

**North Western Inshore Fisheries and
Conservation Authority**

Annual Meeting: 12 June 2012

Morecambe Town Hall: 11.00 a.m.

**AGENDA
ITEM NO.
12**

**ENFORCEMENT DIRECTOR'S REPORT ON THE FISHERIES
FOR THE PERIOD 1ST February 2012 to 30th April 2012**

WEATHER

Following 6 months of almost incessant strong or gale-force onshore winds, it was a relief for those fishermen who work offshore when a marked change in the weather pattern occurred during late January/early February. This resulted in winds becoming much lighter, and for the most part variable in direction. This allowed fishermen throughout the District the opportunity of putting to sea again. Despite being hampered by some shorter periods of strong winds mostly from a westerly quarter, the operators of many local vessels have managed to put in a reasonable fishing effort during the past 3 months.

After having to endure such an extended period of inclement weather conditions, it was heartening to see the local fishing fleet getting back to sea again.

TRAWLING

As to be expected at this time of the year prawns (nephrops), roker (thornback ray) and plaice are the main target species for most of the North Western IFCA based trawling fleet.

Landings of prawns at both Whitehaven and Maryport have proven to be rather disappointing. Inspections at Whitehaven have revealed local trawlers seldom making daily hauls exceeding 20 – 30 stones of both whole and tailed prawns. Maryport vessels would seem to have fared a little better, with some skippers occasionally reporting landings of up to 50 stones. This was at times augmented by up to 30 boxes of whitefish, mainly plaice and roker particularly when fishing in the northern sector of the Solway Firth.

Up to 25 Northern Irish based vessels were occasionally sighted working to the south west of St Bees Head and Sellafield, most of these were large twin rigged vessels from Kilkeel, along with a few smaller vessels from Ardglass and Portavogie. The larger boats were at times seen making more substantial landings at Whitehaven, of up to 400 stone of prawns plus 20 – 30 boxes of mixed whitefish. It is understood that in most cases these catches were taken over trips of up to 4 days at sea. Two large twin rigged vessels also made notable landings at Whitehaven, in each case consisting of around 100 boxes of roker.

There was a considerable reduction in the numbers of large shellfish dredgers landing at Whitehaven; also I have no reports of any sightings of beam trawlers being made, in or around the district.

There would again seem to have been very little trawling effort in the Southern half of the district. As a result of the "Elainalee" BW 23 sinking at her berth, there has been no trawling from the port, whilst at Fleetwood only one vessel put to sea reportedly making only modest catches consisting mainly of plaice. Several small trawlers are understood to have occasionally worked off both the Dee Estuary and in the Mersey. These boats are most likely to have targeted plaice, roker and Dover sole, although no reports have been received regarding amounts caught.

MUSSEL AND COCKLE FISHERIES

Mussel harvesting from intertidal beds has again been very low key. Around 200 tonnes was taken from the bed at West Kirby in the Dee Estuary prior to the fishery closing on 27th February 2012. Only modest amounts were gathered from the Ribble training walls, Bare Ayre at Morecambe and the Barrow-in-Furness area. There has been no harvesting of mussels in the Solway Firth, either in the Silloth channel or from any of the intertidal beds.

There has been no commercial cockling anywhere in the District during the past 3 months, as notices of closure have remained in place for the Wirral, Morecambe Bay and the Ribble Estuary. Stocks of cockle on the English side of the Solway remain in a very poor state with no prospect of a fishery in the foreseeable future. Officers have however received anecdotal reports that cockle stocks in the Scottish sector of the Solway are showing signs of improvement.

POTTING AND NETTING

Both lobster and brown crab have proved to be rather scarce so far this year. Whilst the main “season” for both species in the north east Irish Sea is usually accepted as being well underway by early – mid March, by the end of April this year catches were generally reported as still being poor. A well respected Cumbrian shellfisherman has suggested that this situation may be due to the ambient water temperature being lower than usual for the time of year. On the up side, the price being paid for brown crab is reported to be quite respectable at around 90 pence to £1.20 per kg with good quality lobster fetching up to £12 per kg.

