

## **CHIEF INSHORE FISHERIES AND CONSERVATION OFFICER A.B. BROWNE** **QUARTERLY REPORT ENDING 31st DECEMBER 2018**

Throughout the quarter the Authority's enforcement officers have been very busy dividing their time between shore patrols, manning the Authority's vessels, carrying out duties from targeted enforcement to environmental survey work, as well as working in the Authority's office. Both enforcement and environmental officers have also been carrying out joint working with other Agencies/Organisations including MMO, NE and EA, to name a few. Whilst out on shore and sea patrols, officers have been recording sightings including bait-diggers, hand gatherers, vessel sightings inside the NIFCA district as well as outside between the 6 - 12 nm limit. This quarter has seen environmental officers, Nat Wallace and Alex Aitken having to "go the extra mile" as Deputy Chief Environmental IFCO Jon Green has been absent for most of the quarter with ill health; well done to both officers.

Please see IFCO Nick Weir (Southern District) and IFCO Darren Graham's (Northern) quarterly reports, these give a very good insight of the activities that have been going on throughout the last quarter. Lobster and brown crab landings throughout the quarter have been very good, prices for lobsters peaked at approximately £24 per Kilo and brown crab at £2 per Kilo, some Wholesalers saying they could have sold all their shellfish twice over as demand was strong.

By the end of September North Shields and on a smaller scale Blyth started to see some visiting larger trawlers arriving from Ireland and Scotland to target the winter prawn fishery. Most of the visiting trawlers are larger vessels which work between 6 and 30 miles offshore, many of these trawlers use twin rigged gear, outside the 12-mile limit. The NIFCA officers with the help of Globavista and AIS have been closely monitoring the larger trawlers movements and with the help of the MMO Operations Room can visually see their past tracks at a moment's notice. The local and visiting trawlers tend to go to sea daily working between 6-30 miles offshore leaving port just before daylight and returning between 17.00 - 20.00. Officers onboard St Aidan have been carrying out sea patrols with and without MMO Officers on-board, whilst at sea visual checks have been made and the crew have been recording type of gear, position where fishing taking place, checking if they were working inside or outside the 6 & 12m limits.

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 to all the known hot spots, including piers, jettys and rocks to chat with the anglers, they have also been handing out size stickers and cards as well as checking their catches. Regular visits to Tackle Shops have also been carried out by Officers. Also, whilst out on shore patrols officers have been checking various sites where shore gatherers frequent, (no breaches detected). Regular inspections and observations have been carried out at the various bait digging sites and recordings of activities or the lack of activities are passed onto the Environmental Team via Google Maps.

Throughout the quarter the MMO, with the help of Malcolm Gristwood (ex MMO Officer), have been chartering both St Aidan and Bravo 1 to carryout boarding's of larger trawlers working between 6 – 20 miles off shore, the main reason for these charters is to get all the MMO's new

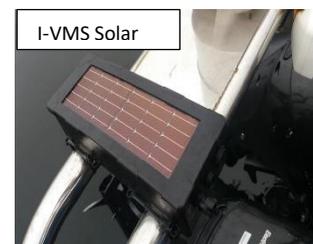
MEOs fully trained and confident in boarding's and inspections at sea. This has been excellent training also for the Authority's officers as well as additional revenue for the NIFCA. Since writing this report the MMO has been back on the phone trying to arrange further charters for 2019.

Cabin RIB update, Hull completed and coming out of mould early January 2019, next visit possibly late January or early February 2019, EMFF have refunded the NIFCA the first stage payment and the second payment will be due after the next visit, if all is satisfactory. Ribcraft remain confident that completion date is still around late February 2019.

St Aidan and Bravo 1 have been used on several occasions to carryout drop down camera work and grab sampling for both Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) (EMFF Project, Newcastle University) and by charter to Mott McDonald acting for Coal Authority.

### **Miscellaneous**

As I'm sure the Committee are aware, I am heavily involved (as a representative for the IFCA's nationally) with the introduction of Inshore Vessel Monitoring System's (I-VMS) on-board all <12m registered fishing vessels starting in 2019 with the 12m – 9m vessels. This Project is being funded by European Maritime Fisheries Fund (EMFF) and part of this Project will involve smaller vessels with no power source on-board to have an autonomous (possibly Solar powered) device fitted. The MMO team were looking for and I volunteered to have a solar powered device from Succorfish fitted on-board Bravo 1 (RIB) to carryout trials. The device was fitted mid-October and a 6-week trial commenced, a full report is due soon.



October saw the Authority's Officer's receiving their annual Occupational Health Check, this was done at the NIFCA Office in Blyth.

Throughout the quarter IFCOs Eric Balsdon and Ricky Willis have been working closely with all the relevant Agencies including MMO, EA, NE and Marine Police. All NIFCA officers are fully trained in collecting and disseminating any piece of intelligence to the intel officers via Intelligence Report (IR) forms, these are then being processed by IFCOs Balsdon and Willis and once sanitized they are sent up to the MMO Operations room at Lancaster House, Newcastle Upon Tyne to be put onto the central database and disseminated the relevant Organisations. IFCOs Balsdon and Willis also attend (1<sup>st</sup> week in the month) the monthly MMO Tactical Coordination Group Meeting in North Shields and similarly host (4<sup>th</sup> week) TCG meeting held at the NIFCA office in Blyth. This is an opportunity for officers from all the agencies present to exchange intel and where appropriate arrange joint working.

