



**North Western
Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority
Annual Meeting: 17th May 2011
Copeland Borough Council Offices: 10.30 a.m.**

Agenda Item 8

**ENFORCEMENT DIRECTOR'S REPORT
FOR THE PERIOD 1ST FEBRUARY – 30TH APRIL 2011**

The purpose of this report is to provide Members with a brief overview of the fisheries, fishing activity carried out within the District and any other topics relevant to the fishing industry during the past three months. More detailed information on fishing is contained in the Area Officers individual reports and the report of the Master of the patrol vessel "Solway Protector".

Several spells of relatively good weather particularly towards the end of the period under review, resulted in a steady increase in the level of virtually all modes of offshore fishing activity.

Trawling effort by boats based at Whitehaven and Maryport was mainly directed at the prawn (*nephrop*) fisheries to the southwest of St Bees Head and the approach to Wigtown Bay on the northern side of the Solway. On occasions the local fleet were joined by up to 30 Northern Irish vessels, most of which were as usual seen to be fishing twin rigged trawl gear. Further south 3 remaining full time inshore trawlers based at Fleetwood and Barrow are understood to have worked the grounds below Shell Wharf, Shell Flat, and further inshore towards Blackpool. For the most part fishing for these vessels was reported to be very poor, resulting in landings consisting of only small quantities of roker (thornback ray) along with a few boxes of poor quality plaice.

With regard to static gear fishing, some good catches were taken, particularly in the north of the District by offshore gill netters using large (10") mesh nets. Daily landings of up to 20 boxes were seen to be made at Whitehaven and Maryport, these consisting mostly of roker but occasionally augmented by smaller amounts of turbot. Creel fishermen took advantage of any spells of suitable weather conditions to put to sea with the result that by mid April the lobster and brown crab fishery was in full swing off the Cumbrian coast, this being some 6 weeks earlier than usual. Officers have reported that landings of both crab and lobster are considered to be above average for this time of the year.

The large whelk potting vessel "Fleur de France" J 86 continued to make regular landings of up to 8 tonnes of whelks at Whitehaven. The Skipper of this vessel has now worked successfully out of the port for over 5 years. It is understood that his catches continue to be purchased by a well known shellfish company at Fleetwood, to be processed and canned exclusively for markets in the Far East.

Intertidal shellfish harvesting throughout the District was for the most part, only low key. Cockle stocks in the Solway and Morecambe Bay continue to be very poor, with the result that both areas remain closed to harvesting under relevant byelaws. Leasowe on the Wirral is the only area in the District where cockling has taken place, although harvesting on this bed was mostly on a small scale. Some fishing of sized mussel took place in Morecambe Bay, particularly around Foulney but in the upper Solway any fishing for mussels continues to be at a complete standstill. The intertidal mussel beds in this area are currently in a poor state and as such unlikely to attract much

interest. There does however continue to be an extensive bed of clean shelled, good sized mussel in the Silloth Channel, but despite 8 permits being issued to dredge this stock, no fishing has taken place so far this year.

A genuine area of concern for the fishing industry here in the north west of England, continues to be centered around the ongoing development of offshore wind farm sites in the eastern sector of the Irish Sea. The establishment of Round One sites at Barrow, Ormond and Robin Rigg in the Solway have without doubt proven to be deleterious for local fishermen, particularly those using mobile gear. It is simply not possible to undertake methods of fishing such as trawling and seine netting within a wind farm site. Unfortunately the industry is now having to come to terms with losing another large tract of what is considered to be very important/productive trawling ground. Construction of the large Round Three wind farm known as Walney Offshore is well underway, and is in fact forecast to be completed by the end of 2011. Situated approximately 12 – 14 km west of Walney Island, this 102 turbine site covers an area of what is acknowledged to be extremely good trawling ground for both prawns (*nephrops*) and whitefish. In the past this area has been fished by vessels from Fleetwood, Cumbrian ports and Northern Ireland. The lost opportunity to work this ground will almost certainly have a financial impact for the Skippers and crews of these vessels.

It is understood that meetings have recently taken place between the site developers Dong Energy and the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations (NFFO) to discuss disruption to fishing at this site along with other associated matters. One can only hope that this leads on to fishermen being adequately compensated for even more lost fishing opportunities here in the eastern Irish Sea.

