

**North Western Inshore Fisheries and  
Conservation Authority**  
**Quarterly Meeting: 16 March 2012**  
**Morecambe Town Hall: 11.00 a.m.**

**AGENDA  
ITEM NO.  
7**

**ENFORCEMENT DIRECTOR'S REPORT ON THE FISHERIES  
FOR THE PERIOD 1<sup>ST</sup> NOVEMBER 2011 to 31<sup>ST</sup> JANUARY 2012**

Members of the Authority will no doubt be aware that for those fishermen who derive their livelihoods primarily from fishing offshore, prevailing weather is a major factor governing their working lives. As alluded to in my previous quarterly report, long periods of strong to gale force onshore winds from around the time of the autumn equinox, severely restricted fishing effort throughout the district. This resulted in many fishermen reporting significantly reduced earnings during that period. Unfortunately there has been little improvement in the weather pattern during the last 3 months. The first 3 weeks of November did provide something of a respite with calmer conditions on around 10 – 12 days, but this was not to be sustained, as from the last week of the month through to late January strong or gale force winds, mainly from a westerly quarter prevailed on most days. Overall the past 6 months will have proved to have been an extremely frustrating, if not distressing period for many offshore fishermen in the district, regardless of the mode of fishing they would normally be engaged in.

**TRAWLING**

On the limited occasions they were able to put to sea, the smaller class of trawlers operating from Whitehaven fished grounds to the southwest of St Bees and the southern sector of the Solway Firth. The main targeted species were as usual prawns (nephrops), plaice and thornback ray (roker). For the most part, catches were reported to be light, the only exception being a 40 box haul of roker made on a rare fine day during late January.

Most of the Maryport fleet rigged with dredge gear for the start of the Irish Sea king scallop fishery on 1<sup>st</sup> November. Mostly working inshore grounds around the Isle of Man, these vessels reported making hauls of 25 – 45 bags per day on the few occasions they actually managed to get fishing.

Further south it is understood that the only trawling activity was from the 2 or 3 boats currently operating from Fleetwood. Catches were reported as reasonable during the early part of November but with little or nothing for the rest of the period, this again principally due to adverse weather conditions.

Very few of the larger class of Northern Irish trawlers were seen fishing off the Cumbrian coast during the past 3 months. This is almost certainly due to a combination of the atrocious weather and lack of prawns. Several of the large Scottish registered scallop dredgers that have used Whitehaven as a base during recent winters, were observed making landings at the port. These were seen to consist of up to 35 tonnes of the smaller shelled queen scallops rather than the king scallops these vessels have previously targeted in the Irish Sea at this time of the year.

**POTTING AND NETTING**

Although lobster and brown crab are essentially a spring/summer fishery in north west England, some creel fishermen (hardy souls) do leave some creels out during the winter period, particularly in the area from Selker rocks to the grounds south of the Barrow channel. It is possible in some parts of this particular area to set gear in deeper water yet still remain on suitably rough ground.

This tends to lessen the potential for loss or damage to gear due to bad weather. Whilst lobster and crab are not usually as plentiful during the winter period, the lack of quantity can be offset by increased demand. Good quality lobster was reported by a local shell fisherman to be making up to £24 per kg around the Christmas period.

Offshore gill netting was severely curtailed by the weather until late January. On the few occasions that the small netting boats were able to put to sea, it was encouraging to hear of some good catches of cod and codling being taken, particularly from north Cumbria and the Walney Island areas. Beach netting, mostly between Drigg to Nethertown on the Cumbrian coast yielded some good catches of cod, bass, grey mullet and the occasional turbot and large roker whenever the weather and tidal conditions proved suitable.

## **COCKLES**

Despite protestations from a large number of hand gathering shell fishermen, the Ribble cockle fishery was closed on November 7<sup>th</sup> under the terms of an emergency byelaw. Principally this was to address concerns over access to the cockle bed at Foulhaze following many calls to the emergency services from fishermen who found themselves in distress. All cockle beds within the NW IFCA district are now closed until further notice.