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 all the Commercial Shellfish Permit holders will have to replace their existing Tags with new (different coloured) Tags as stated in Byelaw 4 'Crustacea and Molluscs Permitting and Pot Limitation'. Tags were ordered early summer (made in China) and true to their word Unisto delivered on time, meaning NIFCA officers could distribute tags to fishers on pre-arranged dates in December at various ports and harbour's throughout the NIFCA district. This year after discussions with fishers regarding marking of fishing gear/identification of gear, officers arranged a meeting with Unisto to get them to design larger tags with fisher's boats details and owners name lasered on, approximately 30% of fishers ordered these tags and when they picked up their pot tags, they were also given their marker tags.

The Authority still has a number of 'Fixed Shellfish Gauges' for sale at the Authority's Office in Blyth and a number of both Commercial and Recreational fishers are purchasing them when they come to collect their tags.

## SUMMARY FOR THE NORTHERN AREA OF THE DISTRICT

### October, November and December 2018

<b>PORT</b>	<b>POTTING BOATS</b>	<b>TRAWLERS</b>	<b>APPROX NO CREW</b>
<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.**

October started with light south westerly winds which maintained a fairly calm sea allowing most of the districts fishermen to head to sea and tend their gear. As October continued the wind veered to a more westerly direction, this continued with the relatively calm sea state. As October ended and November began the wind continued to veer to the north and increased in strength which raised the sea state for a short period before the wind moved to the south easterly direction, reducing in strength, which in turn reduced the sea state. This trend continued into December, but the wind increased towards the festive period of the month.

#### **Lobsters**

Lobster landings seen and inspected during this quarter have been slightly higher than expected compared to similar times over the past recent years. October, we saw landings of between 12 and 113 with one vessel from Seahouses seen landing approximately 400 on one occasion, prices per kilo reported to ourselves during the month of October started at approximately £14.00 per kilo and increased to approximately £16.00 per kilo towards the latter end of the month. November followed the same trend, with landings seen of between 20 and 120 lobsters during the month. With prices per kilo of between £17.00 and £20.50 per kilo quoted to us. December's landings that we witnessed were between 10 lobsters and one box with prices being between £21.00 and £24.50, in time for the festive period.

#### **Edible Brown Crabs**

Brown crab landings seen during this quarter have averaged between 2 boxes and 6 boxes, with some of the northern districts fishermen stating they thought that the brown crab season was out of sync by approximately six weeks. Prices quoted to ourselves during this quarter for brown crabs, were between £1.60 and £2.00 per kilo.

### **Velvet Crabs**

Velvet crab landings during this quarter have been expected, with only a limited number of skippers choosing to land them, average landings seen were between half a box and one box. But these sightings were sporadic to say the least. Prices quoted to ourselves were between £1.30 and £2.00 per kilo.

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

Most of the anglers we have encountered have been at sea, during this quarter. For those that we have seen with catches onboard, have had predominantly Cod, with average weights of approximately 2 to 3 pounds, Especially towards the end of November and beginning of December, with most anglers saying they had had a good year for catching.

### **Divers**

Interaction with divers during this quarter has been limited to say the least, with Beadnell launch area closing for the winter months at the end of October, and only a very small number of vessels choosing to launch from Seahouses.

## **SUMMARY FOR THE SOUTHERN AREA OF THE DISTRICT**

**October, November and December 2018**

**IFCO N. Weir**

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

<b><u>PORT</u></b>	<b><u>POTTERS</u></b>	<b><u>TRAWLERS</u></b>	<b><u>Approx Crew</u></b>	<b><u>Salmon boats</u></b>
North Shields	8	20	55	
Cullercoats/Seat on Sluice	1	0	1	
Blyth	9	11	42	
Newbiggin	2	0	3	
<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>8</b>

Report covering the ports of;

North Shields (including Royal Quays marina) Cullercoats, Seaton Sluice, Blyth and Newbiggin by the sea.

## **General**

This quarter is generally a busy time for the vessels and ports of the southern district, with the large numbers of lobster being caught at the beginning of the quarter and then prices rising significantly in the later months. This quarter also sees the beginning of the Nethrop fishery in the Farne deeps with large numbers of visiting trawlers arriving in the district.

The weather over the quarter has been relatively good for the time of year especially in October through early November, with prolonged periods of calm weather interspersed with heavy swells and some gales.

## **Potting Activity**

The quarter seemed to have been a good one for the potting fleet, landings in October remained high with a belief that the warm waters resulting from the hot summer had aided catches. Most skippers we have spoken to were of the opinion that their takings year to date were up on last year. This was certainly aided by the higher than normal prices being seen throughout the quarter, increasing from £15.00 to £24.00 per kilo for Lobster and between £1.50 to £2.00 for Brown Crab. These high prices were almost certainly driven by lower catches across the rest of the east coast especially the Bridlington area where one wholesaler has (reported to NEIFCA) receiving 47,000 kg less of Lobster than the year before. Most vessels in the southern district have been landing 1-2 Boxes of Lobster per day and 2-3 boxes of Brown Crab.

## **Mobile Fishing**

Mobile fishing within the district has been busy at the end of the quarter, with the return of the district's vessels from operating outside of the district. Within the district fishing has been taking place north of Blyth in the Newbiggin area approximately 4-6 miles out. November also saw the arrival of the visiting trawler fleet for the Farne deep Nethrop fishery which has reportedly seen a good showing.

## **Recreational fishing**

Recreational activity remained high as the quarter began, mainly for anglers on piers and from the shore, this was especially prevalent as the quarter moved on with the sea's increasing. A late show of Mackerel as well as codling of 2-3lb were the main species we saw landed. In December the last 40 metres of the seaward end of Blyth Pier was closed due to structural damage.

Intertidal fishing was quiet over the quarter, with a reduced number of gatherers working. Those that were reported a good number of Lobster amongst the rocks but that the number of small lobsters reduced significantly as the quarter progressed. The response to the change of bylaws for Lobster allowance was positively met by all spoken too.