

**NORTHUMBERLAND INSHORE FISHERIES  
& CONSERVATION AUTHORITY  
CHIEF FISHERIES OFFICER A B BROWNE  
QUARTERLY REPORT ENDING 31 DECEMBER 2017**

Throughout the quarter the Authority has been down 1 enforcement officer (since Michael Docherty left at the end of August). This has put additional workloads on all the IFCOs and I must say all have stepped up to the mark. Things have been fairly steady throughout the quarter with all officers dividing their time from routine shore patrols, manning the Authority's vessels, carrying out survey work, (Blyth Mussel Survey, Hauxley Fish Survey and Lobster Surveys), working in the Authority's office or joint working with other Organisations including MMO, NE and EA to name a few. 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. The Enforcement Team have been out and about splitting their time between being on-board the Authority's vessels and shore side, checking boats, carrying out catch inspection both at sea and in harbours and ports; they have also been speaking with the fishers as well as checking shore gatherers and anglers.

After advertising for a replacement Enforcement Officer and receiving some excellent potential candidates it came down to the Authority, Chair, Les Weller, Vice Chair Wendy Pattison, Chief IFCO, Al Browne and Deputy Chief IFCO, Mark Southerton to have the daunting task of getting down from over 35 candidates to 6 for interview, after a long day it was finally decided to interview 7 very good candidates. On Monday 20th November 2017 all 7 candidates were interviewed and the 7 became 2. It was arranged for both candidates to go out for the day onboard St Aidan (separately), this gave the crew the opportunity to engage with both gents and see how they performed onboard St Aidan, unfortunately a decision had to be made and finally Deputy Chief IFCO Mark Southerton and I decided on Mr Nick Weir, from Cullercoats. Nick joined the Royal Marines shortly after leaving school and spent 7 years in the Corps (a number of which in active service). Once Nick left the Royal Marines he worked in various roles for Trendsetting Awards, culminating in becoming Factory Manager and I'm sure Nick will fit in well with all the officers and office staff and in time will become an asset to the NIFCA.

Please see Deputy Chief IFCO Mark Southerton and IFCO Darren Graham's quarterly reports for the northern and southern areas, these give a very good insight of the activities that have been going on throughout the last quarter. Lobster landings throughout the quarter have been good and to top that prices for Lobsters (per Kilo) have been excellent this year with some Wholesalers saying they could have sold all their lobsters twice over as demand was strong. Some fishermen have been

working some if not all of their pots further offshore targeting brown crab with again some very good landings being seen.

As has been the norm for a number of years the end of September started to see some visiting larger trawlers arriving in North Shields getting ready for the winter prawn fishery and by the middle of October these numbers had grown to around 30-40 trawlers from Scotland and Northern Ireland. The NIFCA with the help of Globavista and AIS have been closely monitoring these larger trawlers as most tend to use more than 1 net (twin or triple trawling) and this is of course banned within the NIFCA District. The local and visiting trawlers tend to go to sea daily working between 4-20 miles offshore leaving port just before daylight and returning between 17.00 - 20.00. Whilst Officers onboard St Aidan have been out on sea patrols with and without MMO Officers on-board, visual checks were made and recorded by the crew including, type of gear, position, checking if they were working inside or outside the 12m limit, (since the introduction of the restrictions within the Farne Deeps regarding trawling).

As the winter weather and rough seas start to appear (preferably North - North East) more and more hardened shore anglers are appearing, trying to catch the elusive Cod. Officers when carrying out shore patrols are going down and talking to the anglers, handing out Size Stickers and checking their catches. Regular visits to Tackle Shops have also been carried out by Officers. Whilst out on shore patrol officers have also been to all the known Cleeking sites within the Authority's district, leading to inspections of Shore Gatherers being carried out (no breaches detected). Regular inspections and observations have been carried out at the various bait digging sites, recordings of activities or the lack of activities are passed onto the Environmental Team via Google Maps.