The large potting vessel “Fleur de France” J 86 has continued to land significant quantities of whelks at Whitehaven. Officers reported the vessel landing between 6 – 8 tonnes of what were considered to be very good quality whelks. Caught mainly from the Scottish side of the Solway Firth, the whelks are transported to Fleetwood for processing prior to being dispatched to markets in the Far East.

Offshore gill netting effort increased throughout the District as the weather improved, particularly so off the Cumbrian coast between Maryport – Sellafield, north of the Duddon Estuary, the Penfold Channel and the Sefton and Fylde coastal areas. For the most part catches proved to be only moderate, consisting of variable amounts of codling, bass, plaice, sole and roker. Occasional good catches of turbot were taken from the Silecroft and Fylde coast areas.

Beach set gill nets, mostly deployed between Netherton to Drigg on the Cumbrian coast, again yielded some good catches of cod, bass, grey mullet, roker and the odd good sized turbot.

Many gill net fishermen have again reported encountering severe problems with the large numbers of seals both grey and common that now resides in or around the District. Not only does the presence of seals have the effect of significantly reduced catches but can also result in extensive damage to both static nets and to fish that may already have been caught in them.

ENFORCEMENT

I regret to have to have to inform Members of the Authority that the previously reported problems with the “Solway Protector’s” port engine, have proved to be ongoing, again resulting in virtually no enforcement being carried out with the vessel during the quarter. Best use was however made of the 7 metre RIB “Protector Bravo” for undertaking inshore patrols whenever weather conditions proved to be suitable. Shore based officers as usual carried out regular coastal patrols throughout the entire District, undertaking inspections of fish and shellfish at all ports and landing stations. Shellfish beds were inspected as necessary, cockle and mussel samples obtained for shellfish hygiene analysis and other activities monitored on the shore as required.

On the whole, compliance of byelaws and other relevant legislation proved to be good. Five fishermen however were interviewed under Caution for alleged offences in respect of the emergency cockle closure byelaw. All 5 admitted the offences and were subsequently offered and accepted Home Office Cautions.

More detailed information on the fisheries and fishing activity around the district are again contained in the area officers' individual reports. As usual should Members require further information or have any specific questions regarding fisheries, I will be only too pleased to address these at the quarterly meeting. Alternatively please feel free to contact me beforehand via any of the usual channels.

Date of offence	Written Warning(s) issued	Home Office Caution(s) accepted	Details of the offence	Prosecution(s) outcome	
				Fine imposed	Costs awarded
03/09/2011			E Edwards – 29/3/2012, fishing in contravention of Byelaw no: 5 – guilty verdict	£500	£1500
25/07/2011		5	Contravention of byelaw 5		
28/07/2011		2	Taking lobster less than the minimum landing size		
30/11/11		1	Contravention of emergency closure byelaw		
07/03/2012		1	Contravention of emergency closure byelaw		
13/03/2012		3	Contravention of emergency closure byelaw		
01/07/2011	1		Contravention of CSFC Byelaw no: 8 – berried lobster, also taking undersized crabs		
11/07/11	1		Undersized bass (angler)		

Prosecutions Pending

Three prosecutions are pending for fishing in contravention of the emergency closure byelaw on 10th November 2011.

D T DOBSON
Enforcement Director
28 May 2012

PATROL VESSELS

Master of the “Solway Proector” - H Thinnesen

“SOLWAY PROTECTOR”

The “Solway Protector” is now in her 23rd year of service, and to be expected for a patrol vessel of this age breakdowns and repairs are likely to become more frequent. As Members will be aware, the “Solway Protector” encountered a major engine failure on several occasions over the last 8 months. Unfortunately the vessel had to be taken out of service again towards the end of January this year.

It was discovered that the port engine was losing coolant into the oil sump. This was eventually traced back to a small hole inside the engine block water jacket, in other words the engine block had become porous. We contacted Caterpillar agent's Finnings with the possibility of the carrying out a repair. We were informed this would not be possible due to the location of the fault.

It was decided that the only way forward would be to locate and purchase a reconditioned unit. For once luck was on our side and a new replacement short engine was sourced within a couple of days. The engine was again removed from the “Solway Protector” on the 30th March and transported to Caterpillar's main depot in Winsford. This was in order for them to remove all the maranised parts off the old engine and refit them on to the new one, along with the gearbox.

