

## **ACTING CHIEF INSHORE FISHERIES & CONSERVATION OFFICER** **M. SOUTHERTON - QUARTERLY REPORT ENDING 31<sup>st</sup> MARCH 2019**

All the Authority Officers have been very busy during this quarter, dividing their time from working on shore and at sea carrying out the relevant functions of the Authority.

An unusual quarter for fisheries as there has been a lot of uncertainty surrounding the industry regarding Brexit and what this will mean nationally as well as locally.

Most of the landings from fisheries we have in Northumberland end up on the European markets, for shellfish, so there is a worry in particular to transporting shellfish to these markets. As I write this report it is still unclear what the UK position is regarding Brexit will be, with dates changing on an almost weekly basis.

There has been a lot of emergency planning for fisheries going on, with weekly "SITREPS" (Situation Reports) with both IFCAs / MMO in preparation for day one readiness, joint working and utilising IFCA vessels for patrols. Although this is more evident for IFCA's on the south coast, the impacts could well reach Northumberland.

Fishing for leave organized a 20 vessel protest up to Newcastle in March to highlight the views of the fishing industry, which resulted in some egg throwing targeted at Remainers on the millennium bridge. A traditional fishing coble was also sent on the back of a low loader to London as part of the publicity drive.

The Authority has also supported the MMO in particular with some joint working to facilitate the training of marine enforcement officers for sea riding duties and this work was undertaken 19<sup>th</sup> January and 14<sup>th</sup> February, both these patrols were in challenging conditions with the first patrol cut short when the towing eye from the RIB snapped while being under tow from St Aidan.

Additional joint working has also been conducted at sea with an officer from the Environment Agency during the quarter.

The Fishery Officers reports give a good overview of the vessel movements, activities and catches throughout the district for the quarter.

Weather conditions in comparison to the same period last year (Beast from the east) have meant a reasonable winter period, generally dry with above average temperatures, record breaking for some parts of the country. There were a couple of named storms that blew through the district Gareth, Erik and Freya obviously disrupting fishing activity as they passed through Northumberland.

In general though, fishing activity has been buoyant with reasonable catches helped along with above average prices for both lobster and brown crab, a trend which the industry are hoping will continue. The annual nephrop fishery has also enjoyed another post new year fishery, with good catches still being made up until the end of April, this

has also been a trend the last few years with this fishery extending beyond its previous norm.

The 3 year pot tag colour change to the NIFCA commercial shellfish permit began in January and officers visited ports in the district, distributing new batches of pot tags with a flyer encouraging suggested fitting and disposal advice of old tags.

Surface marker tags were also distributed to fishers who took up the offer of having personal tags made up to assist in them complying with the marking of fishing gear byelaw.

Fishers have been given to the end of March to have all the new pot tags fitted to their gear. Surface marker tags have been used straight away with very good levels of compliance now seen during gear inspections at sea.

### **FLAG Funding and EMFF Funding**

The Authority successfully applied for flag funding for a 15 month Brown Crab project in Northumberland, this position was filled by Andrew Boon who started the project in early January.

The Authority also had an EMFF application in for two iVMS units for the St Aidan and the new cabin RIB. The two units were supplied by Succorfish, one unit is with RibCraft and being installed on the new RIB in build, the other unit was fitted to St Aidan early April.

The Authority also have an EMFF grant for the replacement 9.5m cabin RIB "Robert Arckless MBE", currently in build with RibCraft based in Yeovil. The situation to date with this is that representatives from the Authority made a second visit to the yard in early March to check on progress and look at another vessel in the completion phase to get a better feel for how our vessel will be fitted out. Officers also contributed to the layout and ergonomics of the wheelhouse layout, this was also tied in with the second stage payment sign off. During the visit all the hull and under deck work has been completed, wheelhouse also fitted. Ribcraft continue to forward build photos now showing both engines in situ as well as the fitting out of the wheelhouse electrics. RibCraft are still expecting the vessel to be complete by the end of April.

Sea trials will be done in Portland and then the RIB will be delivered by road up to the Royal Quays where officers will carry out further familiarizing training before she takes up her new berth at Amble marina.

Lastly, the Authority have just had confirmed their final EMFF grant was successful, this covers Environmental Monitoring and was for equipment and software packages.

### **Staffing**

The Authority have advertised and now recruited a replacement for Eric who will be sadly leaving the Authority after 10 years as a part time officer to enjoy his well-deserved retirement. I would like to pass on my thanks to Eric, on behalf of the Authority and all the staff who have worked with him and we wish him a very happy retirement.

Eric's replacement Mark Lynn will begin his employment on the 23<sup>rd</sup> April and is expected to attend the Quarterly Meeting.

Sticking on the subject of retirement, Bravo 1 the Authorities 7 metre Rib will also be retiring after 10 years faithful service hopefully this will be at the end of April when we will be taking delivery of the new Rib and then the plan is to sell Bravo 1.