### **Miscellaneous**

**Joint working** with other Organisations have been limited this quarter for a number of reasons including weather, availability of fully trained officers to carry out boardings of trawlers at sea or man power to crew vessels. The Environment Agency sent one of their officers out onboard St Aidan in November, more for him to gain experience at sea at night than to carry out enforcement. Senior officers of both the NIFCA and MMO are trying to arrange some opportunity for joint working in 2018. MMO are keen to try and get as many of their MEOs fully trained as soon as possible and then they are looking at chartering IFCA vessels to carry out boardings outside the 6 nautical mile limit, this of course will be an excellent opportunity for the Authority's officers to gain additional experience.

October saw all the Authority's IFCOs and office staff attend a full **Occupational Health Check**, this was carried out at the NIFCA Office in Blyth.

Throughout the quarter officers have been inputting to the **Intel** team (IFCOs Eric Balsdon and Ricky Willis) Intelligence Reports (IRs). These have been processed and sent up to the MMO Operations room at Lancaster House, Newcastle Upon Tyne to be put onto the central database and securely disseminated to the the relevant Organisations. Early December Chief IFCO Al Browne along with

representatives from MMO, Ops room and Senior MMO officer visited Durham Constabulary HQ, in Durham to have a demonstration from their Intel Officers on a new Intel System which would enhance the combined Intelligence data of both MMO and IFCAs. This now is at the stage when Senior officers of both the IFCAs and MMO have to make the decision, do we really need or want this system and is it going to be cost efficient? I will keep the Authority up to date. The Intel team, Deputy Chief IFCO Mark Southerton and myself are continuing to have our Tasking & Coordination Group (TCG) meetings with the local MMO once a month (last week of the month) at our Office and we also attend the MMOs TCG (beginning of the month) at North Shields. All involved do recognise how useful and worthwhile these meeting are, it gives all present the opportunity to share intelligence, maximise resources and arrange joint working. The Authority and the Marine Police are very close to agreeing and signing an Information Sharing Agreement, hopefully in the next couple of months, this will enable the NIFCA officers to quickly access restricted and sensitive information of suspects, vehicles and any known history prior to approaching an incident.

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. This year the Authority, Environmental Team included on the back of the Commercial and Recreational renewal forms a questionnaire which they asked the fishers to complete and return (by all accounts this has been very successful and some very useful information is being sourced). Also included in the letter was a flyer informing fishers that the Authority now have 'Fixed Shellfish Gauges' for sale at the Authority's Office in Blyth. 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.

**Chief IFCO A B Browne**



**IFCO DARREN GRAHAM**

**SUMMARY FOR THE NORTHERN AREA**  
**OCTOBER, NOVEMBER, DECEMBER 2017**

<b>Port</b>	<b>Potting Boats</b>	<b>Trawlers</b>	<b>Approx. no. crew</b>
North of border	9	<i>None</i>	16
Berwick	3	<i>1</i>	4
Holy Island	6	<i>None</i>	13
Seahouses	10	<i>1</i>	19
Beadnell	3	<i>None</i>	4
Newton	1	<i>None</i>	1
Craster	2	<i>None</i>	3
Boulmer	3	<i>None</i>	4
Amble	22	<i>7</i>	51
Totals	59	<i>9</i>	115

**Weather**

Weather throughout this quarter has been as expected for this time of year, with periods of unsettled weather and short periods of calm. October started with strong westerly gales from the remains of storm Maria and as that subsided, the remains of hurricane Ophelia passed on through. This hit the UK during the middle of the month, but as this originated in the Atlantic Ocean it swept sand from the Sahara desert. As it passed over the UK some of the sand was deposited on land but most was retained in the airstream which as it passed the sun caused a red glow across the sky. (As reported in the Standard on the 17th October 2017). Once the dust had settled the UK was hit by storm Brian, with the Environment Agency issuing Red and Amber flood warnings for the Northumberland District. (Reported by the BBC on the 22nd of October) October ended with a short period of welcome calm weather. November started with Northerly winds and big seas which quickly dissipated to light northwesterly winds, reducing the sea to a slight swell. This continued for best part of the month and into early December, when the sea and wind increased again from the north. Strong Northerly winds and big seas continued until approximately mid month, when the wind backed to come from a southwesterly direction and reducing in strength. Light winds and calm seas took us up to the festive period where the wind veered to come from a northerly direction increasing in strength, and raising the seas; the wind continued to veer to come from a predominantly easterly direction, giving very little shelter for the districts fishermen.

