

## **CHIEF INSHORE FISHERIES & CONSERVATION OFFICER A B BROWNE**

### **QUARTERLY REPORT ENDING 30 SEPTEMBER 2017**

Once again the NIFCA has experienced a very busy summer with all Officers working full steam ahead, can I take this opportunity on behalf of the CEO and myself to thank all the officers and office staff for their hard work throughout the summer months, especially covering for fellow members of staff throughout the main holiday season. All the IFCOs including the Environmental Team have divided their time between carrying out routine and targeted shore inspections, visiting ports and carrying out vessel landings inspections, checking recreational fishers, shore gatherers, anglers, divers as well as visiting wholesalers, angling and dive shops. Whilst carrying out these duties IFCOs are liaising with fishermen and the general public. As well as all the above tasks all IFCOs take their turns crewing the Authority's vessels, St Aidan, RIB(TT St Aidan) and Bravo 1, this involves monitoring the various types of fishing being targeted within the NIFCA district, recording sightings, inspecting fishing gear, boarding fishing boats, carrying out fleet surveys and many more duties. Currently the NIFCA have 7 officers who are qualified to RYA Powerboat Level 'Advanced Power Boat' Commercially Endorsed, the plan is to get the remaining officers up to the above Level over the winter period, meaning additional training has been given to the relevant officers.

Throughout the quarter Deputy Chief IFCO Mark Southerton (skipper) and IFCO Darren Graham (mate) both of whom take St Aidan to sea, have been carrying out safety drills on-board St Aidan with all the Authority's officers, resulting in all the officers now being trained to a very high level of professionalism. These drills included man-overboard (the NIFCA invested in a dummy after visiting the Workboat Show, Southampton), fire drills, anchoring and emergency steering.

Sadly this quarter IFCO Michael Docherty, who has been with the NIFCA since August 2011 decided it was time to leave the NIFCA and move over to a career in the Offshore Wind-farm Industry. Michael has been an essential part of the NIFCA Enforcement Team and as well as his skills on-board all the NIFCA's vessels and his knowledge of the fishing industry, Michael managed the Monthly Shellfish Returns which had to be inputted onto the Authority's Database every month. I'm sure all the members as well as the officers and office staff wish Michael every success.

Please see the quarterly reports from Deputy Chief IFCO Mark Southerton and IFCO Darren Graham which as usual gives a very good overview of what has been happening throughout the Authority's District this quarter. The main lobster season didn't really start till mid July and by then most of the potting fishermen had their pots set ready. By all accounts it has been a very good season, with fishermen happy with the strong price they were receiving for their lobsters. The Salmon and Sea Trout season started well, but most fishers were saying by the middle of August catches had dropped dramatically with some finishing early. Some of the local under 10m trawlers headed up to the Firth of Forth for the summer prawn fishery and the remainder stayed in the district fishing the coming in dark and coming in daylight\* with some good returns of prawns. By the middle of September most of the boats were back in their home ports getting ready for hopefully a good winter on the prawns. \_\_\_\_\_

Checks have been carried out on both shore and boat anglers this quarter with some good Codling and Ling being caught, mainly by charter vessels fishing on the hard rocky grounds or wrecks. There have been some good signs of Mackerel this quarter, however sometimes they have been seen and caught close inshore, the next they are further offshore. Regular inspections and checks have been carried out on all the known bait digging sites and records are being collected and given to the Environmental Team. Numerous shore patrols (both weekdays and weekends) had been organised to visit and check all the known hot spots for shore gatherers, surprisingly there hasn't seemed to be as many this year as previous years. Regular checks have also been carried out on divers this quarter with very little or no shellfish being seen, all pieces of intelligence received regarding divers as well as shore gatherers have been followed up, including joint patrols with the MMO.

### **Miscellaneous**

As mentioned in the Environmental Report the 2017 'V' Notching Scheme was completed on Friday 8th September 2017, and this year the Authority released 1012 lobsters within the 5 sectors, on 5 sea patrols, costing £10,428.50.

Sadly due to the introduction by Defra of the new Statutory Instrument (SI) 2017 No 899, The Lobster and Crawfish (Prohibition of Fishing and Landing) (Amendment) (England) Order 2017 on 1st October 2017, it looks like the end of the 'V' notching scheme which has been running since 2000 which has resulted in total over 20,000 egg bearing female lobsters being released in various locations throughout the Authority's district. \_\_\_\_\_

\* Particularly for the benefit of newer Members, the phrase "coming in darkness, coming in daylight" refers to the fact that at this time of year, local and visiting trawlers will leave their home port and get to their desired fishing grounds before dusk, for some reason if they have their trawl nets fishing when it starts to get dark they tend to get a better return of Prawns, they will normally tow for around 4 hrs, haul their nets drop the contents onto the deck, re-set their net and again tow for another 4 hrs this gives them time to sort their first catch. At dawn they will haul their second tow, again put the catch on deck and secure the net and start to steam back to port, sorting their second catch on the way.