## **MUSSELS**

Fishing for mussel from intertidal beds within the district was again carried out on what can only be described as a very modest scale. Stocks in the upper Solway continue to be very poor, whilst a release of untreated sewage from a pipe at Middleton Sands in November resulted in all molluscan shellfish beds in Morecambe Bay being closed under relevant food hygiene regulations. The NW IFCA has issued a substantial number of permits to harvest a mixture of sized and undersized mussel from a bed at West Kirby. However up to the end of the quarter very little interest had been shown in this stock, possibly due to reports that buyers were offering what most fishermen considered to be a very poor price.

## **ENFORCEMENT**

Ongoing problems associated with the "Solway Protector's" port engine, along with the prolonged spell of atrocious weather resulted in very little enforcement work being carried out offshore. This apart, officers have again been kept busy, in particular with the continued enforcement of the emergency byelaw closing the Ribble cockle fishery. Whilst compliance with the Authority's byelaws and other relevant legislation was found to be generally good, 4 case files, all resulting from alleged cockle fishing offences in the Ribble fishery have been prepared and passed to the Authority's solicitor agent for consideration regarding possible prosecution. A further offence, again related to a cockle fishery in Morecambe Bay was considered to be relatively minor, and dealt with by the person admitting the offence and agreeing to accept a formal Home Office Caution. Other than this officers only found it necessary to issue a small number of verbal warnings for what were essentially considered to be very minor transgressions.

Reports and more detailed information on fishing activity around the district are contained in the Area Officer's individual reports. In the event that Members require further information or have any specific questions regarding fishing and the fisheries, I will be only too pleased to address these at the Authority's quarterly meeting. Alternatively please feel free to contact me beforehand via any of the usual channels.

## **NORTH AND WEST CUMBRIA FISHERIES LOCAL ACTION GROUP (FLAG)**

The Fisheries Local Action Group (FLAG) for north west Cumbria covers the coast from Silloth to Ravenglass. It is one of 6 FLAGs in England, the others being East Riding of Yorkshire, Hastings, North Norfolk, Cornwall and North Devon. The Groups aim is to help build sustainable solutions to the challenges facing the local fishing sector. This work will be funded through the European Fisheries Fund (EFF) Axis IV scheme. The north and west Cumbria FLAG was awarded £1.35 million and was the first FLAG to launch on 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2011. They will use the funding towards implementing a local development strategy which will include amongst many other proposals, developing local brands and new markets for fish products, supporting the establishment of a local fishermen's co-operative with the ambition of adding value of fish landed and processed in west Cumbria, and will also be supporting opportunities for diversification within fishing communities. The FLAG will also encourage co-operation within the industry and working with other partners such as NW IFCA to help people learn more about fishing and the marine environment.

**D T DOBSON**  
**Enforcement Director**  
**15 February 2012**

**Master of the “Solway Proector” - H Thinnesen**

**“SOLWAY PROTECTOR”**

As previously reported the “Solway Protector” suffered a major port engine failure last year, resulting in the vessel being taken out of service for quite a considerable length of time. As members may be aware the port main engine was removed from the vessel and transported to Caterpillar agents, Finning for repair.

Unfortunately after only four patrols and one survey, this engine again developed a similar problem. The failure was again due to loss of coolant water into the sump of the engine. Caterpillar agents Finning were immediately informed and it was reported to them that the same fault for which the engine had originally been sent away for repair, had re-occurred. Unfortunately up until time of writing this report, I can't give an exact date when the vessel will be back online, as investigations are still ongoing.

“Solway Protector’s” main Koden radar also developed a fault during the quarter. This fault was traced back to a faulty circuit board. Repairs were carried out by our marine electronics agent K R Marine.

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 provide us with an excellent service with no running problems to report.

“Protector Bravo” was taken out of the water during the first week of January for routine maintenance. Once out of the water the vessel's hull was pressure washed and inspected for signs of fatigue. The hull was then treated with antifouling paint prior to the vessel going back in the water.

**BOARDINGS, PATROLS AND INSPECTIONS**

Extensive periods of poor weather along with the major engine failure on the “Solway Protector” has resulted in a considerable number of patrol days at sea being lost.