**Lobsters**

October brought the first month when Berried Hens couldn't be landed, with many of the northern districts fishermen who we chatted to giving a mixed reaction, some for the ban and some against it. One fisherman I spoke to during October said he was throwing back between 25 and 30% of his catch because of them being berried hens. Lobster prices per kilo were between £14 and £16.00 which seemed to follow

the previous quarters prices of remaining high. Landings seen during October, as expected, were reducing from the previous month. Average landings seen were between half a box and three boxes. But as always this depended on the size of the vessels, gear being used and the skippers decisions on where to fish; weather is also a massive factor taken into consideration. November brought an increase in the price per kilo the fishermen were receiving for lobsters, to between £16 and £18, the higher price being received towards the latter end of the month. Average landings sighted were between half a box and one box, this also was the average sighted during December. Prices followed the previous two months with a slight increase to approximately £18 to £20.00 per kilo, but towards the festive period the prices increased for a short period to £22.00 per kilo.

### **Edible Brown Crabs**

Brown crab landings seen during this quarter, have increased from previous months with some of the districts skippers targeting them as a replacement in income from the reduced landings of lobsters. Average landings seen during this quarter were between half a box and 5 boxes, this as with lobster landings, depended on where the skipper chose to work his gear, vessel size and gear type. There were a few exceptions where landings were sighted of approximately 14 boxes being landed. Prices per kilo quoted to ourselves were slightly up on similar times in previous years with between £1.10 - £1.50 for Cock Crabs and £1.00 and £1.20 for Hen Crabs.

### **Velvet Crabs**

Velvet crab landings seen during this quarter have bucked the trend of previous quarters, where fishermen and wholesalers have been actively fishing for them, as the quoted price to ourselves had slightly increased from between £1.10 and £2.50 per kilo. one wholesaler from Eyemouth has requested landings every day, while another wholesaler from Amble has requested that landings to them should be Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday only. Landings seen were between half a box and two boxes, with some fishermen telling us verbally that they had landed four and six boxes.

### **Recreational Angling, Sea and Shore**

Meeting and greeting anglers have continued throughout this quarter, with some of the anglers that we spoke to catching Codling from the piers and rock edges. Sea angler sightings have reduced over this quarter as weather conditions have made it uncomfortable for most vessels to head to sea.

### **Divers**

The diving season has been and gone; with big seas and strong winds there has been very little ongoing diving activity sighted. There have been one or two shore divers seen and spoken to at Beadnell, but with the boat launch at Beadnell closed until next year, no dive RHIBs have been sighted in that area.

### **Vessel Movements**

The Madonna from Seahouses has changed ownership but stayed in the same port, with the previous owner retiring from the fishing industry and heading into the tourism side of life.

### **Other**

In the week before Christmas a Fisherman from Boulmer village was involved in a dramatic rescue, when his vessel capsized leading him to be stranded on the hull of the upturned vessel. St Aidan was in close vicinity and offered her assistance to Humber coastguard and the RNLI. The RNLI rescued the stricken fisherman and his vessel and returned him to the shore, whence the St Aidan was stood down and returned to her normal duties.

**IFCO Darren Graham**

**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 OCTOBER, NOVEMBER AND DECEMBER 2017**

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

<b>Port</b>	<b>Potters</b>	<b>Trawlers</b>	<b>Approximate No. Crew</b>
<b>North Shields</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>55</b>
<b>Cullercoats/Seaton Sluice</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Blyth</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>Newbiggin</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>103</b>

Report covering the ports of North Shields, including Royal Quays marina, Cullercoats, Seaton Sluice, Blyth and Newbiggin.

**General**

The report during this quarter covers the transition period from the Northumberland summer to the autumnal period with more unsettled conditions and shorter daylight hours.

Weather conditions as expected of the quarter were very changeable with October seeing wetter more blustery conditions, winds from a westerly direction for most of the month with occasional SE winds. Northumberland also managed to get a dusting of Sahara sand brought up from strong southerly airstreams during the month.