On a brighter note fishermen in the north of the District were relieved to hear on 18th March 2011 that the Scottish Government had refused permission for the construction of two Round Three wind farms, one proposed for the middle of the Solway Firth and the other at Wigtown Bay. Both these areas are extremely important mobile gear fishing grounds and their loss would have been disastrous for fishing communities all around the Solway. The decision to refuse development of these sites was taken following strong opposition voiced by the fishing industry and others at consultation events held by Marine Scotland on both the north and south sides of the Solway during the past 12 months.

Enforcement Director
3rd May 2011

"SOLWAY PROTECTOR"

In general terms the patrol boat has performed well throughout the quarter. There are however several running problems to report; these are as follows:

- While carrying out routine maintenance, it was noticed that one of the sacrificial anodes from inside one of the main engine's raw water circulating pump, was missing. After having encountered this problem once before, our Engineer decided to remove the water pump and associated pipe work in order to try and retrieve the missing anode before any major damage was caused to the engine. The pump was removed and stripped down and fortunately only slight damage was found to the brass impellor where it had been in contact with the anode. New shaft seals and gaskets were fitted to the pump prior to being refitted. Unfortunately the patrol vessel was offline for 5 days as replacement parts had to be sourced from Belgium.
- A new filter assembly had to be fitted to the patrol boat's Webasto heating system.
- The port main engine was found to have developed some oil leaks, these were traced to the fuel pump oil line and rocker box cover. New lip seals were fitted to the fuel pump while the rocker box cover was removed, cleaned down and new gasket seals also fitted.
- The Appelco HXL 1000 intercom/loudhailer was found to have developed a fault. After investigation the problem was traced back to faulty wiring in the engine room trunking. All old wiring was stripped out and replaced with new.
- Two water pump impellors were changed on both the main electrical generator set, and on the port main engine fire pump. These had simply become worn due to general use.
- While out on a routine patrol on the 28th April 2011 the vessel developed a heavy vibration from the stern of the boat. It was suspected that something had been picked up and was fouling one of the propellers. Arrangements were made for the vessel to be slipped at M P Marine at Maryport the same day. Once the vessel was dried out on the slipway it was found that there was indeed a heavy rope wrapped around the port propeller shaft, the rope was removed and the shaft was checked for any damage. The "Solway Protector" returned back to the water the same afternoon.

SEVEN METRE RIB - "PROTECTOR BRAVO"

During the quarter the boat's CP50 chart plotter and radar system developed intermittent faults. On investigation two separate faults were located in the electrical wiring system. The necessary repairs were carried out and I am pleased to report both systems are now back up and running.

Problems were also encountered with starting the auxiliary motor for the boat's hydraulic net and line hauler. Due to the location of the motor it is very difficult to carry out any repairs while the motor is in place. Once the motor was removed, the carburettor and fuel system was stripped down. The fault was located to a blocked fuel jet and dirt in the system. The motor was treated with water repellent prior to being refitted.

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

BOARDINGS, PATROLS AND INSPECTIONS

Essential maintenance and periods of poor weather, along with the vessel being on the slipway at Maryport, resulted in quite a number of patrol days at sea being lost. This apart a total of 35 patrols were carried out in the District using both "Solway Protector" and "Protector Bravo".

Sightings of fishing vessels made from the "Solway Protector" totalled 104 with 34 being logged as visiting vessels. A total of 45 boardings and inspections were carried out at sea from "Solway Protector" and "Protector Bravo".

Compliance with byelaws and other relevant fisheries legislation at sea has on the whole been very good. This resulted in no serious infringements or incidents being detected in the District during the quarter, although one verbal warning was issued to a hobby fisherman for a minor offence.

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

SURVEYS

- **ENTEC Survey**

The "Solway Protector" was again chartered to carry out a migratory fish and electro sensitive beam trawl survey, and one seabed survey using our own day grab equipment. This work which was carried out at the Robin Rigg wind farm site was again undertaken for environmental consultants ENTEC UK Ltd.