The Environmental report gives a detailed list of the work that has been done this quarter. I would also like to give my thanks to the team who have had an increased work load during the quarter, with the continued absence of Jon, but this has been lightened somewhat with Andrew Boon doing additional days alongside his crab project to support the environmental team.

The Engineers report also gives an in-depth list of maintenance and repairs carried out over the quarter. St Aidan is currently off service undergoing annual maintenance at the Royal Quays marina. This work was pre planned as the marina is closed to marine traffic undergoing maintenance to the loch gates. It is expected that St Aidan will be back at sea and fully operational by the time members receive this report.

#### **4x4 vehicle Ford Ranger**

Reliability issues have become more apparent in the last couple of months with the Ford Ranger, this has been due to a recurrent flat battery.

This issue was first raised with the Northumberland Council depot at Stakeford where the vehicle is leased from and serviced. Because the vehicle is still under warranty all repairs are undertaken from Bristol Street motors in Morpeth.

The vehicle was in Morpeth for a replacement brake caliper, tests on the battery were carried out and no fault was found. We have since had at least 2 completely flat batteries, which has prevented the vehicle being used for planned works.

The problem was raised again with Northumberland Fleet maintenance, and the recovery vehicle attended the office beginning of April and jump started the vehicle. The vehicle was used on that day and dropped off at the depot. The engineer there reported having several problems with flat batteries on other vehicles due to the tracker fitted to the vehicle. I've asked for the tracker to be disconnected, which it was, and the vehicle was left for 2 days at the depot to see if the battery retained charge. The vehicle was picked up and started normally. Hopefully this has now resolved the issue, no other problems with the vehicle to date.

#### **Courses**

February, Deputy Chief IFCO Southerton and Environmental IFCO Aitken attended the Annual IFCA Enforcement Course held in Torquay. The Course has been running for approximately 28 years and has always been considered an excellent way for officers to get the opportunity to meet and work with officers from around the country from their respective IFCAs, as well as all of the training which is delivered.

The main drives of the course is the standardized training for all new officers and to re-refresh more experienced officers. The week involves covering fisheries Legislation and Enforcement powers and procedures, as well as practical skills in fish / shellfish

I.D. and understanding fishing gear in more detail, these are all vital skills required by officers returning to their individual IFCA as competent warranted Fisheries Officers.

Ian Jones who is the National training officer for IFCA's also held a two-day training course at the Authorities office in March. This was targeted at the enforcement IFCO's with 5 officers undertaking the training. The course was titled "Lines of Questioning" and covered IFCO powers under MACAA, PACE and relevant offences; the second day there were several roleplay exercises undertaken.

In March IFCO Nick Weir began his RYA advances powerboat training, spending two days 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> working from the Royal Quays marina, using Bravo 1 the second day involved a night passage. This course will conclude when an independent assessor will finally sign Nick off.

**SUMMARY FOR THE NORTHERN AREA OF THE DISTRICT**  
**JANUARY FEBUARY MARCH 2019**  
**IFCO DARREN GRAHAM**

<i>PORT</i>	POTTING BOATS	<i>TRAWLERS</i>	APPX NO. CREW
<i>North of border</i>	9	<i>None</i>	16
<i>Berwick</i>	3	0	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.**

Weather throughout this quarter has been very varied. Once the festive period had been and gone, January started with a period of calm, with light westerly winds, calm seas allowing the fishermen of the northern part of the district to head to sea and tend their gear. Towards the middle of the month the wind veered to come from a more northerly direction, increasing in strength and raising the sea state, with some of the district's fishermen choosing this period to commence maintenance on vessels and gear. The wind backed to the west towards the latter end of the month decreasing in strength, the sea state followed suit. January ended with calm seas and light winds which continued into February for the first few days, then storm Eric hit the UK during the middle of the month with strong northerly winds, increased sea state, which then backed to come from the south. Once the storm had passed there was a period of calm for the rest of the month, this accompanied by bright sunny skies made for a pleasant end to February. March followed a similar trend to February, with a period of calm seas and light winds, until the middle part of the month when storm Gareth descended on the district, bringing high winds, big seas and snow flurries. Once the storm passed, the winds backed to a southerly direction, easing in strength, reducing the sea state and this continued till the latter end of the month.

### **Lobsters**

As is the trend for this time of year, some fishermen have been tending their pots on a two to three day stand period. Some of the larger vessels have been making the most of the sustained periods of calm and tending their gear on a more regular basis, with one wholesaler being described as “desperate for” shellfish during the early part of January. Lobster landings seen during this quarter have been higher than expected, when compared with the same time period in previous years, with it not un-common to see approximately 40 lobsters being landed from some of the districts smaller fishing vessels. The larger vessels working more gear and further off shore were also landing large numbers, with landings of approximately 80 to 100 lobsters being seen landed. This along with the price of lobsters being between £22 at the beginning of January to approximately £19 per kilo quoted to ourselves towards the end of January. February saw average landings seen reduce to between 20 and 40, Prices remained to between £19 at the start of the month, dropping to £17 at the latter end, quoted to ourselves. Landings seen during March followed a similar pattern to February, where average landings seen were between 20 to 40, with the odd exception where a couple of boxes were seen landed, although this was half hollied off from the previous day. Prices per kilo quoted to ourselves during March were £17 at the start of the month, reducing to £16 towards the middle but increasing to £19 per kilo at the latter end of the quarter. One skipper from Holy Island who we chatted to wanted to point out that it’s the first time he has seen small juvenile lobsters in his pots situated further off from the shore.

