

## **NORTH MORECAMBE BAY**

## **HAVERRIGG POINT TO ARNSIDE**

**Fishery Officer, C. Britton**

### **GENERAL**

Fishing activity on the north side of Morecambe Bay in this quarter started slowly with shrimping the only means of fishing that had shown any level of activity. As the quarter progressed however this changed as shore and boat angling increased with the good weather experienced periodically through the quarter. These periods of activity further enhanced my opportunities to introduce myself to the local angling community and to distribute the IFCA size charts which were gratefully received by most anglers. With the increase in angling activity more of my focus was concentrated in the Ulverston, Barrow and Walney areas and less focus on the shrimping activities which by the last month of the quarter was showing quite an evidenced tail off.

Cockle and Mussel sampling has continued to obtain samples for South Lakeland District Council and Barrow District Council. A survey of the Duddon Estuary was undertaken to see if there were any significant deposits of cockles in the area but density proved to be very poor but any found were of reasonable size. Small cockles were most notable by their absence.

I have attended my second meeting of the Duddon Estuary Partnership where I was able to inform the partnership about the cockle survey that had been undertaken and the enforcement activity in relation to the removal of illegal nets on the Estuary near Askam Pier.

Earlier this month (July ) I had opportunity to go to Whitehaven to have a familiarization day with the new IFCA RIB which is destined for use in my area when suitable storage is found which yet remains elusive. The handling characteristics of the new R.I.B are excellent and it will prove a great asset in relation to monitoring and checking the activities of boat anglers, Lobster fishermen and any netting activity taking place in the North Morecambe Bay area as well as further afield.

### **TRAWLING**

With only one full time trawling vessel operating out of Barrow and some smaller part time vessels operating on a very ad hoc basis communication with this section of the fishing community has been very intermittent. Recent conversation with the skipper of the full time vessel indicates that this quarter has not been a good one with catches of Bass and Mullet in particularly significantly down in comparison with last year. The belief held is that the continued activity around the wind farms is detrimental to the existence of a viable fishing industry.

### **SHRIMPS**

In the early to mid part of the quarter shrimping activity centred around Flookburgh as well as the area out from Aldingham and Newbiggin. Conversations with members of the shrimping community indicate that they have had a good season at the shrimps. However as the quarter progressed shrimping activity has diminished to virtually no fishing taking place. It is anticipated that this will increase again later in the season before finishing altogether over the late autumn and winter period.

## **COCKLES**

Cockling remains closed on North Morecambe Bay as cockle density on the surveyed beds remains low in the Flookburgh/ Leven Island, Aldingham and Newbiggin beds. Sampling from these areas yields samples of mostly small sized cockles just within legal dimensions with the odd patch of larger cockles. In my last report I had stated that I did not believe that there was any illegal cockle fishing taking place but recent events may have turned that belief upside down as reports have been received that illegal fishing is taking place on suitable low tides late at night into the small hours of the morning on the bay accessed via Humphrey Head. Last week I went to Humphrey Head in the early hours to see if there was any substance to the claims of illegal fishing and observed two quadbikes making their way along the track out onto the bay. On the same morning at approximately one o'clock I went to Flookburgh and half way along the track I observed a transit van with a trailer attached with two male persons preparing to go out onto the sands on a Quad. The trailer was of large proportions and may have been able to accommodate at least one other quad. On speaking to the two male persons it became immediately apparent that they were of Eastern European extraction. When asked what they were doing they replied, "just looking". I made them aware of the fact that cockle fishing in the area is illegal and subsequently they left the area some fifteen minutes later. In view of this activity it is reasonable to assume that illegal cockling is taking place. Continued monitoring of activities in the early hours will continue as well as on daytime tides to see if any patterns of continuous activity emerge and thereby implement a strategy to interrupt and if possible bring this activity to an end.

## **MUSSELS**

Musseling in the area is centred around the Foulney area with the most significant change being the legal presence of mussel dredging vessels on the area of the bay known as South America. These vessels are harvesting seed mussel under licence for relaying in other areas. Some allegations of straying beyond the permitted boundaries have been made and observation of the area has been undertaken to establish fact. I have spoken to the skippers of the vessels concerned and have been given assurances that they did not stray over the boundaries, facts which they say they can verify if need be. Mussel sampling will continue for Barrow District Council for hygiene samples.

## **SHORE ANGLING**

Of all aspects of fishing in the area this is the one that has shown the largest growth in this quarter. This I believe is partly due to the reasonable long periods of good weather which the area has enjoyed for a time. The popular areas are centred in the Ulverston area with a reduction at Greenodd due to a change in the course of the river Leven through its estuary away from the car park at that location which had been the centre of concentrated angling in the area. The Slagg Banks area and the shore adjacent to the Priory have shown a marked increase in popularity mostly yielding reasonable catches of Flounder. Bass have been caught in reasonable numbers near Bardsea at Kingfisher Chemicals. This has made this a popular fishing mark with competition for space on the right high tides. I recently received information that some unscrupulous anglers were fishing up to six rods and keeping undersize bass, the anglers believed to be from the Chinese community, with the activity taking place on tides in the hours of darkness. Visits to this mark in the hours of darkness on suitable high tides did indeed reveal the presence of the said fishermen with a large number of rods, although Bass were caught none were caught by the Chinese gentlemen and anything undersize was returned by all present. Continued monitoring of the area will be sustained.

Angling continues on west shore Walney and at Askam Pier and recently I have observed anglers fishing of rocks near the life boat station on Roa Island at the entrance to the Walney Channel on low tide presumably for Bass and Mullet although presence of anglers at this location is sporadic.

Boat angling has increased with most boats being launched from the slipway on Walney. When I have spoken to the anglers as they came ashore I have observed and inspected some good catches of Mackerel and reasonable catches of Bass all of which have been of legal size and above.

The numbers participating in angling I believe will be maintained until a return to colder weather in late autumn will see a return to the much lower number of participants through the winter period.