- **SILLOTH CHANNEL Survey**

A seabed survey was carried out in the entrance to the Silloth channel after we had received information that part of the channel had started to silt up. As this is an area heavily used by committee vessels it was vital that we carried out a survey of the area as soon as possible. This work, which was undertaken over two days, revealed that whilst there had been some sediment transfer in the southern part of the channel, this was unlikely to hamper our patrol vessels operations.

- **CEFAS Survey**

After quite a lengthy lay-off due to a variety of factors, we have managed to re-start the CEFAS Irish sea Prawn (*nephrop*) sampling programme. Two samples were obtained during late April from local trawlers. The basic scientific data required was processed by the patrol boat crew. Following this, the information derived was sent to the CEFAS laboratory in Lowestoft for further analysis. It is planned for 5 samples per month to be acquired during the next 6 months.

Master "Solway Protector"
6th May 2011

" Solway Protector "

DURATION OF PATROLS AND SIGHTINGS

Date	Area Patrolled	Sightings	Sea time	
			Hrs.	Mins.
15/02/2011	Silloth	0	9	15
16/02/2011	Prawn pitch/Haverigg/Fleetwood	5	9	15
17/02/2011	Prawn pitch/Liverpool Bay	4	10	40
28/02/2011	St Bees/Ravenglass/Barrow	5	11	10
01/03/2011	Prawn pitch/NW Corner/Maryport	1	9	30
02/03/2011	Prawn pitch/W of Eskmeals/St Bees	3	10	30
03/03/2011	Seabed survey Silloth Channel	1	8	15
04/03/2011	Seabed survey Silloth Channel	3	6	20
14/03/2011	Prawn pitch/Selker/Maryport	6	6	10
15/03/2011	St Bees/Selker	0	6	30
16/03/2011	Robin Rigg	0	12	20
17/03/2011	Robin Rigg	0	5	0
24/03/2011	Selker/W of Eskmeals/W of Sellafield	14	9	0
25/03/2011	Selker/W of Sellafield	9	7	25
07/04/2011	Prawn pitch/Workington/Maryport	8	5	15
08/04/2011	Robin Rigg	1	6	50
18/04/2011	St Bees Head/Sellafield	4	4	0
20/04/2011	St Bees Head/Selker/Whitehaven	0	7	0
27/04/2011	St Bees Head/Schooner/Shell Flats	33	8	15
28/04/2011	Passage to Maryport	7	1	10

" Solway Protector "
PATROL STATISTICS

	13/02/11 - 30/04/11		13/11/10 - 12/02/11	
Number of patrols and passages	20	patrols	13	patrols
Seatime	153 hrs	15 mins	85 hrs	15 mins
Average length of patrol	7 hrs	39 mins	6 hrs	33 mins
Total distance covered	1367	miles	779	miles
Average distance per patrol	68	miles	60	miles
Fuel used	2745	gallons	1749	gallons
Average fuel used per patrol	137	gallons	135	gallons
<u>Total identified sightings:</u>	104	vessels	42	vessels
Local	70	vessels	40	vessels
Visiting	34	vessels	2	vessels
<u>Types of fishing vessels sighted:</u>	<u>< 45'</u>	<u>> 45'</u>	<u>< 45'</u>	<u>> 45'</u>
Trawlers	46	12	15	2
Beam Trawlers	0	0	0	0
Twin Rig Trawlers	0	21	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	0	0
Twin Beam Shrimpers	0	0	0	0
Whelk Potters	0	1	0	0
Potting Boats	11	0	12	0
Scallop Dredgers	0	0	0	0
Mussel Dredgers	0	0	2	0
Cockle Dredgers	0	0	0	0
Netters	1	0	2	0
Anglers	12	0	9	0
<u>Total:</u>	70	34	40	2

NORTHERN (CUMBRIA)

BURGHMARSH POINT TO HAVERIGG POINT

Senior Fishery Officer, E. Thinnesen
Senior Fishery Officer, M. Dobson

GENERAL

Commercial fishing activity got off to a slow start, mainly due to the inclement weather. However, as the quarter progressed, opportunities to put to sea increased, resulting in much more activity now being seen in all areas.