### **Edible Brown Crabs**

Brown crab landings sighted during this quarter have been very dependant on the area the skipper has chosen to work his pots, with some landings seen of low single numbers of crabs, to vessels landing 10 and 15 boxes sighted by ourselves. With prices per kilo quoted as between £2.00 and £2.30. throughout the quarter.

### **Velvet Crabs**

Velvet Crab landings have followed previous years, with only a few skippers choosing to land them. Those that have landed were between half a box and three boxes, although the larger numbers seen landed were always after the weekend and the crabs had been hollied off, as the wholesalers only wanted to take them on a Tuesday and Thursday for a period of time. The price quoted to us remained steady throughout the quarter of £2.00 per kilo.

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

The Amble open fishing competition was attended by officers. They were informed of a tragic event earlier that day when an angler was washed from the rocks at Howick, before the start of the competition. When the competition was under way, the weather wasn’t in the anglers favour, and very little was seen caught. Officers attended the weigh in later in the day when the largest fish seen landed was a 5lb 4oz Cod. Officers have also engaged with anglers whilst on RIB patrols

### **Divers**

No divers were seen during this quarter.

**SUMMARY FOR THE SOUTHERN AREA OF THE DISTRICT**  
**JANUARY, FEBRUARY AND MARCH 2019**  
**IFCO N. WEIR**

**A Comprehensive Guide to Indigenous Active Vessels**

<b>PORT</b>	<b>POTTERS</b>	<b>TRAWLERS</b>	<b>APPROX CREW</b>	<b>SALMON BOATS</b>
<b>North Shields</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>55</b>	
<b>Cullercoats/Sea ton Sluice</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</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>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**

The first quarter of the year is typically the quietest within the southern part of our district, with the potting activity being hampered by poor weather, cold sea water and maintenance for vessels and equipment. This is normally replicated for recreational fishermen and gatherers. However, this should be the busiest time for the trawling fleet, seeing vessels from around the country descending on North Shields to catch Nephrops in the Farne deeps.

January saw better than expected weather for the month with only the occasional day being lost to poor weather, this was reflected with higher than average sea temperatures of about 7-8°C at the beginning of the month dropping with a cold snap towards the end of the month. In Newbiggin-by-the-sea it was often impossible to launch from the beach during January due to storms in early December removing too much sand and causing a step that the launching tractors were unable to cope with unless the tide was favourable. February for the main was unseasonably calm with long periods of flat seas and slight winds and bright if somewhat cold days, March was unremarkable with the weather fluctuating between fine spells and moderate patches.

**Potting Activity**

This quarter seems to have been a very good one for most of the potting fleet. Because of better than expected weather and sea temperatures, those that were of a mind to fish seem to have done very well with landings on average of 1-2 boxes of lobster and the same of Brown Crab. The highest landings in the southern district for one vessel was; 1'835, 974 and 971kg of lobster and 20'900, 11'029 and 5500kg of Brown crab. Those vessels that also target prawns have seen a good showing with between 6-10

trays being landed by some of the vessels. Paradoxically this seeming abundance of shellfish has not seen a large reduction in price, with prices starting at £22 per kilo in January then dropping to £17 in mid-February before climbing again to £19 by the end of March. The price for Brown Crab has fluctuated between £2 and £2.30 throughout the quarter.

### **Mobile Fishing**

Mobile fishing within the district has been very busy throughout the quarter, with both local and visiting trawlers operating in the outer area of the district. This has tended to be from Newbiggin-by-the-sea to the southern border. These vessels have also been operating further out and as far north as Amble. All reports have told of good Nephrops landings during this period. As a look forward, when officers have spoken to drift and beach net fishermen during this period it has become apparent that with the coming diminished length of season for beach nets this year and the banning of drift nets targeting Salmon, that there will be much reduced effort by fishermen in this area. The only report of a vessel using a fixed engine in the district came via an over-zealous chief fisheries officer who is unable to follow both his physicians and wife's advice regarding essential rest and recuperation.

### **Recreational fishing**

Recreational activity was low throughout the quarter, although some sporadic activity was seen mainly from anglers from the shore. Those spoken too including a number of sea kayakers and recreational boats reported poor fishing with 2-3lb Cod being the most prevalent of catch.

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 including a promising number of small lobsters boding well for the future.