A total of 9 patrols were carried out in the district using both “Solway Protector” and “Protector Bravo”. Sightings of fishing vessels made from “Solway Protector” totalled 15 with 1 being logged as a visiting vessel. A total of 18 boardings and inspections were carried out at sea using both “Solway Protector” and “Protector Bravo”.

I am pleased to say that no reportable infringements or incidents were found at sea during this quarter, suggesting that compliance with byelaws and other relevant fisheries legislation at sea has on the whole been good.

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

**SURVEYS**

“Solway Protector” was chartered to carry out a beam trawl survey in the Solway Firth. Once again this work was for environmental consultants AMEC. The survey took approximately 12 hours to

complete. Due to shifting sands, some trawl sampling points had to be aborted as there was not enough available depth of water at high tide to continue with these in safety.

It is planned that a mussel survey in the Silloth channel will be carried out once the patrol boat is back on line.

**Master "Solway Protector"**  
**2<sup>nd</sup> February 2012**

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

Date	Area Patrolled	Sightings	Sea time	
			Hrs.	Mins.
24/12/2011	Engine trials	0	1	45
10/01/2012	Prawn pitch - Silloth	1	5	0
11/01/2012	W of Whitehaven/Selker	3	6	15
13/01/2012	W of Eskmeals/Prawn pitch/NW corner	11	6	5
17/01/2012	Robin Rigg	0	10	20
26/01/2012	Parton/Harrington/Workington/Maryport/Silloth	0	5	20
	Patrol boat off line			

**" Solway Protector "**  
**PATROL STATISTICS**

	<b><u>1/11/2011 - 31/1/2012</u></b>		<b><u>31/8/11 - 31/10/2011</u></b>	
Number of patrols and passages	6	patrols	2	patrols
Seatime	34 hrs	20 mins	7 hrs	20 mins
Average length of patrol	5 hrs	43 mins	3 hrs	40 mins
Total distance covered	325	miles	85	miles
Average distance per patrol	54	miles	43	miles
Fuel used	766	gallons	250	gallons
Average fuel used per patrol	128	gallons	125	gallons
<b><u>Total identified sightings:</u></b>	15	vessels	6	vessels
Local	14	vessels	6	vessels
Visiting	1	vessels	0	vessels
<b><u>Types of fishing vessels sighted:</u></b>	<b><u>&lt; 45'</u></b>	<b><u>&gt; 45'</u></b>	<b><u>&lt; 45'</u></b>	<b><u>&gt; 45'</u></b>
Trawlers	7	0	1	0
Beam Trawlers	0	0	0	0
Twin Rig Trawlers	0	0	0	0
Pair Trawlers	0	0	0	0
Anchor Seiners	0	0	0	0
Fly Draggars	0	0	0	0
Gill Netters	0	0	0	0
Shrimpers	0	0	4	0
Twin Beam Shrimpers	0	0	0	0
Whelk Potters	2	0	0	0
Potting Boats	0	0	0	0
Scallop Dredgers	0	1	0	0
Mussel Dredgers	0	0	0	0
Cockle Dredgers	0	0	0	0
Netters	0	0	0	0
Anglers	5	0	1	0
<b><u>Total:</u></b>	14	1	6	0

## **NORTHERN (CUMBRIA)**

## **HAVERIGG POINT TO BURGHMARSH POINT**

**Senior IFCOs, E. Thinnesen and M. Dobson**

### **GENERAL**

This reporting period for the shore includes numerous enforcement taskings to the Southport/Lytham area during November 2011 and one period to the River Dee since the opening of the mussel beds. It was a busy November and January for this part of the district with a quieter period in the run up to Christmas with the severe weather hampering fishing effort prior to the closure of the markets.