TRAWLING

The Silloth vessels, comprising of mainly shrimp beamers have had a very slow start to the shrimping season, although catches picked up in the last 2 weeks of April with reports of daily catches up to 80 kg. However, the current price gained for this catch is reported as low as 65p per kilo. This is not making the vessels much, if any profit, other than the shrimps which are processed locally. The Maryport fleet spent the early part of the quarter working scallops mainly on Isle of Man grounds and only recently switched back to trawling. The Whitehaven fleet reported reasonable catches of skate in the early part of the quarter and are now starting to land increasing amounts of prawns (*nephrops*), along with comparable amounts of dover sole, plaice and turbot. The quarter has again seen very little landing in the way of cod or whiting. The last week of April saw sizable landings of prawns in Whitehaven by Irish vessels that had been identified by the patrol vessel as working up to 12 miles off Sellafield, outside of the District, in an area known locally as "The Schooner".

SCALLOPS

Local boats from Maryport have spent the early part of this quarter working scallops on the Isle of Man and West coast of Scotland grounds, occasionally landing back at home port. Whitehaven has also seen a number of the Scottish fleet landing after working the same grounds. Recent information is that Silloth will be handling at least one of the large Scottish registered vessels, landing queen scallops, again caught outside of NW IFCA district.

POTTING

There was a reduced potting effort during the early part of the quarter, but effort increased from late February onwards. There are suspicions of some pot tampering taking place off Harrington, with a report to the Police of the theft of 9 strings of pots (approximately 180 pots in total). This area has been the subject of increased observation by officers to identify any enforcement related issues. A request for assistance from the Police has been sought from the Enforcement Director, which is currently on-going. Inspections have identified significant numbers of edible brown crab being caught in all traditional potting areas in the Cumbria District and that lobster catches are up considerably from the same period in 2010, possibly due to the much higher temperatures this year to date. A point to note is that one of the commercial potters has reported large numbers of cod being caught in his lobster pots set off Walney Island

OFFSHORE NETTING

There has been activity from vessels from Whitehaven and Maryport netting in the area, targeting mainly skate & turbot with very good catches reported at times, of up to 20 boxes of skate per day.

BEACH NETTING

This quarter has seen extremely low levels of beach nets compared to previous years, with most activity being identified as weekend fishing only in the Braystones area. Daily returns during April from these nets have included up to 12 good sized mullet and reports of some sized bass now starting to be caught. In addition some lobsters have been caught in the nets close to areas of scar ground.

ANGLING

Recreational angling continues to be as popular as ever, with large numbers seen fishing at recognised marks throughout the district, both on and off shore. Catches were very sporadic early in the period, but picked up from mid-March, with increasing numbers of good sized plaice being caught, particularly from the piers at Whitehaven. Other species caught included flounder, dab, codling, small whiting, and the occasional bass. Lesser-spotted dogfish were at times caught in such numbers as to be considered a nuisance.

OFFSHORE HOBBY FISHING

There has continued to be a strong presence of potting permit holders and netting hobby fishermen, working in the northern part of the district. Reports are that edible brown crab are plentiful and the latter part of the period has seen an increase in lobster catches. Apart from a short period where good returns of codling were reported from nets off Workington, the remainder of the quarter has shown poor returns. There were issues early in the quarter of high levels of herring being caught in the offshore nets, mainly off Harrington.

BAIT DIGGING

There has been the usual activity identified with bait digging during the period. Black Bank, north of Workington remains popular for lugworm, as does Whitehaven Harbour, but reports from the local angling fraternity suggests the traditional ragworm digging areas are yielding very poor returns. There has been "commercial" lugworm digging taking place throughout most of the quarter in the Nethertown area but little activity from the "recreational" anglers, suggesting this bed may be being kept a secret! Anglers have been identified gathering razor clams on beds between Nethertown and Silecroft during periods of suitable spring tides, and the next 6 to 8 weeks will see large numbers of anglers gathering peeler crabs on the extensive areas of scar ground to be found throughout the District. There will no doubt be the usual influx of people from outside the District (mainly north east England) some of whom will be taking crabs to sell commercially. There will be a requirement to increase inspections on the scars during this period to ensure protection of immature edible brown crabs.

OTHER DUTIES/TRAINING

M. Dobson attended the Sea Fisheries Officer training at Torquay during February in addition to completing his VHF Radio and Sea Survival qualification. M. Dobson, A. Forster and E. Thinnesen completed their mandatory Fire Fighting and First Aid courses in February. M. Dobson also facilitated one of the New Duties courses in London as part of his role on the DEFRA Training workshop group.

