

SOUTHERN AREA

MERSEY, WIRRAL AND DEE

Fishery Officer, A. Brownrigg

GENERAL

During April 2011, the Sea Fishery Committee made the transition to Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority, which resulted in an expansion of the Southern district to incorporate parts of the River Dee Estuary. Regular shore patrols continue across the area and support to other IFCA officers and multi-agency operations remain ongoing. Advice and guidance to the general public via meetings has also been undertaken.

SPECIFIC

TRAWLING

A small part-time fishing unit of around seven boats can be found moored off Meols, and observations indicate that most vessels do not fish during the winter months, but during the summer period fishing a pattern can be seen. A detailed report will be included in the next quarterly report.

COCKLING

The cockling season drew to a close during May, and over the final few weeks, approximately 1.8 tons of cockles were harvested from the bed every day. There was no cockling activity during the first 6 weeks of the closed season. However, with the opening of the Dee cockle bed and a rise in cockle prices of up to £2.40 per kg, this has resulted in cases of low level poaching taking place, where it is estimated that approximately two tons of cockles were illegally harvested from the Leasowe/Moreton beach in a one week period alone. Vehicle patrols and static observation patrols were undertaken at irregular times and over the weekends in order to eradicate this activity. An incident occurred at the end of July where cockle harvesters from South Wales and Poland were caught taking cockles from a closed bed on Leasowe/Moreton beach. Officers from NWIFCA and Mersey Port Health Authority were on patrol, and approximately 20 illegal harvesters were apprehended, cautioned and interviewed under IFCA byelaws with all cockles being returned back to the bed. MSH Hygiene samples are routinely undertaken to determine the quality of the bed. Presently only adult size shellfish remain from 2010's spat. August will see a detailed scientific survey of the bed to determine if a fishery will be present come the start of the cockle harvesting season in September.

MUSSELS

With the introduction of the new district, a mussel bed on the river Dee has now become the responsibility of NWIFCA. Presently the mussel bed is not accessible due to the seasonal closure and will look to open in September. Early samples suggest the Mussels are a grade 'C' standard, however; a detailed survey of the bed will take place shortly with a more accurate report being highlighted in the next quarterly report.

ANGLING

Since May a steady rise in Rod angling both on shore and by boat has taken place. Seaforth, Otterspool, New Brighton (Perch Rock, Kings Parade) are all popular areas with Bass, Dab, Codling, Whiting and Rays being fished. Commercial recreational fishing boats from Liverpool Marina can be observed moored off New Brighton with each craft carrying four to seven anglers over one tide, however, no significant catches have been noted. Bait diggers, roughly two to six in number, can be seen daily along the North Wirral coastline. New Brighton, Mockbeggar Wharf and the area of beach

off Leasowe Common have been identified to be the most popular areas.

NETS

Several nets have been located along the North Wirral coastline. From the nets identified, two were found to be correctly marked, however, three nets, believed to be abandoned, were found to be contravening Byelaw 11 offences. These nets will be re-visited over the forthcoming weeks.

ENFORCEMENT AND OTHER ACTIVITIES

Despite seasonal closures of the cockle beds, this has been a particularly busy period. Ground orientation of the new area was necessary, as well as routine patrols, sample gathering and survey work. Mobile and static patrols of the Leasowe/Moreton area have been undertaken in view of incidents of illegal cockle harvesting, and officer support has been offered to other areas in the form of shore/ATV patrols. Several minor offences have been dealt with mainly relating to elderly/family groups cockle harvesting during the closed season. In June, I attended a one day Sea Survival course at Fleetwood, and gained the qualification required in conjunction with the Rigid Inflatable Boat moored at Liverpool Marina.