes and we have seen on the odd occasion 15 boxes being landed. Prices per kilo quoted to ourselves, followed the unusual pattern of the lobster prices of increasing in price, the beginning of January saw £1.30 per kilo quoted to £1.70 towards the end of March.

Velvet Crabs

Velvet crab landings have been few and far between, with what seems to be becoming the trend with some fishermen who choose not to land them. For those that we have seen landed amounts were between half a box and 1 box, with the very rare exception of three boxes being seen landed, but one of these had been hollied off from the previous days fishing. Prices per kilo quoted to ourselves were between £1.10 and £1.60, with one skipper mentioning to me a price of £3.00 per kilo.

Recreational Angling, Sea and Shore

We have continued to engage with anglers within the district, two officers attended the Amble open, the competition was entered by over 400 persons, with over 100 of those weighing in at the end with fish caught.

Divers

No diving activity has been sighted during this quarter

DCIFO M SOUTHERTON

**QUARTERLY REPORT FOR THE SOUTHERN AREA COVERING THE PORTS OF
NORTH SHIELDS, INCLUDING ROYAL QUAYS MARINA, CULLERCOATS,
SEATON SLUICE, BLYTH AND NEWBIGGIN**

FOR THE MONTHS OF JANUARY, FEBRUARY AND MARCH 2018

**A Comprehensive Guide to Indigenous Vessels Active in the
Southern Area of the District**

<u>PORT</u>	<u>POTTERS</u>	<u>TRAWLERS</u>	<u>Approx Crew</u>
North Shields	8	20	55
Cullercoats/Seaton Sluice	0	0	0
Blyth	9	11	42
Newbiggin	2	0	3
Total	19	31	100

General

The report during this quarter covers the most unsettled quarter of the year, with generally the worst weather conditions and lowest fishing activity in the year. Weather conditions as expected of the quarter were very changeable. Settled weather conditions in January together with high shellfish prices holding out after the holiday period saw potting vessels quick to get back to sea and take advantage of this. Settled conditions also permitted the inshore trawl fleet to access fishing grounds further offshore out to 10 to 15 miles, where a fairly large fleet of around 25 vessels made up from visiting Scottish and Northern Irish vessels worked alongside locals and with reasonable catches of prawns were landed daily. Overnight temperatures dropped with the Royal Quays Marina freezing over for a couple of days in January.

Conditions became more unsettled during February when a particular cold weather system dubbed “the Beast from the East” moved across the UK bringing in cold strong easterly Siberian winds and drifting snow. This weather event closed all fishing opportunities from late February to early March. Conditions had been so bad and along with a drop in water temperature a number of marine life were killed and washed

ashore during the storm. As the seas built up other marine life were dislodged and washed ashore. Yorkshire coast suffered worse when literally thousands of crab and lobster were washed ashore dead or dying. Along with the loss of marine life, the shores in Northumberland were strewn with fishing pots, litter/debris and plastics of which organised groups and public as well as NIFCA officers assisted with the clear up.

There was a brief settled period when most fishers in the southern district began sorting through their gear, a number of pots were lost or had moved in the bad weather. A lot of pots were scrubbed or bunched and damaged. Fortunately the forecast was predicted well in advance and most pots were moved into deeper water, but even pots in 12 fathoms suffered damage. Any gear set from the shore was destroyed.

By the middle of March, again winds from the east blew for a prolonged period, again heavy seas and cold temperatures drove marine life, fishing gear and plastics back on the shore, where further beach cleans were conducted. During the latter end of the month again fishers were sorting out their remaining gear.

Fishing Activity

Lobster fishing early in the year was particularly good for the time of year, especially as the price still remained high after the holiday period. Catches were still in the high teens, with up to 70 lobsters seen landed in January, this fishing remained stable until the weather changed late February. Very few lobsters have been seen landed, with landings down to single figures with fishers saying the cold water has slowed any lobster movements to a virtual stop. Boats were hauling maybe only twice per week due to the lack of shellfish.

Brown crab catches had been reasonable further offshore early in the quarter, landings up to 6 boxes per landing, however this fishery has also suffered with even catches 36 miles offshore down by half to levels before the bad weather.

Velvet crab were landed in low numbers prior to the bad weather, no landings have been seen after the bad weather.

A couple of boats from the southern district also worked prawn pots. Again at the start of the quarter some good landings were seen landed, unfortunately the price paid for these had slumped somewhat after the holiday period, down by half. Catches up to 7 trays of prawns were seen landed.

One vessel has landed all his pots due to damage and lack of shellfish, preferring to set gill nets. After the first easterly storm had some reasonable catches for a couple of days, after the second storm catches were poor with only 12 fish seen from 4 bins of nets. A number of seals were in his fishing location. Of the fish that were landed they were reportedly all full of lugworm when gutted, most probably washed out of the shore in the rough weather.

Trawling

Nephrop fishing resumed in January after the holiday break and vessels enjoyed a period of settled weather, when even the smaller inshore fleet were able to work further offshore where the best catches were landed from. Conditions also permitted some joint working by NIFCA with the MMO using the NIFCA vessel and a number of larger vessels were boarded outside the 12 mile limit. Most trawling activity was conducted outside the NIFCA district.

A few of the visiting vessels alternated between grounds to the north of Eyemouth and working the Farne Deeps, working out of the Tyne. Catches had begun to fall and all fishing ceased when the easterly storms moved over the UK. Vessels were slow to get back started late March, but reports of some reasonable catches were made, despite big tides. A few of the inshore vessels fished inside the NIFCA district when conditions permitted in March and have had some good catches of good quality nephrop.

Recreational fishing

One person was seen hauling pots early in the quarter with no shellfish seen landed. A number of recreational permit holders were seen recovering pots washed ashore in March, most, if not all of these pots were completely destroyed with the storm. There has been a little activity on the shore, but a lot of this has been people curious as to what has been washed ashore during the storms.

Hand gathering for shellfish from the shore was restricted to a few days during spring tides in October and there was the occasional sighting after that but generally this activity was limited to the odd spring tide.

Very little bait digging was observed in the southern district. I would think a lot of the worm beds were washed out during the storms. Certainly large amounts of sand have been scoured from the beaches.

Anglers were out after the worst of the weather with catches of fish reported from usual marks. However due to the sheer amount of shellfish and marine life available for predators catches have not been as good as anticipated.

No shore divers were seen in the southern part of the district during any of the shore patrols.

Lobster £14 - £17 per kilo

Brown crab £1.10 - £1.40 per kilo