The patrol boat crew re-installed the new port engine on the 19th April, and this was followed by sea trials on the 24th April.

The electrical wiring system on the Solway Protector has started to give us problems at times, almost on a daily basis. Again this is down to the age of the vessel, along with the fact that when the vessel was built 23 years ago the amount of electrical equipment onboard the vessel then, was less than half the amount which is fitted onboard now. Again all the electrical repairs were carried out by the patrol boat engineer with boat crew assisting.

All other planned essential maintenance schedules are all up to date.

SEVEN METRE RIB - “PROTECTOR BRAVO”

I am pleased to report that “Protector Bravo” continues to give us valuable service. We did however encounter a problem with damage to the forward port sponson. We suspect this had been damaged by another vessel in harbour, however this could not be proven.

The vessel was taken out of the water and transported around to the Whitehaven boat yard in order to carry out a thorough inspection, and check for any other damage to the vessel. No other damage was found and the necessary repairs were carried out by the Authority's officers.

“Protector Bravo” is now in her 13th year of operation. The vessel's sponsons and deck structures are now showing signs of fatigue, and as the vessel has been tasked quite hard over the years the everyday wear and tear is now starting to show.

We also had a small problem with the 6.5 metre Humber RIB. While out on a routine patrol the Marine radar system failed. The fault was traced back to a small screw which had worked itself loose and had jammed in the drive gear on the radar scanner. This in turn stopped the radar scanner from rotating. No other damage was found and the problem was quickly rectified.

I am pleased to report that both “Protector Bravo” and the 6.5mtr Humber RIB are now back in service.

BOARDINGS, PATROLS & INSPECTIONS

The “Solway Protector” again lost a number of patrol days at sea mainly due to the engine problems, along with poor weather and the availability of crew due to staff training and annual leave.

This apart a total of 16 patrols were carried out in the district using “Solway Protector”, “Protector Bravo” and the new 6.5 metre Humber RIB.

Sightings of fishing vessels along with recreational sea anglers made from the “Solway Protector” totalled 10 with 9 being logged as visiting vessels. A total of 26 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 on the whole been good. This resulted in no serious infringements being detected with only a small amount of hobby fishermen’s potting gear being seized

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

SURVEYS

A beam trawl survey at the Robin Rigg wind farm site, which had been planned for the end of April, was eventually carried out on the 3rd May. The survey was for environmental consultant’s Natural Power. As usual the “Solway Protector” towed a beam trawl from the stern of the vessel, carrying out 15 minute tows in various positions, around the wind farm site before hauling up. For this survey we had 3 marine biologists on board, who process and record the samples taken. The weather on the day was fresh with the wind blowing from the easterly direction.

Master “Solway Protector”
29th May 2012

" Solway Protector "**DURATION OF PATROLS AND SIGHTINGS**

Date	Area Patrolled	Sightings	Sea time	
			Hrs.	Mins.
25/04/2012	Outer prawn grounds St Bees	6	4	30
26/04/2012	Prawn pitch	4	9	35

" Solway Protector "
PATROL STATISTICS

	1/2/2012 - 30/4/2012		1/11/2011 - 31/1/2012	
Number of patrols and passages	2	patrols	6	patrols
Seatime	14hrs	05 mins	34 hrs	20 mins
Average length of patrol	7 hrs	03 mins	5 hrs	43 mins
Total distance covered	101	miles	325	miles
Average distance per patrol	51	miles	54	miles
Fuel used	263	gallons	766	gallons
Average fuel used per patrol	132	gallons	128	gallons
<u>Total identified sightings:</u>	10	vessels	15	vessels
Local	1	vessels	14	vessels
Visiting	9	vessels	1	vessels
<u>Types of fishing vessels sighted:</u>	<u>< 45'</u>	<u>> 45'</u>	<u>< 45'</u>	<u>> 45'</u>
Trawlers	0	4	7	0
Beam Trawlers	0	0	0	0
Twin Rig Trawlers	0	5	0	0
Pair Trawlers	0	0	0	0
Anchor Seiners	0	0	0	0
Fly Draggers	0	0	0	0
Gill Netters	0	0	0	0
Shrimpers	0	0	0	0
Twin Beam Shrimpers	0	0	0	0
Whelk Potters	0	0	2	0
Potting Boats	1	0	0	0
Scallop Dredgers	0	0	0	1
Mussel Dredgers	0	0	0	0
Cockle Dredgers	0	0	0	0
Netters	0	0	0	0
Anglers	0	0	5	0
<u>Total:</u>	1	9	14	1

