

**NORTHUMBERLAND INSHORE FISHERIES & CONSERVATION AUTHORITY
CHIEF INSHORE FISHERIES & CONSERVATION OFFICER A.B.BROWNE
QUARTERLY REPORT ENDING 31 DECEMBER 2016**

Once again it has been a busy quarter with officers dividing their time from routine shore patrols, manning the Authority's boats, survey work, office work to joint working with the MMO. Whilst out on shore and sea patrols, officers have been recording various sightings including bait-diggers, hand gatherers, vessel sightings inside the NIFCA district as well as outside between the 6 - 12 nm limit. Survey work has included Blyth Mussel Survey, Beadnell Fish Survey, Long Nanny Fish Survey and the Escape Gap Survey involving St Aidan. The Enforcement Team have been out and about throughout the Authority's district splitting their time between being on-board the Authority's vessels and shore side, checking boats landing and speaking with the fishers as well as checking shore gatherers and anglers. They have been working very closely with the MMO officers both on the shore and at sea carrying out joint working. Environmental IFCO Natalie Wallace has fitted in well with the team and she and IFCO Docherty are attending the IFCA Enforcement Course in Torquay the 1st week in February 2017, meaning once Nat successfully completes the course she will become a fully warranted officer.

As usual IFCOs Graham and Docherty quarterly reports for both the northern and southern districts give a very good insight of the activities that have been going on throughout the last quarter. I mentioned in my last report that the lobsters were late to come out of their holes, however when they did there has been reports from a number of local fishers that 2016 has been a very good year for landings of both lobsters and brown crabs. Throughout the summer and up until Christmas the price for lobsters has been very good. Some fishermen have also had some if not all of their pots offshore, targeting brown crab with again some very good landings being seen.

The back end of September started to see some visiting larger trawlers arriving in North Shields getting ready for the winter prawn fishery and by middle of October these numbers had grown to around 30-40 trawlers from Scotland and Ireland. These trawlers were closely monitored by both the NIFCA and the MMO and the majority of activity and fishing patterns was the trawlers going to sea before daylight and returning between 17.00 - 20.00 daily, they were working between 7-20 miles offshore normally between the Tyne and Craster. Whilst out on sea patrols with and without MMO Officers on-board visual checks were made and recorded by St Aidan's crew including, type of gear and position (checking if they were working inside or outside the 12m limit). On a couple of occasion when the Authority had MMO Officers on-board, the Authority's officers assisted with boardings and inspections. Since the introduction of the restrictions within the Farne Deeps regarding trawling, only minor offences have been detected by MMO Officers whilst out with NIFCA Officers.

Due to the milder weather at the start of the quarter there have been shore gatherers down on the rocks throughout the Authority's district right up till Christmas. Regular checks have been made at the known hot spots. As the winter weather and rough seas start to appear more and more hardened shore anglers are appearing normally after a heavy sea trying to catch the elusive Cod. Officers whilst out and about are

getting down and talking to the anglers, handing out Size Stickers and checking their catches. Regular inspections and checks have been carried out on all the known bait digging sites recording if there are any persons digging or the lack of persons digging. All this information is being passed onto the Environmental Team.

Miscellaneous

It was decided that letters would be sent out to a number of leading local and national businesses explaining the role of the NIFCA also giving them an insight to our 'V' Notching Project, why the NIFCA have continued to carry out the project every year since 2000 and asking these companies if they would like to consider donating to this extremely important project. We are waiting with baited breath hopefully we may get some to sponsor this extremely important project.

Following on from last quarter's report NIFCA and MMO Officers have carried out numerous joint patrols both at sea and ashore resulting in detailed inspections of vessels, vehicles and daily vessel landings being carried out. On one occasion MMO officers requested our assistance, they wanted to go out to sea and board local and visiting trawlers who were working between 6 - 20 miles east of the Tyne. NIFCA officers manned the Authority's Patrol Vessel St Aidan and also the onboard RIB (TT St Aidan) they took the MEOs out to the fleet and launched the onboard RIB and put 3 MEO's onboard one of the trawlers. Once onboard the MEOs carried out a full inspection lasting approximately 3 hrs. Joint shore patrols have also been arranged at very short notice with both Organisations supplying officers to assist. These have led to some good intelligence being gathered, this is all down to the very good working relationship the NIFCA has with our local MMO Officers, both Organisations are able to call on their partners pretty much any time and if officers are available joint patrols either onboard the Authority's boats or on the shore can be executed at short notice.