GENERAL

In the second week of February I attended a Sea Fishery Officers course in Torquay which I found very helpful and informative and provided me with a deeper insight into the role of a Sea Fisheries Officer. This also afforded me the opportunity to hear about and discuss the diverse range of fishing activity that occurs in our coastal waters and emphasised the differing and similar enforcement roles carried out by other Sea Fishery Committees/IFCAs.

Fishing activity in North Morecambe Bay in the early part of the quarter has been almost at a standstill with little fishing of any kind being witnessed apart from Angling at Greenodd. General patrolling has been engaged in and the quiet time used to call with various organisations in the area such as Cumbria Wildlife Trust based on Walney Island and with Sea Salter Oyster Hatchery also on Walney. Efforts are continuing to find suitable premises in which to keep the new R.I.B which is destined for the Barrow area as premises of suitable price and size are proving difficult to locate.

I attended the Spring meeting (and my first meeting) of the Duddon Estuary Partnership in March where the emphasis on this occasion was centred on a possible routing of Electricity Supply from Sellafield through the Duddon area to Conurbations in the Midlands. Reports were also brought from various interest groups in the area and I was asked if I would bring an update to the partnership at the next meeting in July in relation to fishing activity in the Duddon Estuary which I agreed to do.

Fishing activity in the later part of the quarter has seen a steady increase on a weekly basis and patrolling has been geared to monitor all fishing being undertaken in this period. Cockle sampling continues on a regular basis to obtain hygiene samples for South Lakeland District Council.

TRAWLING

During the last quarter there has been little activity from any of the trawl boats based at Barrow or for that matter any of the small fishing boats based at Askam and Millom/ Haverrigg.

Conversations with fishermen would indicate that more of the fishermen are seeking employment with the Windfarm operators in the Irish Sea reducing the operational time spent fishing at sea. Of those still engaged in fishing reasonable catches of Codling were reported in the early part of the quarter but tailed off significantly soon after. Repair work is being carried out on one or two vessels in the area but not at any great speed. Most small craft moored in the Walney channel have remained unused and visits to the area at various states of the tide have shown this to be the case. The activity around the windfarms features in complaints of poor fishing not only from commercial fishermen but across the board to even the rod and line shore based anglers.

SHRIMPS

Shrimping activity has gathered pace in the last month or so of the quarter with an increase in the number of trailers with shrimping gear on board being parked on the sands at Flookburgh and the adjacent airfield area. I have observed shrimping activity on the North Morecambe Bay area with operators coming out from Flookburgh and the shore area below Baycliff. All fishermen observed engaging in this activity were employing Tra-la-la units. Monitoring of this activity will continue in the next quarter when I hope to have details of catch quantity and quality available.

COCKLES

Cockling on North Morecambe Bay remains closed as cockle density on the beds remains poor and samples obtained for hygiene testing are mainly small in size. There have been no obvious signs of illegal cockling activity on this side of the bay with the exception of one very minor incident where three persons from the local Chinese community were gathering a small quantity of cockles on the sands at Roosebeck. These persons were advised that the beds are closed and a request to replace the gathered cockles back onto the bed was complied with. The Duddon sands area remains open to cockling but I have yet to evidence any cockling activity taking place there. Disturbance of sands off the shore at Roosebeck has been noted but investigation revealed this to be someone having tried out a plough on the sands and monitoring of this area will continue to see if there is a recurrence of this sort of activity.

MUSSELS

Musseling activity in the North Morecambe Bay area is centred around the Foulney area with activity continuing on a reasonably frequent basis to fulfil small orders that have been placed. Attempts are underway to establish fishable Mussel beds on the upper reaches of the Walney Channel led by Kingfisher Sea foods in Barrow. Contact has been established with persons engaged in mussel fishing and I look forward to good working relations with these people. A recent visit to Seasalter on Walney Island proved very helpful and informative and introduction and contact has been established with the Proprietor Kelsey Thompson.