NORTHERN (CUMBRIA)

HAVERIGG POINT TO BURGHMARSH POINT

Senior IFCOs, E. Thinnesen and M. Dobson

GENERAL

This reporting period has seen a variety of weather conditions, which have given the local commercial fishermen short periods of working in the early part of the quarter, and opportunities for officers to check all of the beaches and ports in the area on a regular basis.

TRAWLING

Early February saw the local fleet getting a weather window to put in some hours at sea. There were mixed returns with reports of good catches of skate and some cod. The majority of the Maryport fleet remained on scallop dredging, which is reported on later in this report. March showed a decline in returns of skate, but there were sporadic showings of nephrops later in the month from Whitehaven based vessels. During April improving catches of nephrops saw the arrival late in the month of the Irish twin-rigged fleet. These vessels worked the traditional grounds between 6 - 12 miles west of Sellafield outside of the NWIFCA limit; some of these were seen making reasonably good landings of nephrops into Whitehaven.

SCALLOPS

Some of the larger Scottish registered dredging vessels were occasionally observed landing Queen scallops at Whitehaven and also at Silloth. Information gathered from the Maryport fleet indicated that some of the trawlers based at the port intended to remain on the Queen scallop fishery as late as possible as landings were proving to be quite steady. These trawlers did not revert back to demersal trawl gear until around the second week of April.

POTTING

In this part of the District, lobster and brown crab potting effort has been quite low during the period under review. Two commercial vessels have continued to work out of Ravenglass, along with one commercial vessel based at Whitehaven. These have reported small but constant numbers of both edible crab and lobsters. April saw an increase in vessels, both commercial and permit holding hobby fishermen, setting gear from Workington and Maryport, as well as a increased effort by the operator of a commercial vessel now working from Haverigg. Information gathered from the Workington and Maryport fishermen indicates that the prolonged period of inclement weather last winter caused significant losses of gear. The result of this is that many fishermen are currently working with reduced numbers of pots than would be normal at this time of year.

There continues to be one large commercial whelk potting vessel working out of Whitehaven. This vessel is understood to be mainly fishing on the Scottish side of the Solway, and has regularly been inspected making some substantial landings of good quality whelks.

OFFSHORE NETTING

Commercial offshore netting effort was for the most part light, with only 6 or 7 vessels seen to be working throughout the northern part of the District. Some reasonable catches were however reported. A Barrow based netter is believed to have encountered a good fishing of turbot and roker to the area west of Kirksanton and Silecroft, whilst boats from Whitehaven, Workington and Maryport occasionally made some very good landings of roker. Hobby fishermen, mainly from Workington also reported taking good numbers of roker along with a few codling whenever tidal and weather conditions proved suitable.

BEACH NETTING

There has been a significant amount of effort by the beach net fishermen particularly in the Nethertown, Braystones and Seascale areas. Regular inspections revealed these nets taking some very good catches consisting of cod, roker, grey mullet and bass. Varying amounts of turbot were also reported, mainly from nets set off Braystones.

ANGLING

Sea anglers were as usual observed in significant numbers throughout the area, with the piers at Whitehaven and Workington amongst the most popular venues. The beaches and foreshore areas between Maryport and Silloth also had a steady showing of anglers most probably looking for large bass that this area is renowned for during the spring and early summer periods. Catches taken by anglers throughout the district were seen to consist of codling, small whiting, flounder, bass, lesser-spotted dogfish and increasing numbers of plaice as the quarter progressed.

BAIT DIGGING

For reasons unknown, there has been significantly less bait digging/pumping observed this quarter, particularly by the few "commercial" diggers that are known to work in the northern sector of the District. However, during the last week of April there was a marked increase in the numbers of people seen gathering "peeler" crab in the traditional area between Dubmill point to Beckfoot in the upper Solway. This activity will undoubtedly increase during the months of May and June as large numbers of people descend on the area, mainly from the north east of England.