It is common to see a fleet of boats leaving port early evening and returning early morning,

Throughout the quarter 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. Since the introduction of the National Marine Intelligence System, Senior Officers and Intel Officers from both NIFCA and the local MMO carryout monthly Tasking and Co-ordination Group (TCG) meetings both at the Authority's Office (last week of every month) and at the MMO Office North Shields (first week of every month): these meeting give all officers the opportunity to discuss emerging issues, intelligence and plan future joint targeted inspections. As well as working closely with the MMO the Authority's officers have been out and about both at sea and on the shore with the Environment Agency Officers and the Marine Police.

### **Publicity events:**

Officers have been busy throughout this quarter either attending or hosting various activities with the general public and these included:-

- Attending the Bob White Open Boat Sea Angling Competition, Amble,
- Sea Cadets/Scouts from Trinity House out for the day on 2 occasions in August,
- Sea Cadets from Whitley Bay Sea Scouts out for a day also on 2 occasions in August,
- Lynmouth Gala/Summer Fete attended by Officers along with Bravo 1 (RIB), Ford Ranger and Display Tent,

Authority member Martin Kitching has been out on St Aidan on a number of occasions with his surveyors recording any Cetacean sightings. All Committee Members have been invited to a trip on-board St Aidan and in September one of the Authority's new members from Blyth came out with her son for the day.

The Authority agreed that 'St Aidan' could be used in September by Paula Lightfoot in conjunction with the Porcupine Society, to carry out Grab Sampling, using the Authority's Vee-Grab, this was done at various sites within the Berwickshire and North Northumberland Coast Special Area of Conservation (SAC), samples of the grabs have been kept by the Environmental Team for further analysis.

Deputy Chief IFCO Mark Southerton along with Bravo 1 (shore based RIB) and some of the specialised underwater equipment owned by the NIFCA was used this quarter to carry out what has now become an annual charter a 2 day underwater survey of a discharge outfall off Whitburn, this work is being carried out for Mott McDonald (who are working on behalf of the Coal Authority).

**Chief IFCO A B Browne**

## SUMMARY FOR THE NORTHERN AREA

### JULY, AUGUST, SEPTEMBER 2017

Port	Potting Boats	Trawlers	Approx. no. crew	Salmon
<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>	11	1	20	1
<i>Beadnell</i>	3	<i>None</i>	4	3
<i>Newton</i>	1	<i>None</i>	1	
<i>Craster</i>	2	<i>None</i>	3	
<i>Boulmer</i>	3	<i>None</i>	4	4
<i>Amble</i>	22	7	51	7
<i>Totals</i>	60	9	116	15

### **Weather**

Weather conditions throughout this quarter have been as expected with long periods of relatively fine weather allowing the districts fishermen to head to sea.

As the quarter started a light north westerly wind had settled over the district bringing periods of very calm seas. As July wore on the wind veered slightly to the east northeast direction and for a brief period increased in strength also increasing the sea state, but this passed and the wind once again reduced in strength, bringing back the calm seas towards the latter end of the month. As July ended and August began the wind backed to the west but staying relatively calm in strength. The westerly wind was a feature for most of the month apart from a short period of a couple of days during the middle of the month in which the wind veered and increased in strength from a northerly direction, again bringing with it increased sea conditions. With the beginning of September the wind once again veered to the south but remained very light in strength keeping the seas calm. Keeping in pattern with the previous two months, the wind towards the middle of the month veered again and increased in strength, to come from a northerly direction, once again bringing with it some larger seas. Towards the latter end of September the wind backed to the east where we had moments of dense fog patches cling to the coast line.