### **TRAWLING**

The first week of November saw good reports from Whitehaven and Maryport based boats with catches consisting of mainly Nephrops with some white fish and in addition to this, 2 boats from Silloth made some good catches of mussels from the Silloth Channel. There followed a period of nearly 7 weeks of predominately strong to gale force westerly winds which restricted the local fleet to very few opportunities to put to sea. The weather did moderate towards the end of January resulting in some Whitehaven trawlers making occasional good catches of Thornback Ray (Roker) along with small amounts of Prawns (Nephrops) during the last few days of the month. The Silloth locals have recently returned to fishing the Silloth Channel for mussels but report that they have made no significant catches to date. It is understood that Mussel stock in the channel may have sanded over, but due to on-going problems with the Solway Protector it has not been possible to carry out a survey of the area to confirm whether or not this is the case.

### **SCALLOPS**

Information on scallop catches is very limited due to the inclement weather, however Maryport based vessels did report catches of 25-45 bags of King Scallops a day when they have had the opportunity to fish. The larger Scottish registered vessels that were fishing King Scallops last year have mainly switched to fishing Queen Scallops. Observations of landings at Whitehaven revealed these boats discharging up to 1000 35Kg bags for a 2-day trip. It has been reported that Queenies are currently making around 35p per Kg.

### **POTTING**

There has been very little potting effort in this area of the district due to the long periods of inclement weather. One vessel from Whitehaven has continued to fish in deeper water throughout the period wherever possible, and has been returning small but constant numbers of both Edible Crab and Lobsters. Observations from officers have identified a larger than average amount of smashed equipment being washed up on local beaches and local fishermen have confirmed a lot of damaged gear through the period. The last week in January has seen reports of a good showing of Edible Crab returning to the grounds, and a noticeable interest from the hobby Fishermen in Workington looking to set pot gear earlier this year than would usually be expected.

### **OFFSHORE NETTING**

There was some commercial netting being carried out prior to the bad weather from Whitehaven, but with poor returns. Since the New Year, there have been reports of good catches by both commercial and hobby fishermen from both Whitehaven and Workington with a good showing of Cod and Codling. These appear to be mainly feeding on vast shoals of spent Herring. Complaints continue as to the number of seals which seem to be resident in the area. There was a noticeable shift towards



deploying large mesh Skate nets during late January following reportedly good catches of Thornback Ray by some of the local Trawler fleet.

### **BEACH NETTING**

There has been significant effort identified in the Nethertown and Braystones areas by netters since the opening of the beaches on 1st December. These nets reported good catches of Cod, Bass and Mullet from around mid-December onwards. Most of these fish appear to have been gorging on small shore crabs. There have been occasional catches of Turbot at Nethertown and also reports of some good Skate catches from Drigg. There were reports of some catches of Codlings from the Siddick/Flimby and Maryport areas in December, but the fishermen concerned have since reverted back to offshore netting.

### **ANGLING**

November and January proved extremely popular with Anglers, with the majority of the effort being in the northern part of the area. The piers at Whitehaven and Maryport proved popular as always, but reports of the better catches have come from the beaches, mainly from Maryport to Allonby. Catches here are reported as being mainly Codling, small Whiting, Dab, Flounder and the occasional Bass.

### **BAIT DIGGING**

There was significantly less bait digging identified in the November and December period than previous years. This however is likely to be due to the limited patrols in the area due to the requirement for the enhanced enforcement on the closed cockle beds in the Ribble Estuary and not from a lack of effort by the diggers. A far greater number of bait diggers have been seen since the New Year as officers have been able to return to more routine patrolling. Prices for commercially dug Lugworm are currently reported to be high at around £35-40 per 100 worms.

### **OTHER DUTIES**

There was a significant requirement during the early part of this reporting period for Cumbria based enforcement officers to assist in the enforcement of the closed Ribble Estuary Cockle beds. E. Thinnesen attended the CEFAS Sea Angling 2012 course in December. The first of these surveys was carried out by officers in the northern part of the district in late January.

### **ENFORCEMENT AND EDUCATION**

There have been only a few minor breaches of regulation during this reporting period. One verbal warning was issued to a commercial netter for breach of CSFC Byelaw 10(3) (Deep Water Fishing) whilst assistance was given to the Barrow based officer in dealing with an incident regarding cockle fishing on a closed bed at Newbiggin. Routine patrols have included carrying out significant education with local and visiting anglers. Information has been provided to a number of fishermen interested in using beach nets.