ENFORCEMENT

There have been no known breaches of byelaws or other fisheries legislation in the Northern area during the last 3 months. IFCO Dobson has however been involved in a number of investigations in other areas with regard to offences detected during the month of March. These include an interview under Caution and subsequent acceptance of a Home Office Caution for an offence in breach of the emergency cockle closure byelaw, committed at Southport. A further 4 fishermen were interviewed at the Carnforth office after being found in breach of the same byelaw at Leasowe. All admitted the offence and were offered and accepted Home Office Cautions. A further incident involving a fisherman, who was found to be in possession of cockles at Flookburgh without any valid movement documents, was investigated and the findings passed to the Environmental Health Department at South Lakeland Council. The cockles were confiscated by the Council, who took court action the following day to recover the disposal costs, this supported by a Competent Witness Statement from IFCO Dobson.

Officer Statistics for the period February – May 2012

Shore Patrols	36
Fishing Locations visited	376
Quad Patrols	4
Locations	26
Anglers seen	263
Bait Diggers seen	10
Shellfish gatherers (Winkle Pickers)	0
Vessels inspected	24
Beach nets inspected	43
Days assisting other areas of district	7

NORTH MORECAMBE BAY

HAVERIGG POINT TO ARNSIDE

IFCO, I. DIXON

TRAWLING

Throughout the last quarter I have observed no trawling activity taking place either on a commercial or hobby basis.

SHRIMPING

During the last quarter I have observed shrimp fishing activity on a regular basis since the middle of March onwards, with five or more tractors and tra-la-la units working from Flookburgh, three of which favoured the Kent channel side of the bay and two preferring to fish the Leven channel. Only one tractor has been observed working from the Furness side of the bay, out of Baycliff and working the Leven Channel, all fishermen have reported a relatively slow start to the season. Efforts in the Leven Channel were hampered by the uncovering of a pick-up truck right in the middle of the Leven Channel off Aldingham which is thought to be left over from the cockle fishery ten years ago. This was removed by local fishermen in the last week of April.

COCKLES

During the last quarter I have not observed any activity taking place in the North Morecambe Bay area. IFCA Officers worked together with SLDC Environmental Health Officers and seized 20 mesh sacks of cockles from premises near Flookburgh due to the lack of any paperwork for the movement of cockles, and the origin of the cockles was unknown. The cockles were destroyed with the offender having to pay the costs involved.

I have continued to collect shellfish samples for South Lakeland District Council from sites at Aldingham, Newbiggin, Leven, and Flookburgh.

MUSSELS

During the last quarter I have observed very little mussel fishing activity in the North Morecambe Bay area. I observed a group of men from the Wirral area prospecting the stock levels and quality of mussels on Foulney, however they never returned to the area, indicating there wasn't sufficient quantity to make it viable.

While undertaking a mussel sample and assessment of the mussel stocks with a member of the IFCA science team on Foulney, I discovered 14 full sacks of mussels which had been harvested and then abandoned. The bags seemed to have been there for several weeks, they were cut open and the mussels were emptied out.

The only other mussel fishing activity in the area was from a fishery at Ravenglass which were transported to premises in Barrow for processing.

There have been reports that a good harvest of large mussels from Hodbarrow sea wall was being enjoyed by a few hand gatherers taking less than 5 kg a day during April.

I have also attended meetings in relation to a proposed mussel fishery in Walney channel.

I have continued to take samples for Barrow Borough Council for Foulney on a monthly basis.

NETTING

Very few boats have been observed netting during this last quarter. The only commercial netting reports I received were from one of the Barrow based boats which reported moderate success fishing Skate gear set off Silecroft, with catches of up to 4 boxes of Roker and 20 or more Turbot taken when fishing the nets every other day. Small boats fishing from Walney and the Duddon Estuary reported small catches of codling and occasional school Bass towards the end of April

No beach nets have been observed in the Duddon Estuary or along the coast from Ulverston to Barrow. I had a report of one beach net set off the rocks at Earnse Bay over one weekend however it had been removed when I went to check it.

