

North Western Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority

Quarterly Meeting: 6 December 2011

Morecambe Town Hall: 10.30 a.m.

Agenda Item: 6

FISHERIES: AUGUST TO OCTOBER 2011

Owing to intense pressure of duties, principally associated with cockle fisheries, my report on fishing and other activities that have taken place during the past quarter is somewhat abridged. Nonetheless as usual more detailed information on the fisheries can be found in the area officer's individual reports.

Members should note that there is no report for this quarter covering North Morecambe Bay (Haverigg Point to Arnside). This is due to the new area officer Ian Dixon, only being in post for the last 3 weeks of the reporting period.

Fishing operations offshore were severely hampered by lengthy spells of strong to gale-force winds, particularly so during late September and early October. Whilst fishermen were seen to have taken every opportunity to put to sea, the number of days lost to unfavourable weather during the quarter will undoubtedly have resulted in considerable loss of earnings for all sectors of the inshore fleet.

The Authority's offshore enforcement capability was severely compromised this quarter due to a major engine failure in the patrol vessel "Solway Protector". Details of this can be found in the report of the Master, Hugh Thinnesen. Members will no doubt be aware that the vessel is now in its 22nd year of operation and despite being well maintained, there is an increasing likelihood of unforeseen and potentially expensive breakdowns such as this occurring at any time.

Despite problems with the "Solway Protector" enforcement officers including the crew of the patrol boat have been kept very busy during the past 3 months. Management and enforcement of the Ribble cockle fishery, as expected, proved to be extremely demanding, particularly so after the introduction of the emergency byelaw to close the fishery. At times officers were required to work for lengthy periods during both day and night. On top of this, staff were also required to undertake their more normal routine duties attending to the management of various other fisheries within their respective areas.

The North Western IFCA has now been in place for 6 months. I think it fair to say that all the staff have worked extremely hard since the amalgamation of the two SFCs to make the IFCA a success. With regard to enforcement staff, I would like to inform Members that as Enforcement Director it is my considered opinion that the Authority is being well served by its current team of enforcement officers.

D. T. DOBSON
Enforcement Director
17 November 2011

Master of the "Solway Protector" - H Thinnesen

"SOLWAY PROTECTOR"

During the quarter the "Solway Protector" has encountered major engine failure resulting in the vessel being off-line for quite some time.

On the 29th September 2011 while carrying out our usual pre sea checks it was found that the port main engine had lost most of its coolant out of the header tank. Further checks revealed water had emulsified around the oil filler port, but no water was found in the oil sump. To find the source of the problem we had to undertake various investigations as follows:

1. Both engine exhaust manifolds were removed and pressure tested these were found to be in good order.
2. The main exhaust pipe was disconnected in order to inspect the turbo charger; this was found also to be in good working order.
3. The after cooler was disconnected from the engine and pressure tested for leaks; no problems were found there, and the main engine raw water pump was also checked.
4. Finally we removed the engine oil cooler and pressure tested the unit which revealed a very small leak. This apart there was no clear indication as to why the coolant had been lost.

The engine was re-assembled and a new oil cooler fitted.

On the 11th October 2011 "Solway Protector" was ready for sea trials, once we were clear of the harbour the engine was run at three quarter speed until the engine got up to temperature. The patrol boat engineer checked the engine to see if it was pressurising as this would indicate a problem with one of the cylinder heads. After about one hour running, excessive steam pressure was found venting out of the engine block, the port engine was shut down and "Solway Protector" returned back to Whitehaven on one engine.

After arriving back at Whitehaven it was decided that the cylinder heads would have to be removed for further inspection. Once the right hand cylinder head had been removed apparent signs of water and rust were found around number six and eight piston liners and spacer plate, along with corrosion inside the engine on the bottom of number seven and eight piston liners.

Further inspection revealed an apparent crack on the engine block around the number two liner. To rectify the problem this would require the engine to be removed and transported to Caterpillar agent Finnings in order for them to carry out specialised machining to the engine block. The engine was removed from the "Solway Protector" on the 21st October 2011.