## **Officer Statistics for the period November 2011 – February 2012**

Shore Patrols	34
Fishing Locations visited	348
Quad Patrols	2
Locations	6
Anglers seen	336
Bait Diggers seen	39
Shellfish gatherers (Winkle Pickers)	4
Vessels inspected	6
Beach nets inspected	17
Days assisting other areas of district	7

### **NORTH MORECAMBE BAY**

### **HAVERIGG POINT TO ARNSIDE**

**IFCO, I. Dixon**

#### **TRAWLING**

During this last quarter I have observed no trawling activity taking place, either on a commercial or hobby basis. However I believe that adverse weather conditions from mid-November onwards contributed to this lack of activity.

#### **SHRIMPING**

During the last quarter the inshore shrimp fishery has seen a promising period of fishing after a poor mid part of the season, reports from Flookburgh based fishermen claim catches have been better than expected for the time of year. During November and December it was not unusual to observe 5 or more tractors and tra-la-la units working the central Morecambe Bay on a daily basis, weather permitting. Two commercial shrimp fishermen have been observed fishing from Baycliff and Newbiggin areas also reporting promising catches. One hobby fisherman has been seen trawling for shrimp using a small boat in the Duddon Estuary in the Roanhead area, with limited success, for his own consumption.

#### **COCKLES**

During the last quarter I have observed one person fishing for cockles in the Newbiggin area of Morecambe Bay which resulted in enforcement action being taken for a Byelaw 13 offence, resulting in the offender accepting a Home Office caution.

Other signs of possible illegal activity were found at Humphrey Head where net bags and rakes were discovered hidden in undergrowth near the car parking area, and two full mesh sacks of cockles were found on the access track at west plain, Flookburgh, one burst open as if it had been lost from a vehicle, observations in this area during darkness and daylight resulted in no activity being recorded.

I have also carried out cockle sampling for South Lakeland District Council on a monthly basis at sites near Newbiggin and Aldingham, although there seems to be little improvement in stock levels.

## **MUSSELS**

The only mussel fishing activity I have observed in my area has been confined to a small bed in Walney channel which the fishermen started working after the restrictions were lifted by Barrow Borough Council in mid-January, however the fishermen claimed that there would be less than 5 days work available for their team of up to 5 men on the bed.

Two other commercial fishermen were observed taking a sample of mussels from Foulney to see if they were commercially viable but I have not seen any activity since.

I continue to take a mussel sample from Foulney on a monthly basis for Barrow Council.

## **NETTING**

Boats in the Furness area reported steady fishing for both Bass and Cod, Bass were not in the same number as the previous couple of years but were of a better average size and quality. Reports suggest one of the best showings of Cod inshore for a number of years, despite fishing effort being severely curtailed by the weather.

Very few beach nets have been observed in the area, none at all in the Duddon estuary, and very few off Walney, one Byelaw 11 tag was attached to an unmarked beach net near Sandy Gap on Walney which was soon made legal by the owner, however he claimed to be experiencing some disruption to his efforts possibly by beach anglers, on one occasion it was cut loose and he recovered it a mile along the shore.

Fishermen have been observed and checked at Flookburgh fishing a short set net, with moderate catches of Flounders reported.

The once popular flounder netting fishery in the Duddon estuary has all but ceased, due almost entirely to the reduction in the number of potting boats working from Barrow, no potting activity has been observed from the two remaining commercial potting boats in Walney Channel.

## **ANGLING**

As with the netting boats the anglers have seen similar results in terms of Bass and Cod in the Furness area, both shore and boat anglers have reported less numbers of Bass than previous years but a better quality. During the latter part of the quarter shore anglers on Walney and boat anglers have reported an encouraging number of codling.

The Leven Estuary from Priory Point to Greenodd and Low Park Wood area have been busy with anglers targeting flounders, with catches of 50 plus recorded on one session, likewise Arnside continues to produce large numbers of flounder in the popular angling venue.