### **Lobsters**

During this quarter most of the districts fishermen who we have chatted to and inspected have mentioned the fact it has been a very good season for them, with a large number also mentioning the amount of small lobsters on the ground is a positive sign for the future. One notable feature for this quarter in regards to the lobster fishery was the continued good price the fishermen were receiving per kilo for the lobsters, which never dropped below the £10 per kilo mark. Pot bait has been mentioned a few times or to be more precise the lack of it, with some of the districts trawlers heading north to Scotland as pot bait became a little scarce for some. Landings sighted, inspected or surveyed throughout this quarter, have as always depended on weather conditions for that day, size of vessel (the ability to sustain heavier seas), number of pots and area where gear is worked. Average Lobster landings throughout the quarter were between one box and four boxes. There were a couple of exceptions to this when we witnessed six to eight boxes of lobsters being landed. The price per kilo quoted to ourselves was between £10 and £12 (with the slight increase in price received coming towards the latter end of August and the beginning of September)

### **Edible Brown Crabs**

Brown crab landings sighted during this quarter have been in keeping with previous years with average landings sighted as between one box and three boxes, but as with the lobsters, on a couple of occasions seven boxes were seen landed. Prices per kilo quoted to ourselves throughout this quarter were between £1.00 and £1.40, we were quoted £1.60 on one inspection.

### **Velvet Crabs**

Velvet crab landings sighted have followed the trend of previous years, as in not many of the districts fishermen are choosing to land them. Those that have, have only landed approximately half a box, with the one exception of one landing where 5 boxes were seen landed by ourselves, although some of these had been hollied of from previous trips. Prices quoted to ourselves per kilo for velvet crabs were between £1.00 and £1.20, we were quoted on one landing a price of £2.00 per kilo but no one else mentioned this figure.

### **Salmon and Trout**

This quarter has seen the Salmon and Trout season open and close, many of the districts fishermen saying it was a very good beginning but faltered away to nothing towards the end. Salmon landings seen throughout the season were between four and eight, with the very rare sighting of three boxes being landed on one occasion. Prices quoted to ourselves were between £16 dropping to approximately £12 per kilo. Trout landings followed a very similar pattern as to the Salmon, with relatively good landings sighted at the beginning of the quarter but dropping off towards the latter end of the season. Landings seen by ourselves were between one box and three boxes, but please note the higher figure was towards the start of the quarter. Average prices quoted to ourselves per kilo was between £4.50 and £6.20. Grilse (Salmon of 6 kg and under in weight), as with both the salmon and trout, followed the same pattern for landings seen. With numbers of between five and twelve being seen landed prices per kilo throughout the season were between £8.00 and £6.00, with the lower price coming towards the end of the season.

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

We have inspected or chatted to sea and shore anglers this quarter, who have been catching a mixture of mackerel, cod and pollock. We also attended some of the angling competitions that were held during this quarter, where we handed out minimum size cards, tackle box stickers and other such paraphernalia. Those fishermen who had been catching pollock have reported to ourselves that they have been good specimens and fairly large in stature and weight. We saw on a couple of occasions pollock which were (according to the owners) of eight and nine pounds in weight. Mackerel seemed to be in feast or famine mode, with shoals being reported up and down the coast, but not many being reported as being caught from the shore. Some anglers reported that the mackerel at the beginning of the season were large rotund specimens but literally thinned out towards the end, with a noticeable reduction in size and weight. During the course of this quarter we have also attended boat clubs, handing out Bylaw books, minimum size cards and stickers, we were also there to engage with stakeholders and answer any possible questions they may have had.

## **Divers**

We have been in attendance at Beadnell and Seahouses during shore patrols on numerous occasions. Where we have chatted and inspected many divers. Many of the divers were from groups/clubs and heading out or returning from organised dive trips. Many of the members from these groups didn't believe in taking shellfish and enjoyed the pleasure of seeing them in their natural environment. We handed out Bylaw books, minimum size cards, we were also on hand to answer any relevant question they may have had.



**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 JULY, AUGUST AND SEPTEMBER 2017**

A comprehensive guide to indigenous vessels, active in the Southern area.

<b>Port</b>	<b>Potters</b>	<b>Trawlers</b>
North Shields	8	20
Cullercoats/Seaton Sluice	2	0
Blyth	9	11
Newbiggin	2	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>31</b>

**General**

The report during this quarter covers the busiest period within the Northumberland IFCA district, at a time when weather conditions are usually at their most favourable for both commercial and recreational fishing to take place.

This quarter was no exception with generally settled conditions, although fishing activity was disrupted the latter end of July as winds blew off the sea bringing unsettled sea conditions and heavy rain. August was reasonably quiet and September experienced a few more days lost due to sea winds. Sea frets usually affecting the north east coast during this quarter were very few with only the odd day or two hampered with fog.

Potting vessel Sea Cinders grounded in the Tyne estuary while hauling pots later sinking, fortunately the crew were all fine and walked ashore, the vessel was later recovered at Tynemouth Haven to be repaired.