We expect to have the engine back and the patrol boat online towards the end of November.

All the above work was carried out by the patrol boat engineer with Authority's officers assisting.

While sheltering from the weather in Saltom Bay, it was noticed when weighing anchor that there was excessive movement in the deck area supporting the windlass. The underside of the deck was inspected for cracks to which none were found, however the foot plate supporting the windlass was made out of light alloy material and was showing signs of deterioration. It was

decided that we would remove the old plate and replace it with a much larger footplate which would then spread the load over a much larger deck area. New stainless steel plates were fabricated at McGrady's Engineering and fitted by the patrol boat crew.

SEVEN METRE RIB - "PROTECTOR BRAVO"

"Protector Bravo" has again provided a valued service this quarter, with only one fault to report on. The Honda engine which runs the hydraulic pump for the Seawinch net and pot hauler was again struggling with fuel problems. Rectifying this problem cannot be done in situ, therefore the engine and hydraulic pump assembly were removed from the boat and taken up to our workshop on the harbour side for repair. The carburettor and fuel pump were stripped down and cleaned before being reassembled.

I am pleased to report that "Protector Bravo" is now back up and running with no further faults to report.

All above work was carried out by the patrol boat engineer with the Authority's officers assisting.

BOARDINGS, PATROLS AND INSPECTIONS

The main engine failure, shore commitments, and long periods of poor weather resulted in quite a number of patrol days at sea being lost this quarter.

This apart a total of 12 patrols were carried out in the district using both "Solway Protector" and "Protector Bravo".

Sightings of fishing vessels made from the "Solway Protector" totalled 6 with none being logged as visiting vessels. A total of 14 boardings and inspections were carried out at sea in "Solway Protector" and "Protector Bravo".

Compliance with byelaws and other relevant fisheries legislation at sea has been on the whole very good. This resulted in no serious infringements or incidents being detected in the district during the quarter.

Details of patrols and sightings can as usual be found in appendices 'A' and 'B'.

SURVEYS

ENTEC Survey

"Solway Protector" was scheduled to carry out a seabed sampling survey for environmental consultants ENTEC UK Ltd. Unfortunately the problems with the patrol boat's main engines mentioned above stopped us from carrying out this work. We would hopefully expect to get back on track with this work during December.

**Master "Solway Protector"
15th November 2011**

" Solway Protector "

DURATION OF PATROLS AND SIGHTINGS

Date	Area Patrolled	Sightings	Sea time	
			Hrs.	Mins.
28/09/2011	West of Whitehaven/Maryport/Silloth	6	4	30
11/10/2011	Sea trials - west of Whitehaven	0	2	50

" Solway Protector "
PATROL STATISTICS

	31/8/11 - 31/10/2011		1/5/11 - 31/8/11	
Number of patrols and passages	2	patrols	42	patrols
Seatime	7 hrs	20 mins	242 hrs	15 mins
Average length of patrol	3 hrs	40 mins	5 hrs	47 mins
Total distance covered	85	miles	2357	miles
Average distance per patrol	43	miles	56	miles
Fuel used	250	gallons	5414	gallons
Average fuel used per patrol	125	gallons	129	gallons
<u>Total identified sightings:</u>	6	vessels	316	vessels
Local	6	vessels	270	vessels
Visiting	0	vessels	46	vessels
<u>Types of fishing vessels sighted:</u>	<u>< 45'</u>	<u>> 45'</u>	<u>< 45'</u>	<u>> 45'</u>
Trawlers	1	0	92	19
Beam Trawlers	0	0	0	2
Twin Rig Trawlers	0	0	0	19
Pair Trawlers	0	0	0	0
Anchor Seiners	0	0	0	0
Fly Draggers	0	0	0	0
Gill Netters	0	0	6	0
Shrimpers	4	0	0	0
Twin Beam Shrimpers	0	0	11	0
Whelk Potters	0	0	0	1
Potting Boats	0	0	40	1
Scallop Dredgers	0	0	0	4
Mussel Dredgers	0	0	0	0
Cockle Dredgers	0	0	0	0
Netters	0	0	0	0
Anglers	1	0	121	0
<u>Total:</u>	6	0	270	46