POTTING

I have observed no potting activity for lobster or crab in this quarter, one fishing boat has been potting for whelks in the outer Walney Channel and Foulney area with moderate success considering the relatively small amount of pots being used. A verbal warning was given regarding the marking of the buoys on the strings of pots.

ANGLING

Recreational angling continues to be very popular around the Furness peninsula with competitions well attended and regular anglers at most of the more productive marks. Catches are predominantly made up of Flounders, although Codling were showing on Walney, and catches of Plaice increased towards the end of April, occasional catches of turbot were recorded on the Irish Sea side of walney.

Catches of school Bass were reported towards the end of April but not in many numbers.

GENERAL

During this quarter I have attended Duddon Estuary Partnership meetings and have planned joint working patrols with the Environment Agency Fisheries team, and have continued to make useful work contacts within my area.

I attended the 5 day IFCO training course at Torquay during February.

SOUTH MORECAMBE BAY

ARNSIDE TO KNOTT END

Senior IFCO, S. J. Waite

TRAWLING

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

SHRIMPS

Effort in the inshore shrimp fishery improved this last quarter with full time inshore shrimp fishermen reporting good landings of shrimps early in the quarter. Unfortunately landings failed to live up to the fishermen's early optimism. Inshore fishermen have continued to fish on a regular basis but landings over the last half of the quarter have proved very disappointing. Throughout this last quarter I have observed no activity from inshore shrimp fishermen working on a hobby basis. April saw the first tractor and tra la la unit working from Morecambe Lodge though landings proved poor and I have not

seen these fishermen working since. I have observed no activity from hobby fishermen working push nets during this quarter.

COCKLES

Throughout this last quarter I have not observed, or had reports of, any activity taking place in the cockle fishery. I have continued to check all the cockle beds in my area. Unfortunately I have observed no improvement in stocks of mature and immature cockles and as a result all beds in my area remain closed.

MUSSELS

Effort in the mussel fishery recommenced during this last quarter following the enforced closure of mussel beds in my area. Beds had previously been closed as a result of United Utilities having to release untreated waste into the sea via an old outfall pipe.

Bare Ayre saw the main effort although harvesting proved low key with only two gatherers working on a small order. Mussels have on occasion been removed from beds in the Knott End area, but this has proved extremely low key.

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

DRIFT STAKE AND SET NETS

I expected to see the return of the inshore drift net boats to their moorings, after their winter overhaul but in the event, only one boat returned to the fishery and effort has proved very disappointing.

During this last quarter I have continued to observe and check both stake and set net areas. This fishery continues to prove extremely low key. Effort has been limited to a few nets working towards the top of Morecambe Bay. Fishermen working this area have reported reasonable landings with a wide variety of species being caught.

Whitebait nets set in the Lune Estuary continued to be fished on selected tides. Catches have been destined for animal feed, supplying both zoos and sea life centres.

DINGHY AND SHORE ANGLING

During this last quarter I have continued to observe little effort from dinghy anglers. Effort from shore anglers improved though landings were poor.

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. I have checked the Heysham Bass Nursery Area and observed and checked the occasional Bass.

CENTRAL AREA

RIVER WYRE TO RIVER ALT

Senior IFCO, S. Brown

GENERAL

Conditions have improved slowly as the year has advanced. After what had been a fairly long winter lay-up fishermen both afloat and intertidal have worked steadily. In general catches have been rather poor; many fishermen are looking towards a revival of the Ribble cockle fishery to boost their annual

income. Initial observations suggest that some stocks have survived the winter but that the fishery is not going to be as spectacular as that of the autumn of 2011.

TRAWLING

Fleetwood's one remaining full time inshore trawler has begun working after a prolonged period weather-bound over the winter months. Modest catches of plaice are reported from below Shell Wharf and the Bank.

The one remaining vessel in the 60ft class has been laid up for most of the winter. The loss of the fishing grounds from W x N of Lune up to the southern end of the prawn ground to wind farm development has severely curtailed fishing opportunity for this class of vessel.

One home water trawler has worked from Fleetwood. This once proud fishing port is now a mere shadow of its former glory.

DREDGING AND POTTING

One migratory inshore vessel (E123 'Emily J') has fished the Irish Sea shellfisheries successfully making the occasional landing at Fleetwood. The other Fleetwood based shell boat ('Corina 2') has been less successful, being plagued with mechanical and crewing trouble.