I mentioned in the last quarterly report that the Authorities officers had just taken delivery of their new 'Northern Diver' drysuits. They have been using them for approximately 4 months now and all officers have reported back how the new suits are more comfortable to wear, warmer and they definitely look more professional.

Brief update on the Intel Project - IFCO Balsdon attended a catch up meeting with representatives from NEIFCA, NWIFCA and MMO at Lancaster House, Newcastle Upon Tyne on Tuesday 8th November 2016. They had an update on how the Project is progressing, as the Intel Team have now rolled it out to the South east and hopefully next year to the South. Since we have started including the Tasking & Co-ordinating Group (TCG) meeting in our monthly Rota meetings, all of the officer's agree it helps them when they're out on the coast to gather intelligence and take a more targeted approach to monitoring. IFCO Balsdon has taken to the Intel Officers role very well, resulting in NIFCA Officers completing and giving numerous Intel Reports to our Intel Officer who is in turn passing on through a secure link to the Ops Room in MMO Newcastle. This is a two way link with NIFCA receiving regular updates and new Intel from the Ops Room. Deputy Chief IFCO Southerton and myself also attend the MMO TCG meetings at North Shields.

Renewal letters have been sent out to all Commercial and Recreational Shellfish Permit holders as well as to Trawl and Dredge Permit Holders reminding them to renew their annual permits by the end of the year. Included in this letter was information regarding the FLAG, NIFCA Escape Gap Project, Marking of Pots, Passive Gear and Keep Boxes and Disposal of old Tags. Since the letters have been sent out the Office has had a steady stream of fishers either phoning up or coming in

to renew their permits.

CIFCO A.B. Browne



**NORTHUMBERLAND INSHORE FISHERIES
& CONSERVATION AUTHORITY**

IFCO D GRAHAM

**SUMMARY FOR THE NORTHERN DISTRICT
OCTOBER, NOVEMBER AND DECEMBER 2016**

PORT	POTTING BOATS APPROX NO CREW	TRAWLERS	
<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

GENERAL

Weather this quarter has been un-seasonally pleasant with long periods of fine calm weather bringing periods of settled weather and fairly mild temperatures, allowing the districts' fishermen to enjoy periods of sustained fishing. October brought periods of north easterly winds along with slight north easterly seas, which veered towards a more easterly direction towards the latter end of the month. As October ended and November began, the weather backed again to come from a more northerly direction. With an increase in strength, the sea raised for a short period. Towards the middle and latter end of the month, the wind decreased in strength. As November ended and December began the wind backed to come from a predominantly southerly direction, with periods of light wind and calm seas. As we headed towards the Christmas Period, the UK was hit by storm Barbara, which saw an increase in wind and the sea.

Lobster Landings sighted during this quarter were up on previous year's numbers, although vessel size, area worked and number of pots being fished has to be taken into consideration. At the beginning of this quarter, average landings seen were between 20 lobsters and 1 box but with the odd exception of three boxes being seen landed on a couple of different days (this from a larger vessel with the capability of putting away in harsher weather). That trend continued into the middle of the quarter and only slightly declined in the latter part of the month towards the festive period, which saw average lobster landings of between 15 and 30 lobster, but once again size of vessel and area worked has to be taken into consideration. Prices being quoted to ourselves during inspections were between £16 and £18 per kilo, but as is

the norm towards the festive period, prices rose to approximately £24 per kilo for the week running up to Christmas.

Edible/Brown crab landings seen during this quarter were once again dependant on area worked, size of vessel and number of pots being worked. Average landings seen were between 1 box and 4 boxes. But as with the lobsters there were one or two exceptions when we saw between ten and fifteen boxes being landed. Prices per kilo have remained steady at £1.10.