NORTHERN (CUMBRIA)

HAVERIGG POINT TO BURGHMARSH POINT

Senior Fishery Officers, E. Thinnesen and M. Dobson

GENERAL

This reporting period for the shore includes a large portion of shore officer time working in the Southport/Lytham area since the opening of the cockle season in September. It has been an active time for the officers from this patch with a number of cases tied up with enforcement activity. A joint operation was also conducted with the Environment Agency, as detailed in the other duties section.

TRAWLING

There has been little trawling activity during the majority of the reporting period due to bad weather and strong tides during the breaks. The activity only picked up during October with reports of good catches of skate and plaice.

The shrimp beamers fishing from Silloth have continued to have a poor year, with catches well below historical averages and the price for rough shrimps now as low as £0.70 per kg. In addition to this, one of the Silloth vessels (Boy Bailey) sunk whilst fishing 4 miles off Silloth. Both crewmen were rescued by the RNLI after an hour in the water.

SCALLOPS

The majority of the vessels in Whitehaven and Maryport have spent the last week of October preparing for the forthcoming scallop fishery in the Isle of Man. Some of the larger Scottish registered vessels have started landing queenies into Whitehaven with good catches being reported.

POTTING

Throughout this period the potting effort has been reducing in preparation for the winter, with most fishermen gradually bringing in their pots. Catch reports are showing falling numbers, which is to be expected with the reduced effort. One of the commercial potters in Whitehaven replaced his vessel this period with a larger one, so we will expect an increased effort from him next year.

OFFSHORE NETTING

There has been steady activity by vessels from Whitehaven, Barrow and Maryport netting in the area, targeting bass in the early part of the period, with good returns reported from the commercial fishermen in Barrow. Skate has continued to be targeted and there are reports of good catches throughout the district especially towards the latter end of the reporting period. The last two weeks of October has also seen a return of decent numbers of codling, along with the continued complaints from the fishermen regarding the increased numbers of seals again this year. It has been noted that there are a number of non-commercial fishermen working nets on a very regular basis, bringing in large quantities of fish, claiming to be for personal use. These fishermen are being monitored in attempts to identify any infringements and the local MMO officer has been informed of our concerns.

BEACH NETTING

During this reporting period the beaches in Cumbria were closed to netting under the terms of Byelaw No: 10 (Cumbria SFC) from 31st May. Regular patrols were carried out of both intertidal and inshore areas, with the result that no illegal activity was found to be taking place.

ANGLING

Recreational angling in Cumbria has continued to be popular, with marks all along the coastline reporting good returns of bass at various times and the occasional codling, with catches of this species increasing in numbers in the latter part of October. Other species that continue to be targeted along the Cumbrian coast include flounder, dab, and small whiting. Lesser-spotted dogfish have again continued to be caught in such numbers to be considered a nuisance to local anglers.

BAIT DIGGING

There have been reduced numbers of beach patrols this period due to the need to support the cockle fishery enforcement at Southport, therefore very little information has been gathered on bait digging effort. However verbal reports received identify that all known marks are still producing bait to usual levels.

OTHER DUTIES

This reporting period has included considerable time at Southport and Lytham assisting the enforcement activity in that area of the district. Assistance has also been given to the new Barrow district officer, ensuring he has had support during his settling in period. A joint operation in conjunction with the Environment Agency was also carried in out October (19th and 20th) focusing on reports of illegal netting in the Workington Box area (CSFC Byelaw 10(2)).