**Fishing Activity**

Traditionally all the inshore potting fleet will have carried out annual painting and maintenance in preparation for the main lobster fishery beginning during this quarter. Lobster catches the last few years have remained reasonably good outside the traditional "Lobster season" and this year was no exception to this, with catches early in the quarter reflecting this. With settled weather, all the inshore grounds were fished and were producing good landings. Lobster catches increased mid to late August and carried on into September with fishermen happy with numbers of lobsters they landed. This ranged depending on the amount of gear hauled from 40 lobster from smaller vessels working fewer gear up to 200+ lobster per landing from larger vessels working greater numbers of pots. This fishery has also been helped with the prices paid for lobsters during this year, which hasn't dropped below £10 per kilo. Average Lobster prices over the quarter were between £12 rising to £14 per kilo.

Brown crab catches are traditionally low during this period as most of the fleet are fishing inshore grounds where the best lobster catches are taken from. There are a few vessels that work gear further offshore, especially as catches inshore begin to fall, or who target brown crab fishing on softer ground. Brown crab catches were as little as a few kilo inshore upto 10 boxes from offshore grounds.

Velvet crabs catches were generally low, with most seen landed in August and from boats working inshore grounds, no more than a couple of box's were seen landed.

The biggest complaint during the quarter was the lack of bait available to fish their pots, a combination of the local fleet either working north of the district or when fishing locally, seeing very little fish bye-catch also the market price for mackerel and Plaice remaining high, with Plaice costing upto £60 per box. As a result of this a number of potting boats spent time mackerel fishing to support their need for pot bait.

### **Mobile Fishing**

A mixed quarter, this quarter can be problematic for the trawling fleet as opportunities are few and catches not always abundant, If nephrop catches are poor locally, boats tend to head north fishing Pelder grounds off Eyemouth over the summer months returning to their home ports in the anticipation of the Northumberland annual winter Nephrop fishery beginning. This year there has been a reasonable nephrop summer fishery locally. This has been the most productive during the dusk and dawn periods. Vessels usually sailed from their ports from 5pm to start their fishing trips, two hauls over the period of dusk and dawn before returning to the ports from 10 a.m. A couple of the bigger vessels fished further out to Graveyard and Farne Deep grounds.

Scallop dredging occurred on a limited basis none of which was in the southern part of the district, the limited activity was seen and monitored east of Amble and outside of the NIFCA district. There were two permitted scallop dredgers under 12m vessels, that have operated from the Royal Quays marina all year.

### **Salmon and Sea Trout**

The season got off to a good start in June, although beach netting can begin earlier

no effort was seen. By the middle of July after a wet period salmon had taken off altogether with boats down to single fish. A few of them stuck it out over the following weeks, but with no improvement a number of them stopped altogether to pursue potting. There were a couple of boats who still landed reasonable amounts from behind the south Tyne pier who fished until the end of the season, but most agreed it was a very difficult season with fish going up the rivers by mid July.

### **Recreational Fishing**

Another busy period for recreational fishing taking advantage of the longer daylight hours and calmer conditions. Two of the charter vessels working from the Tyne have commented on the lower than expected catches for cod over the summer months with a fair bit of effort needed to get reasonable catches, most fish seen landed were around the 3 to 4lb mark with the odd one greater. Pollock has been caught in good numbers with double figured fish landed. Mackerel a summer favourite throughout the whole district has again been patchy with some days very few landed the next an abundance, that was true from both boat and shore. A few patrols were arranged over angling competitions, where officers give out information on Bass regulation and minimum size cards as well as measuring stickers for anglers if they wanted them. There were a few reports of antisocial behaviour from the west pier at Blyth as a result of the lure of mackerel fishing, most of which was low level. Also noted was the removal of the ladders and installation of CCTV to prevent anglers accessing Blyth east pier, this was resulting from an individual who needed to be rescued from the pier during a storm last winter.

Shore gathering for shellfish from the usual hotspots seems to be in decline with only the seasoned individuals sighted over the spring tides.

Bait collection and digging again was popular in the same hotspots, the lower Tyne estuary for shore crab and rag/lug worm, Blyth estuary and lower harbour for mussel and crab, ragworm digging further up the estuary.

Few divers have been seen operating either from the charter vessel from the Tyne or shore diving from either St Marys or Cullercoats. No shellfish has been seen landed.

Average prices over the quarter

Lobster £ 12 per kilo

Brown crab £1.20 kilo

Velvet crab £1.00 kilo

### **DCIFCO M Southerton**