Velvet crab landings have followed a similar trend to last year, with only a handful of skippers choosing to land them. Those that have been seen landing have landed approximately between half a box and one box, but this has been on a few and far between basis. Prices per kilo have remained steady at £1.00

**NORTHUMBERLAND INSHORE FISHERIES &
CONSERVATION AUTHORITY
IFCO M DOCHERTY**

**SUMMARY FOR THE SOUTHERN DISTRICT
OCTOBER, NOVEMBER AND DECEMBER 2016**

**A Comprehensive Guide to Indigenous Vessels, Active in Southern
District**

<u>PORT</u>	<u>POTTERS</u>	<u>TRAWLERS</u>
<u>North Shields</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>23</u>
<u>Cullercoats/Seaton Sluice</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>0</u>
<u>Blyth</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>11</u>
<u>Newbiggin</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>0</u>
<u>Total</u>	<u>21</u>	<u>34</u>

Overview:

Shimmering frost upon our chosen paths, are cast like stars upon the sea. Cloaked in dark, our mornings' black, we look to skies to guide our way.

This quarter has been eventful, if nothing else with operators adapting to new legislation for the traditional winter prawn fishery. North Shields sees the departure of both 'Glad Tidings' BH 111 and also 'Shemara' SN 186.

Static Gear:

Static gear is more abundant than usual due to mild weather and pleasing catch rates. This has allowed for smaller inshore vessels to work almost continually throughout the final quarter.

One or two vessels operating from the Tyne to Blyth have set gillnets, targeting winter codling. Catch reports have been typically poor and aside from mild weather the blame is pointed firmly at the ever expanding population of nuisance Seals. The general consensus among fishermen being that a cull is long overdue to save our inshore fish stocks and restore a sustainable and profitable netting fishery.

Catch Reports:

Lobster catches have remained steady and vessels have reported good days exploiting marks inshore that would traditionally be reserved for the summer season. This is attributed to a mild winter and calm seas that allow for vessels to work in shallow, inshore waters.

Pleasing catch rates coupled with an average price of £16-18 per kilo have meant a fruitful winter for the smaller class of vessels that may often struggle at this time of year.

Recreational Activity:

Westerly winds and a milder than usual climate have dampened the efforts of the shore angler this past quarter. Fish may have been scarce in numbers but when reports have arisen they have been for a good stamp of fish. One such report came from Cambois rocks with one lucky angler landing what can only be described as a fish of a lifetime; tipping the scales at 27.2 lbs.

Whilst fishing may have been patchy on the beaches, our friends afloat have reported a fruitful winter. Both charter and recreational craft have benefitted from calm seas right the way up to the year end and have regularly caught codling at anchor and 'on the drift' with baited muppets being the weapon of choice.

Mobile Gear:

This quarter has been somewhat remarkable for the annual North Shields prawn fishery. Not because of catch rates or lack thereof but due to a much smaller level of exploitation of the stocks by visiting vessels. By my estimation there is approximately half the number of visiting trawlers from North East Scotland and Northern Ireland operating from North Shields and Blyth this season.

This can only reasonably be attributed to the new measures brought in that ban 'twin rigging' (simultaneously towing two nets from one boat) within 12 nautical miles and also bans 'multi rigging' (simultaneously towing 3 or more nets from one boat) in what is being referred to as the 'Farne Deeps'. For the purpose of the new legislation, this refers to an area that spans from Whitby in the South to Dunbar in the North and out to 60 nautical miles at sea at the most extreme point.

The new legislation also restricts a vessels power to 350kw to be able to fish within 12 nautical miles and vessels must now use a minimum mesh size of 90mm. The previous minimum mesh size was 80mm.

While many vessels have switched from twin to single rig to comply with the new regulations, a great deal have opted to stay north of the Border and exploit the offshore grounds of North East Scotland and Shetland.

Vessels working inshore have reported a disappointingly small class of prawns being caught and catch rates have been inconsistent.