ENFORCEMENT

Enforcement activity this period for the Cumbria based officers has included the completion of 5 Home Office Cautions for an illegal cockling offence prior to the season opening at Leasowe (as reported last period), and the offer and acceptance of 2 Home Office Cautions for landing of under-sized Lobsters at Whitehaven. The latter of these offences was originally being held with the intention of offering a Fixed Administrative Penalty (FAP). However, the on-going delays from the MMO in finalising the policy required us to take the alternative option of the Home Office Cautions. A Verbal warning was also been given out during this period to a shore angler for retention of undersized codling and an education exercise given to a commercial netter with regards to the CSFC Fixed Engine Byelaw No: 10.

SOUTH MORECAMBE BAY

ARNSIDE TO KNOTT END

Senior Fishery Officer, S. J. Waite

TRAWLING

During this last quarter I have observed no activity taking place either on a commercial or hobby basis. This fishery continues to prove very disappointing and I expect little improvement in the foreseeable future.

SHRIMPS

During this last quarter fishermen associated with the inshore shrimp fishery have continued to work on a regular basis. Landings throughout this last quarter have however, proved very disappointing after the promising start reported in my last report.

During this last quarter I have observed little increase in activity from hobby fishermen working push nets working between Warton Sands and Heysham Harbour.

COCKLES

During this last period I have observed no activity taken place in this fishery. During this last quarter I received no further reports of Chinese women removing small amounts of cockles on an occasional basis. During this last quarter I have continued to check all the cockle beds in my area but only on an occasional basis due to working outside my District in the cockle fishery. There has been no improvement in stocks of both mature and immature cockle in my area and as a result all beds remain closed.

MUSSELS

During this period I have observed no harvesting of mussels on any of the recognised skears between Bare and Heysham Harbour although fishermen have occasionally surveyed the beds. I have occasionally received reports of occasional activity from skears in the Knott End area, although I have observed no activity taking place.

During this last quarter I have been unable to monitor mussel beds in my area as often as I would have liked due to pressure from the Ribble cockle fishery. I hope to rectify this during the next quarter.

During this last quarter I have continued to collect shellfish samples for Lancaster City Council and Wyre District Council.

DRIFT STAKE AND SET NETS

Effort in this fishery remains poor with fishermen associated with the inshore drift net fishery concentrating their efforts in other seasonal fisheries until the seasonal closure.

Improvement in landings reported in my last report have continued with fishermen reporting a slight improvement in Bass over the corresponding year. Towards the end of the last quarter, landings of cod also proved very disappointing with fishermen reporting no cod being caught. Fishermen thought that the very mild weather experienced this last quarter might have been a factor.

Towards the end of the quarter fishermen removed their inshore boats from their seasonal moorings.

During this last quarter I have continued to observe both stake and set nets throughout my area although little activity has taken place with stake nets being lifted for long periods. During this last quarter I have had no contact with fishermen associated with the set and stake net fishery, and as a result I have no information regarding landings.

DINGHY AND SHORE ANGLING

During this last quarter both dinghy and shore anglers have reported landings of Plaice, Dabs, a large quantity of undersize Bass and mature fish being landed. Eels have proved better than recent years and anglers have reported a few cod being landed towards the end of the quarter.

Shore anglers have continued to fish over high and low water tides at the top end of Morecambe Bay, the Stone Jetty at Morecambe, Heysham and Arnside. Heysham Bass Nursery Area has continued to be fished on a regular basis, although only limited checks have taken place due to pressure from fisheries outside my area.

Effort from dinghy anglers has proved disappointing. This has been due to long periods of strong winds over high water. Dinghy anglers have also encountered problems when launching due to encountering clay which has weighed them down. Anglers have suggested that the rock armour sea defences might be a contributory factor in this respect.

Due to pressure from the Ribble cockle fishery I have had little time to gather information in my report as I have had insufficient opportunity to conduct regular checks and patrols. Information has been gathered from those fishermen associated with the various fishing activities in the Morecambe Bay area.