## **GENERAL**

During this quarter I have been involved in the enforcement effort at Lytham/Southport and also on the Dee mussel fishery. I have also been in contact with Environment Agency Fisheries Officers in the North Morecambe Bay area with a view to joint patrols this year. I have represented the NW-IFCA at Duddon Estuary Partnership and Barrow Council's Wildlife and Heritage Group meetings.

## **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 throughout this last quarter has tailed away because the full time inshore shrimp fishermen have turned their attention to overhauling their gear and inshore boats. One inshore shrimp fisherman worked an occasional tide outside my area but effort has remained poor and I have observed very little effort taking place. In addition, I have seen no activity from the inshore shrimp fishermen working on a hobby basis. I have observed no activity from hobby fishermen working push nets working between Warton Sands and Heysham Harbour in this quarter.

### **COCKLES**

Throughout this last quarter I have not observed, or had reports of, any activity taking place in the cockle fishery. During this last quarter 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**

Throughout October I observed no harvesting of mussels nor received any reports of activity taking place on any recognised skears throughout the Arnside to Knott End area. In November all recognised mussel beds in my area were closed under the Food Hygiene Regulations.

This decision was taken because the waste water pipe at Middleton Sands failed which subsequently resulted in United Utilities releasing untreated waste into the sea via an old outfall pipe situated in the west end area of Morecambe. Work by United Utilities on the Middleton Sands pipe has since improved the situation and it is currently working at around 60% capacity. Despite this however the beds remain closed. This incident has affected a traditional winter fishery of the local fishermen and they have become increasingly concerned about their loss of earnings.

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

### **DRIFT STAKE AND SET NETS**

This quarter has seen no activity in the inshore drift net fishery due to the continued removal of all the inshore drift net boats from the seasonal fishery. I expect the next quarter will see the return of the inshore drift net boats to their moorings, after their winter overhaul, in readiness for the start of the inshore bass fishery.

During this last quarter I have continued to observe and check both stake and set net areas. All nets have been removed and I have seen no effort in this fishery throughout January. I do however expect effort to improve during the next quarter.

Whitebait nets set in the Lune Estuary have been fished on selected tides with good landings of both Whitebait and Sprats being reported. Catches have been destined for animal feed, supplying both zoos and sea life centres.

### **DINGHY AND SHORE ANGLING**

During this last quarter I have observed little effort from both dinghy and shore anglers, although effort did improve slightly in January. Fish species reported and checked were Dabs, Flounders and Whiting. January saw dinghy anglers fishing off the Fylde coast landing Cod.

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 on a regular basis but have not observed any angling taking place. I hope to continue patrolling this area throughout the Bass season.

### **CENTRAL AREA**

### **RIVER WYRE TO RIVER ALT**

**Senior IFCO, S. Brown**

### **GENERAL**

Very poor weather with prolonged periods of onshore gales have severely restricted any fishing activity. The closure of the Ribble cockle fishery has required virtually all of the Authorities enforcement staff to have been engaged in monitoring and maintaining the closure. Being the officer for the Ribble area I wish to record my appreciation for the efforts of my fellow staff who have put in a great deal of effort to assist me during this extremely busy period.

### **TRAWLING**

Good catches of plaice and roker (thornback ray) were reported by Fleetwood inshore boats in November. The smaller vessels have remained weatherbound in port until well into the New Year. One larger trawler has "Isadale" has been landing into Fleetwood.

### **SHRIMPING**

Following the closure of the Ribble cockle fishery most local fishermen returned to their more familiar seasonal fisheries. The Lytham fishermen made a few landings of shrimps, but catches from the Sefton coast (Penfold Channel to Formby) have been both erratic and generally poor.

Genuine local fishermen who for various reasons have been unable to obtain a Byelaw 5 permit to exploit the cockle fishery have had a very hard time during the latter months of 2011.

Very little hand netting has been observed along the Fylde coast, catch reports have been very poor.