SHORE ANGLING

Shore angling in the early part of the quarter had mainly been concentrated at Greenodd near Ulverston with reasonable numbers of persons present on an incoming tide. Catches have invariably been of Flounder and a reasonable proportion of these have been keepable. I have found that the anglers engaged in this activity are largely very responsible and small fish have been returned to the water. In the last couple of weeks Bass anglers have been present on the west shore of Walney Island but most were fishing two rods one for Bass the other for Flounder etc. Few Bass have been caught but most anglers report it's a bit early in the season for them yet. The Easter weekend coinciding with good weather saw big numbers of Anglers out on the usual Marks at Ulverston and Walney and reasonable catches of flounder were reported and those examined were of keepable size. I expect that this level of activity will be maintained throughout the summer months into autumn when numbers will tail away due to the onset of colder weather.

LOBSTER

When the new R.I.B becomes available for sea patrols monitoring of Lobster fishing in and around the Walney Island area and further up the West coast will be possible as this is a reasonably significant potting area. The Environment Agency has expressed an interest in joint boat patrolling especially in the Duddon Estuary area where there is an overlap of interests.

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 on a commercial basis in this fishery. Fishermen associated with the fishery removed their inshore boats during the last quarter for their winter overhaul and have yet to return these to their seasonal moorings.

As with the last quarter, I have observed no activity in this fishery from fishermen working on a hobby basis. Fishermen continue to voice their concerns regarding both the activity of the wind farms and the ongoing cable laying taking place in Morecambe Bay.

SHRIMPS

During this last quarter I have continued to observe no effort on the South side of Morecambe Bay by fishermen working tractor and tra-la-la units

During this last quarter fishermen associated with the inshore shrimp fishery have returned to their seasonal moorings after overhauling their inshore shrimp boats and gear. Fishermen associated with the inshore shrimp fishery have informed me that although landings have been reasonable, a high percentage of shrimps landed have been small.

I have observed no activity by hobby fishermen working push nets primarily towards the top end of Morecambe Bay although I expect effort to improve throughout the next quarter.

Fishermen associated with the inshore fishery continue to voice their concerns regarding the future introduction of the Marine Conservation Zone and the impact this could make on the traditional inshore fishery.

COCKLES

During this last period I neither observed nor had reports of any activity taken place in this fishery. I have continued to check all the cockle beds in my area and I have seen no improvement in stocks of both mature and immature cockle. As a result all beds in the Morecambe Bay area remain closed.

MUSSELS

During this period skears in Morecambe Bay continue to be fished on an occasional basis with effort remaining extremely low key. Mussels have, in the main, been removed from skears in the Knott End area.

During this last quarter I have continued to monitor all mussel beds in my area on a regular basis. I have observed the early signs of seed mussel on most mussel beds on the south side of Morecambe Bay with good early signs of seed on Heysham Flat Skear. At present, however, I feel it is too early to say how successful the coverage of seed mussel will be. I intend to check the skear on a regular basis throughout the next quarter and will update on the beds in my next report.

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

DRIFT STAKE AND SET NETS

To date only one fisherman has returned his inshore drift net boat to its seasonal moorings after the winter overhaul. Early reports have proved reasonable with Bass and Mullet being landed. I expect all the recognised fishermen to return their boats to their seasonal moorings within the next few weeks.

During this last quarter I have observed no stake or set nets being fished in my area although have observed fishermen associated with the fishery starting to prepare for the season.

During this last quarter Whitebait nets have continued to be fished on a regular basis with good landings destined for human consumption and sprat landings destined for various zoos for animal feed.

DINGHY AND SHORE ANGLING

Effort has begun to steadily increase towards the end of this quarter and anglers have reported landings of Bass, Plaice and Dabs. Fishermen have also reported large amounts of Dogfish being landed and have expressed their concerns about this.

Effort during this last period by shore anglers has continued to take place over high and low water tides at the top end of Morecambe Bay, the Stone Jetty at Morecambe, Heysham and Arnside. Effort and fish landings have, however, proved poor and I have observed only a slight improvement in fishing activity taking place at the Heysham Bass Nursery Area.

MISCELLANEOUS

During this last quarter fishermen voiced their concerns regarding the ongoing cable laying operation, despite effort being made to make good the area. Concerns relate to shore damage caused by the removal of a large area of rocks due to cable laying; damage to flora and fauna; discarded equipment which might cause serious damage to commercial and pleasure boats. Fishermen have also voiced concern that the cable can be seen at spring low water periods. I intend to check the area as soon as possible during the next quarter.