MISCELLANEOUS

It is with great sadness that I have to report the death of Richard Langley. Dick was an influential member of the Morecambe Bay fishing industry and his knowledge of the inshore fishery will be greatly missed. Dick served on many working groups, most recently becoming a member of our new IFCA committee.

CENTRAL AREA

RIVER WYRE TO RIVER ALT

Senior Fishery Officer, S. Brown

GENERAL

As a result of the exceptional amount of staff time taken up by the policing of the Ribble cockle fishery it has not been possible to devote the time deserved to other fisheries. I wish to record my thanks for the efforts of all the other officers and staff from both NWIFCA and other agencies who have worked with me during this extremely busy period. Efforts often well in excess of contractual requirements by staff from many agencies need to be recorded. The local government resources put in to contain the disruption caused by this fishery have been exceptional. The time to evaluate the management of what are really peripheral if extremely lucrative fisheries is clearly upon us.

TRAWLING

Inshore trawling from Fleetwood has reached another low ebb with only two full time vessels pursuing the fishery. Moderate catches of plaice, sole and roker have been reported. It is encouraging to report an increase in sole landings (primarily by an inshore beam trawler) following a long period of decline in landings of that species.

Inshore trawler 'Mi Amour' has been transferred to work from Brixham.

SHRIMPING

Very poor reports have been received from the Marshside and Southport fishermen. Most shrimping activity at Lytham has been suspended as the fishermen have taken advantage of the lucrative cockle fishery. Part time fishermen have made a few modest landings. Reports from the Fylde Coast push netters suggest extremely erratic catches.

COCKLES

August saw most of the southern officers with occasional and much appreciated assistance from officers from the northern areas engaged in a continuous struggle to contain determined cockle

fishing effort throughout the closed season. Considerable disruption of fishing effort was achieved but given the scale of activity and high value of cockles that is all that can be claimed.

The formal opening of the Penfold Channel and S Gut fishery required a great deal of effort and organisation from all relevant local government departments. It was possible to marshal activity through the Marshside access and during the few frantic days that the fishery remained viable there was a great deal of good work done. The limited resource of sizeable cockles did not support the fishing effort targeted at the beds for more than a week.

The late discovery of substantial stocks of cockles on the particularly inaccessible Foulnaze bed has been the cause of significant problems.

The Foulnaze fishery has highlighted the total inadequacy of Byelaw 5 designed to restrict effort on normal intertidal areas. The weaknesses within this Byelaw have been exploited by a legally well advised industry. The various loopholes contained in and poor wording of Byelaw 5 have made this Byelaw under the present circumstances virtually unenforceable, it has effectively rendered the Authority's officers impotent. With headlines such as "Cockle fishery branded a National Disgrace" observed on local bill boards, and the possibility of Ministerial level involvement as an almost direct result of the ineffectiveness of this Byelaw an immediate and far reaching review of Byelaw 5 in particular and the shellfish management Byelaws in general should be the Authority's most pressing priority.

Up to 650 gatherers per tide have been transported to the bed from Lytham in over 100 often totally inadequate craft. The levels of risk taking and poor seamanship displayed defy description. Rescue, local government and fisheries resources have been stretched to the limit.

Up to 5 large vessels and a host of normally grossly overladen small craft have been used to transport the cockles to Lytham and Preston. There have been some efforts to access the bed from the S Gut (very hazardous) particularly in the dark.

During suitable weather conditions landings have reached some 200 tons per tide, the cockles are not good quality making some £700 per ton.

MUSSELS

After a prolonged quiet period some interest has been expressed in the Ribble mussel fishery.

NETTING

The Lytham drift netters enjoyed modest success at the Bass fishery up until the diversion of activity to the cockle fishery. Beach nets have been observed along the Sefton coast from the Penfold Channel to Formby Point only modest catches have been reported. There has been very little netting activity off the N Fylde coast.

ANGLING

Anglers both afloat and ashore have been active during periods of good weather throughout the quarter. Modest catches of bass, flounder and an increasing number of codling have been reported.