A few lobster pots have been placed along the Rossall outfall pipe, however no regular potting activity has been observed.

SHRIMPING

The spring shrimp fishery made a very slow start during March and into April.

Catches by push and hand netters in the immediate coastal strip have been very poor.

The Southport and Marshside fishermen have benefited slightly from the South Gut hardening up a little and becoming workable with a tractor for the first time in many years. However as with the Penfold Channel and Southport shrimp fisheries catches have been very erratic and generally poor.

The Lytham shrimpers have had a similar poor time; catches reported have been barely viable. Most Lytham fishermen have worked on mixed intertidal fisheries throughout the period to supplement their income, to quote one Lytham fisherman "We have had a bit of a rough time". That sums up the situation of most local fishermen very well.

COCKLES-MUSSELS

The emergency closure of the Ribble cockle fishery has been respected by the industry with only the occasional scouting expedition being reported or intercepted. Foulhaze awaits full survey however staff have visited the southern Ribble beds during MSH sample gathering patrols. A small stock of sizeable cockles has regrouped on the South Gut bed, Penfold North has not fared well over the winter, being patchy and rather small at present. Penfold South has regrouped but contains only modest amounts of mixed size cockle. Much of the stock on Penfold West seems to have been lost to winter weather; small patches remain over a large area.

To summarise, the observed Ribble cockle stocks should be ample to support gathering at traditional low levels for a sustained period but would not support the level of effort placed on them last September for more than a few days.

I am glad to report that after a break of more than two decades regular mussel harvesting from the Ribble Walls has started again. One local fisherman has set up his own purification plant and while there are only small areas of harvestable mussels (the majority of the stock is of very mixed size) quantities available are sufficient for immediate demand. This fishery has been of vital importance for the small number of local fishermen who would normally have looked to the winter cockle fishery as part of their seasonal fishing activity.

During April an early spatfall of mussel was observed on the R. Wyre Black Scar and Perch Scar beds.

NETTING

Set nets have been worked in the relatively sheltered waters of the Penfold Channel throughout the quarter. Along the more exposed Fylde and Sefton coasts netting activity has been of a more opportunist nature. Modest catches of Codling and a few early bass Plaice and Sole have been reported. Catches began to improve a little along the Fylde Coast in April with a few very good Bass, Turbot and Thornback Ray being taken. The Sefton netsmen however had to bring their gear ashore for a time being unable to cope with the ravages of Seal predation.

There has been some drift netting from Lytham. Catches have been barely viable consisting of a few early Bass and late Codling.

ANGLING

While angling remains as popular as ever relatively few anglers have been observed during shore patrols. Things began to improve during April with numbers of sightings of shore anglers, beach-launched boats and charter boats steadily increasing. A few Bass, Codling and flatfish have been reported by shore anglers fishing both high and low water marks.

ENFORCEMENT

Regular patrols have been undertaken throughout the quarter. 23 Byelaw inspections have resulted in 3 verbal admonishments being issued.

The ATV has covered 110 nautical miles in 33 running hours on patrol and sample gathering work on intertidal areas.

I have also attended the MMO Technical and Conservation course for IFCA Officers during this reporting period.

SOUTHERN AREA

MERSEY, WIRRAL AND DEE

IFCO, A. Brownrigg

GENERAL

Along with the daily tasks of enforcement, sampling and survey work, my primary task for this quarter has been the introduction of Sea Angling 2012 survey and the information gathering of fishing activity within the southern area. 'Protector Alpha', the 5 metre Rigid Inflatable Boat (RIB), used in the local area has undergone maintenance work. The offer of assistance to other enforcement officers and scientists within the District remains ongoing.

SPECIFIC

TRAWLING

Several trawlers working on the Dee Estuary operate on the six mile point fishing for Sole. This area has become a major point of concern for the fishermen since 'Round 2' of the proposed Burbo Bank Extension extends into this area.