### **COCKLES**

Media hype raised high level political concerns over the totally irresponsible behaviour of the cockle industry; this resulted in the Ribble cockle fisheries being closed under emergency Byelaw on safety grounds. The fishery also served to emphasize the many loopholes within and total inadequacy of the Authorities Byelaw 5.

On a more positive note a significant proportion of the marketable cockle had been removed from the Foulnaze bed. The bed had been so densely populated that a major natural mortality was otherwise unavoidable.

Poor tides and adverse weather have so far prevented full surveys of the Foulnaze bed. Initial observations of the S. Gut and Penfold Channel beds suggest some regrouping has occurred over the winter months however the vast majority of cockles on the south bank of the Ribble remain marginally undersized.

### **SHELL FISHING**

Two small trawlers, one rigged with beams the other with dredges, have worked from Fleetwood. One of the vessels "Emily J" E123 is reported to have made some good landings. The other vessel "Corina 2" has sailed occasionally but appears to be having little success.

### **NETS**

Set nets have been worked in the Penfold Channel and in the few calm periods along the Sefton Coast out onto Tailors Bank. Modest catches including a few cod have been reported.

Following the Ribble cockle closure some Lytham men returned to drift netting. For a short while making a few respectable landings of late Bass and a few Codling.

### **ANGLING**

Strong onshore winds have restricted both shore and boat angling. During calmer periods encouraging catches of codling and whiting have been taken from the Fylde coast.

### **ENFORCEMENT**

Very significant amounts of patrol time have been dedicated to maintaining the Ribble cockle bed closure. One major incident was detected during a joint patrol with Sefton Council Officers and the Police, 5 persons are at present under caution.

In total 49 inspections have been carried out during the reporting period with no other enforcement action being necessary. The Honda ATV has covered 67.9 NM in 17 hours running time carrying out patrol and sample gathering work on intertidal areas.

### **SOUTHERN AREA**

### **MERSEY, WIRRAL AND DEE**

**IFCO, A. Brownrigg**

### **GENERAL**

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

## **SPECIFIC**

### **COCKLING**

Early in November all the cockle beds within the District closed, this included Wirral North cockle bed. Presently the bed has reached its minimum volume for it to be classed as sustainable. Small patches of adult size cockle are dispersed over the bed with no sign of spat. Routine hygiene samples from the bed continue to be collected on behalf of Mersey Port Health Authority. A second Representative Monitoring Point (RMP) has been introduced at Dovepoint situated in Hoylake. I have also assisted in collecting samples from the Penfold Cockle beds throughout the quarter on behalf of West Lancashire Borough Council.

### **MUSSELS**

The 16<sup>th</sup> of January saw the opening of West Kirby mussel bed on the Dee Estuary, where a mixture of sized and undersized mussels were present. Despite the issue of mussel permits by NWIFCA (this is a requirement for the collection of undersized mussel) very little interest has been shown by fishermen, possibly due to the price presently being £80 - £100 per ton. Despite the poor price, local fishermen have expressed an interest in harvesting the bed with the purpose of clearing the mussels to allow any cockles which are present to grow.

### **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.

### **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.

### **SEA ANGLING 2012 SURVEY**

In January the Sea Angling 2012 survey began in the southern area. A more detailed report on future progress will be included in the next quarterly report, with the aim being to collect information on recreational sea angling activities, economic value and social benefit around England in 2012.

### **ENFORCEMENT AND OTHER ACTIVITIES**

As in the previous quarter, I have attended several meetings with Sefton Council, Gangmasters' Licensing Authority and Mersey Port Health Authority. These included a review of the Operational Plan of the Southport cockle beds, from the opening days of the cockle season up until the bed was closed due to health and safety issues. I have also attended a workshop with Cheshire Region Local Nature Partnership at the Floral Pavilion, New Brighton, which focused on the coastal natural environment. During February I will be attending a 5 day Day Skipper Theory and a 2 day Advanced Power Boat Course, both of which will offer greater knowledge and experience in handling 'Protector Alpha' the southern areas 5 metre Rigid Inflatable Boat. In preparation for the Sea Angling 2012 survey towards the latter end of last year I attended a 2 day workshop in Newcastle