SOUTHERN AREA

MERSEY, WIRRAL AND DEE

Fishery Officer, A. Brownrigg

GENERAL

The Southern area remains busy. Activities such as enforcement, sampling and surveying have been undertaken throughout the District, as has the offer of support to other officers.

SPECIFIC

COCKLING

A detailed survey of the cockle bed at Leasowe/Morton beach in August proved satisfactory, and the bed was opened to coincide with the commencement of the cockling season on the 1st of September. During the first week, approximately 70 cockle gatherers were observed per day fishing the bed. At present, cockling along the North Wirral Coastline remains ongoing, with 2 to 30 cockle gatherers permitted to harvest the Wirral North cockle bed each day. However, due to the opening of the Foulnaze bed near Lytham St Annes on the same day, the numbers of cockle gatherers in the area reduced, with the majority of cockle gatherers choosing to fish in that area. Numbers of cockle gatherers is noted to increase at Leasowe/Morton beach for periods of up to 3 or 4 days, during periods of inclement weather at the Foulnaze bed. Depending on the size of individual cockles on Leasowe/Morton beach, prices can range from 60p to £2.20 per kg, and permitted cockle gatherers can harvest an average of 3 bags (180kg) per person over both tides.

Considerable amounts of time has been spent at Marshside in Southport, observing and monitoring small groups of cockle gatherers who have been using Marshside to access the Foulnaze bed using All Terrain Vehicles and Rigid Inflatable Boats. Approximately 55 to 100 bags per tide can be harvested and transported back from Foulnaze bed.

Routine hygiene samples from Wirral North cockle bed continue to be collected on behalf of Mersey Port Health Authority and samples from Penfold North Cockle bed for West Lancashire Borough Council will continue throughout the forthcoming months.

MUSSELS

Mussels on the Dee historically have only been of commercial interest in the early winter months where they are intensively harvested over a period of a few weeks. NWIFCA took on the responsibility of the mussel bed in April this year, and since then has undertaken a brief survey with colleagues from Wirral Borough Council Environmental Health. Fishermen on the Dee notified me about the discovery of large quantities of mussels on the Dee. The mussels, which are of a harvestable size, are located several kilometres from the contaminated Caldy Blacks area. Reports suggest that the area is located close to West Kirby Cockle Representative Monitoring Point (RMP), however at this present time I am awaiting exact grid references from the fishermen as to the location and extent of the bed. A further examination of the bed will take place by me and a member of the scientific staff at a future date.

SHORE ANGLING

Recreational Angling continues to take place throughout the area. The North Wirral Coastline, Otterspool Promenade and New Brighton (Perch Rock and Kings Parade) are very popular areas. Bass, Dab and Codling remain the most popular fish being caught in the area. Approximately 2 to 8 bait diggers have been observed daily along the North Wirral Coastline.

FISHING BOATS

During the last quarter, there has been very little activity from any fishing boats based moored at Meols. Regular repair work is being carried out but most craft remain unused for long periods. No regular fishing pattern is being carried out due to most fishermen only working part time. Private fishing boats from Liverpool Marina continue to operate private fishing trips throughout the River Mersey and Liverpool Bay with groups of 5 to 7 anglers per group.

NETS

There are only two set nets presently within my area which have been observed up to this time. Both nets are correctly marked up, and no observations have been made of these set nets being used to fish within the area.

ENFORCEMENT AND OTHER ACTIVITIES

As in the previous quarter, I have attended several meetings with Sefton Council. These included a review of the Operational Plan from the opening days of the cockle season, and a meeting at Mold with the Dee Estuary Sea Fisheries Liaison Group. To coincide with the introduction of the NWIFCA Members' Community of Practice, developed by the Technical Science and Byelaw (TSB) Sub-Committee, I have been invited to become a co-facilitator to offer mediation and advice on enforcement issues. This is a role I have been happy to undertake in my capacity as an IFCA Officer.