Northerly winds at the beginning and end of November saw the first heavy seas of the season, swells were predicted to be over 7 metres, fortunately more like 3 metre swells pounded the coastline. A number of lobster pots suffered damage with a couple washed ashore during this period.

Weather in December was relatively settled with a period of northerly winds mid month. Temperatures plummeted during this time due to the northerly airstream, however there were a number of days of settled weather prior to the Christmas holidays allowing fishers to get back to sea, taking advantage of the increased shellfish prices prior to the holidays.

There have been a few fishermen talking of EMFF grant funding in particular for cold storage of pot bait, this will hopefully alleviate problems experienced lately with fishers struggling to obtain fresh bait. It is also hoped that funding can go towards upgrading landing facilities in Blyth harbour with electric winches.

### **Fishing Activity**

The main talking point during the quarter was the berried lobster prohibition coming into force beginning of October. This came as a real shock to potting fisherman and more so as the number of berried lobsters being caught during this period with fishermen having to discard up to a third of their catch during October. A number of fishermen were so disheartened with the situation they said they had felt unmotivated about coming to work; interestingly a number of fishers had said they would need to put in more pots to reduce the amount of money they were losing.

Lobster catches as expected have been down during the quarter with all berried lobsters being returned, fortunately the prices for lobster have remained above average for the time of year so financially this has been slightly less impactful. Lobster prices were from £18 to £25 per kilo. As the quarter wore on and gear was moved further offshore for crab, fewer berried lobsters were being caught although towards the end of the quarter when prices were at their highest fishers were still counting the cost of this prohibition.

Cold weather towards the latter end of the quarter had an impact on inshore fishing which seemed to drop right off with shellfish catches falling as fishers confirmed very little activity seen in their pots. Average landings were maybe 40 lobsters early in the quarter falling to the high teens. Vessels were increasing soak times hauling maybe two to three times a week.

Brown Crab catches have increased as gear is moved further offshore but also with more unsettled weather some good shots were seen landed; some more capable vessels were fishing for crab during most the quarter with good landings up to 25 boxes, prices were also slightly above average, best crab landings were seen after pots had stood over heavy seas.

One or two fishers still landed velvet crab only in low numbers as most gear was

being fished offshore.

### **Trawling**

This quarter is usually when the Northumberland nephrop fishery gets underway and this year was no exception Scottish and Irish vessels began heading south from grounds further north in the latter half of October. Interestingly some of our local inshore fleet were still fishing dusk and dawn for nephrops which is usually late this time of year when it's normally daylight fishing only. Nephrop catches were low to begin with and a number of vessels alternated from fishing Eyemouth grounds and then further south working from North Shields. Visiting vessels gradually increased to around 20+ vessels with most of the activity outside the 12 mile limit, couple of the bigger vessels were further out into the Farne Deeps themselves. Blyth and Amble inshore fleet spent a fair bit of time fishing inside the NIFCA district catching few prawns but better quality also when strong westerly winds limited their range. A few patrols were spent beyond the Authority's limits when MMO were in attendance and this was useful for monitoring twin rigging prohibition within the 12 mile zone.

Spring tides and heavy weather disrupted trawling on occasions especially during spells of northerly winds. Fishing has been steady, quality of the prawns offshore have been described as small with vessels seen tailing prawns.

### **Recreational fishing**

A number of recreational permit holders were seen recovering pots in October before the first autumn storms hit the coast. Information was also relayed about the Authority's emergency byelaw regarding berried lobsters. Hand gathering for shellfish from the shore was restricted to a few days during Spring tides in October; there was the occasional sighting after that but generally this activity was limited to the odd spring tide.

Bait digging was seen in the usual hotspots in the district as anglers geared up for the autumn winter shore fishing. Fish reports were improved after unsettled sea conditions; codling were being landed around the 2 -3 lb mark, this was also seen from pots with a number of fish seen this size, the odd bigger fish seen landed on social media.

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

Lobster £17 - £25 per kilo  
Brown crab £1.10 - £1.40 per kilo  
Velvet crab £1.60 -£2.50 per kilo

### **DCIFCO M Southerton**