CENTRAL AREA

RIVER WYRE TO RIVER ALT

Senior Fishery Officer, S. Brown

GENERAL

With the weather conditions changing from the extremes of winter to unseasonably warm it is no surprise that fishing conditions have been a little variable over the past few months. After a prolonged winter lay up most fishermen welcomed the improving conditions, however their enthusiasm has often been tempered by disappointing catches and poor returns. Increased fuel and travel costs have restricted the efforts of migratory fishermen both afloat and ashore.

Despite the Committee's concerns no action appears to have been taken over the breakwater at Cleveleys, built a year ago in breach of consent, of materials that were expressly forbidden being both toxic to the marine environment and recycled. In addition the area is now facing more disruption with trenching work for a cable coming ashore a few yards further north. A substantial trench has been cut across Cleveleys Rough, the spoil heaps showing clearly at low water. Similar spoil heaps left after work on the Fylde Coast sewer outfall took many years to clear by tidal action. Local fishermen report that they were not consulted about this work which crosses an important nursery area at a time when the small fish are known to settle there. The area is also very popular with the beach launched angling boat fraternity with two major clubs using launching point in the vicinity.

TRAWLING

The one remaining full time inshore trawler based at Fleetwood has struggled to meet her running costs making disappointing landings of plaice and thornback ray from the Below Shell Wharf, the Pebbles and the Point of the Bank. An experimental trip to the now little visited Blackpool trawling grounds proved particularly unsuccessful.

One larger trawler continues to struggle against wind farm encroachment onto her traditional grounds about the southern end of the Prawn Pitch. This vessel has been kept running only through family initiative in the direct marketing of prawns (nephrops).

The area's largest trawler A678 'Isadale' has found employment on standby work guarding cables being put in to bring power ashore from the wind farms.

All other smaller trawlers have remained laid, up their owners finding alternative employment.

SHRIMPING

The spring fishery started in early March with the Lytham boats making modest landings from the sheltered waters at Wall End off the mouth of the Ribble. They have continued to make modest landings throughout March and April.

The Southport and Marshside fishermen also enjoyed a reasonable start to the season but with predominance of calm weather and offshore winds catches dropped away to less than viable levels. A considerable amount of silt has settled along the edge of the Penfold Channel and Southport shrimping grounds, the situation is not likely to improve until the onset of westerly winds.

Push netters working from Blackpool north to the Landmark Hole off Rossall have reported the presence of considerable quantity's of small shrimps, a lot of riddling has been needed even to sift out sufficient shrimps for domestic purposes.

COCKLES - MUSSELS

Unfounded excitement over the early prospects of the Penfold Channel cockle fishery is beginning to reach fever pitch in some sections of the shellfish industry. In reality while considerable stocks have survived the winter on all the known beds in the Ribble estuary few are likely to reach marketable size until the latter months of this year. Most will not mature until well into 2012.

Officers and scientific staff have been working with the relevant Environmental Health Authorities to ensure that the MSH classifications are in place in time for harvesting to commence. The ground is already starting to go soft in parts of the Penfold Channel and some difficulties are expected with the gathering of samples over the next few months.

An early spatfall of mussels has been observed on Rossall Scar, the Neckings, King Scar and Black Scar. All of these areas are extremely vulnerable to storm damage and will be kept under observation to assess the prospects of a viable seed mussel fishery developing.

Scouring along the Ribble Walls has cleared much of last year's mussel spatfall and the stunted and elderly mussels that had inhabited the area for many years. With the improvements to the water flow that have occurred with the Ribble Channel breaking out to the west the situation is now more favourable for the on growing of more marketable mussels.

NETS AND LINES

Beach nets have been worked on Taylors Bank, along the Sefton Coast, in the Penfold Channel and at North Shore Blackpool. Occasional reports have been received of Oriental netting activity at Starr Gate - South Shore Blackpool. After some initial reports of a few headfish and early Bass being taken from Blackpool, catches declined with the onset of calmer weather.

The Lytham netting boats began exploratory trips to Salters Bank in early April. Fishermen report that there are good few Bass about but that by far the majority of fish have been lost to seal predation before they could be got safely onboard.