COCKLING

Both cockle beds along the North Wirral coastline remain closed, and continue to be routinely sampled once a month for Hygiene and Bio Toxin. It is anticipated that, due to the lack of volume of cockle on the beds, they will remain closed when the new season begins in September. Assistance remains ongoing in relation to the collection of samples from the cockle beds at Penfold North, South and West, on behalf of Mersey Port Health Authority and West Lancashire Council.

MUSSEL

The mussel bed at West Kirby opened at the beginning of February, and holders of a valid mussel permit were allowed the opportunity to harvest undersize mussels for commercial use. Despite 100-150 permits being issued by NWIFCA, only 20 permitted gatherers were observed harvesting the bed. This lack of interest in harvesting the mussel is thought to be due to the £80 - £200 per ton being offered by the industry. Approximately 200 ton was harvested from the bed over the four weeks, however, after much discussion with the Dee Estuary stakeholders, NWIFCA and several other agencies it was decided that an extension to the permit would not be granted. This resulted in the permit to fish for undersize mussel ceasing on the 27th February. The bed remained open for the harvesting of size mussel but due to several factors, no activity was observed. In accordance with NWIFCA byelaws the Mussel bed closed for the season on the 1st May 2012.

NETS

Presently there are five set nets in the area of East Hoyle Bank. No observations have been made of these set nets being used to fish within the area. Reports of set nets within the channel off New Brighton are, as of yet, unconfirmed. This issue will be investigated further when maintenance work on 'Protector Alpha' is completed, and the vessel is deemed seaworthy.

SHORE ANGLING

Recreational Angling continues to take place throughout the area. Fish such as Bass, Plaice, Flounder, Dab, Brill, Turbot and Thornback Ray are regularly caught around the North Wirral Coastline (West Kirby to Perch Rock). Cod and Whiting are popular in the areas around the River Mersey such as Otterspool Promenade, Albert Dock, Waterloo Dock, Brunswick Dock and Alexandra Dock Wall. Rod Angling has increased in the recent weeks with up to 9 -11 anglers observed in certain areas and up to 30 reported over 'match' weekends.

SEA ANGLING 2012 SURVEY

The Sea Angling Survey 2012 is being undertaken by the newly appointed Scientific and Communication officer Alasdair Lindop and myself, under the direction of IFCA Officer Phil Capper. Three surveys so far have been completed within my area with a further two due to be undertaken in May. Despite numerous advertising cards being distributed around angling shops and the angling community, we have observed very little activity (three persons or less) or no activity at all. The general consensus is that most anglers know very little or nothing at all about the survey, however, overall the majority of anglers are happy to answer the survey when questioned.

ENFORCEMENT AND OTHER ACTIVITIES

During March four permitted cockle gatherers were observed exiting Leasowe/Moreton Beach with cockles and cockling equipment by an on duty IFCA and Mersey Port Health Officer. After identifying themselves all four individuals were cautioned and after investigation under Byelaw 14 (Cockle Fishery – Seasonal Closure), all were issued with Home Office Cautions. Despite this no other cockling activity has been observed during my daily vehicle and foot patrols.

During the same month, I attended the Technical Conservation Enforcement course in Plymouth. The aim of the week was to provide me with the responsibilities and jurisdiction of the MMO and IFCAs, the UK Fishing Industry, EU and UK Sea Fisheries Regulations, and how they are applied and enforced. Another aim was to gain an understanding of nature conservation regulations. I felt this was an excellently ran course which installed me with confidence to further carry out my enforcement duties.

As part of my career development I have recently attended an Advanced Powerboat Course. This gave instruction on boat handling, seamanship, pilotage and navigation up to the standards required to operate the powerboat ('Protector Alpha'), safely both day and night – a requirement for working on the River Mersey, Dee Estuary and North Wirral Coastline and within the NWIFCA district.

After a period of maintenance, 'Protector Alpha' will shortly be patrolling the area. This will allow the boarding of numerous privately chartered fishing vessels that routinely operate within the area of the North Wirral Coastline, Liverpool Bay, River Mersey and Dee Estuary to take place; something which the skippers of the vessels are actively encouraging to see happen. It will also allow survey work to take place on Burbo Bank in order to locate potential areas of cockles.

Further meetings I have attended are the proposed Burbo Bank Extension meeting and the Dee Estuary Stakeholders meeting held at North Wirral Country Park.