ANGLING

Shore and boat angling remains as popular as ever with numbers of beach launched boats increasing, particularly in the Southport area.

Calm weather has been good for boat anglers who have been observed fishing Blackpool, Cleveleys and Rossall roughs during settled periods.

The same calm weather has not helped the shore anglers. Catches have consisted mostly of small flounder and a few plaice. Reports have been received of the very occasional spring bass and codling.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

A considerable amount of time has been spent on shellfish sampling and survey work particularly relating to the Ribble fishery. I have also worked with SFO S. Waite on sample gathering and patrol work in Morecambe Bay.

There have been a lot of meetings to attend dealing particularly with plans for the Ribble fishery, Marine Conservation Zones and the ongoing problem of vehicle access at Blackpool for fishermen and anglers.

Work with D. Dobson on drafting the replacement NWIFCA Byelaws is making good progress and it is hoped that a draft document will be ready for presentation shortly.

SOUTHERN AREA

MERSEY, WIRRAL AND DEE

Fishery Officer, A. Brownrigg

GENERAL

There are three main features which remain on-going in the southern area. Harvesting of commercial cockles on the Leasowe/Moreton cockle bed, utilisation of resources and introduction of equipment into a relatively new area, and the transition from Sea Fishery Committee to Inshore Fishery Conservation Authority.

SPECIFIC

Cockle harvesting remains a pertinent issue in the area, with 16-40 individuals harvesting the bed daily, resulting in approximately 300 kg being fished per tide. Cockle prices have decreased to £1:20 per kg and £1200 per ton since December 2010, a drop of 30p per kg and £300 per ton.

A second area of the bed, extending down to New Brighton, was identified in February which contains adult shellfish and spat. A set of 12 samples was subsequently obtained from 2 separate points (Harrison Drive East and West), all of which have been classified as Grade B samples. In April a new classification was granted and the cockle bed was extended up to the Y breakwater at Harrison Drive, at New Brighton, to the Lighthouse station at Leasowe. Overall, a working area in excess of 6 km²

Joint enforcement operations with the Gangmasters Licensing Authority (GLA), Mersey Port Health Authority (MPHA), UK Border Agency (UKBA), North Western Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority (NWIFCA) and Merseyside Police resulted in the arrest of 1 individual for Gangmaster related offences and 6 oriental cocklers for other offences. Vehicles and equipment

were seized and impounded as part of these operations and 180kg of cockles were returned to the bed.

A Mersey Shellfish Liaison joint meeting took place involving MPHA, GLA, NWIFCA, Merseyside Police, Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council (WMBC) and Health & Safety Executive (HSE), regarding current management issues of the cockle bed on Leasowe/Moreton beach, and for the start of the new season in September. Also discussed at the meeting was an area orientation for 2 representatives of the WMBC, and issues surrounding the improvement of communication with merchants.

Due to previous confusion regarding sampling, two representatives from the Centre for Environment Fisheries Aquaculture Science (CEFAS) visited the Leasowe/Moreton coastline for an orientation of the area, and to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the location of sample points relevant to that specific bed, something that proved to be invaluable.

The transition to IFCA on the 1st of April has resulted in the expansion of working boundaries, which now include part of the Dee Estuary. This required orientation to the area and development of working relationships with individuals relevant to the working area such as the Environmental Agency, Park Rangers.

A Quad bike has now been introduced into the area which has carried out enforcement and scientific duties at the Leasowe/Moreton area, and been utilised in support and conjunction with Senior Fishery Officer Brown in the Southport area.

A 5m Rigid Inflatable Boat (RIB) is now moored at Liverpool Marina and following a short period of training, such as the recently attended 1 day Very High Frequency (VHF) Radio course, will be available for enforcement and scientific patrols on the River Mersey and Dee Estuary.

Other courses attended include a week long Fishery Officer's Enforcement course in Torquay intended to clarify the roles and responsibilities expected of a Fishery Officer, and a 2 day 'New Duties' workshop, held in Newcastle and run by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), held to offer a better understanding of the organisation IFCA.

With effect from the 1st May the cockle bed at Leasowe/Moreton beach will close for the season; however, samples will be routinely collected every month in order to monitor classification.