



North Western
Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority
Meeting 4: 30 September 2011
Morecambe Town Hall: 10.30 a.m.

Agenda Item: 6

ENFORCEMENT DIRECTOR'S REPORT
FOR THE PERIOD 1ST May 2011 to 31ST July 2011

The purpose of this report is again to provide Members of the Authority with a brief overview of the fisheries, fishing activity, enforcement and any other topics relevant to the fishing industry and the work of the NW IFCA. More detailed information is contained in the Area Officer's individual reports, whilst offshore activities are covered by the report of the Master of the patrol vessel "Solway Protector".

The period started off with 4 weeks of very poor weather conditions, as strong-to-gale force winds mainly from a westerly quarter prevailed on most days. Whilst this is most unusual for the month of May it did result in virtually all offshore fishing coming to a standstill. The weather improved somewhat from around the first week of June, but it was not until early July before conditions became more summer like, with much lighter winds. Apart from a few days of fresher conditions, the weather then remained in a similar vein through to the end of the reporting period.

As to be expected at this time of the year, trawlers in the north of the district mostly based at Whitehaven and Maryport targeted the prawn (nephrops) fisheries off the Cumbrian coast and grounds to the south of Wigtown Bay on the Scottish side of the Solway. The best hauls of prawns were again taken during the hours of darkness, with catches improving steadily from around the second week of June. Inspections of landings at Whitehaven revealed nightly hauls of between 20 – 70 stones consisting of a mixture of both whole and tailed prawns. Vessels landing at Maryport were seen to put ashore catches of up to 150 stone of prawns augmented by up to 30 boxes of mixed white fish, mostly plaice. These hauls were reported as taken mainly from the Wigtown Bay prawn fishery and other grounds in the Scottish sector of the Solway. Further south in the district trawling effort was reported to be very limited, with only 2 boats working from Fleetwood and occasionally one from Barrow. Nonetheless some reasonable catches were taken consisting mostly of plaice, roker and some dover sole. Very few visiting Northern Irish vessels were seen targeting the Cumbrian prawn fishery during the quarter, this most probably due to continued good fishing in the western Irish Sea along with reports of much better prawn prices at Northern Irish ports.

Creel fishermen have reported catches of lobster to be somewhat lighter than those of a corresponding period in recent years. On the other hand, brown crab is understood to have been plentiful and for the most part of a very good quality. Regrettably creel fishermen working inshore grounds off Barrow and west of Walney Island are understood to have lost considerable amounts of gear in these areas during the past few months. It is thought that this may be due to dahn markers being severed by wind farm service vessels not keeping to prescribed navigation corridors.

Fishing for sized mussel from intertidal beds within the district was again carried out on a modest scale, with the only activity reported around Foulney and the skears in the Knott End area. There continues to be a substantial stock of good sized mussel in the Silloth Channel, however only one Maryport based vessel was occasionally seen dredging in this area.

All cockle fisheries in the district remained closed to fishing under the terms of the Authority's annual closure byelaws. Officers did however receive several reports of illegal fishing taking place on the northern side of Morecambe Bay, the Wirral and at Southport. These reports were investigated and a strategy developed to try and prevent any reoccurrence. This however has proved to be extremely difficult owing to limited staffing resources covering a relatively large area. Nonetheless officers did have some success. An operation carried out in the early hours of 25th June at Leasowe resulted in 15 cockle fishermen being apprehended. The outcome of this was a group of Eastern Europeans being given verbal warnings, whilst 8 fishermen from north Wales were interviewed and subsequently offered official Home Office Cautions for the offence of fishing in contravention of the seasonal closure byelaw. A further incident then occurred at Humphrey Head near Flookbrough when following information received from a reliable source, officers discovered 4 Polish fishermen on the shore who were found to be in possession of equipment that could have been used to harvest cockles. These 4 were given verbal warnings and sent on their way. The officers then carried out an inspection of the area which resulted in them finding several bags of cockles concealed at the edge of the marsh. These were taken back out to a cockle bed and relayed.

IRISH SEA CONSERVATION ZONES – FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

The final recommendations for Marine Conservation Zones in the Irish Sea Project Area were submitted on 31st August 2011 to the Science Advisory Panel, The Joint Nature Conservation Committee, and Natural England. It is expected that Government will hold a full public consultation next year before beginning to designate the actual Marine Conservation Zones.

The recommendations have been developed by a Regional Stakeholder Group consisting of around 40 people with firsthand knowledge of the Irish Sea. These included people from commercial fishing interests, marine industries, wind farm developers, marine scientists, local authorities and recreational interests, among others.

A summary version of the Irish Sea Conservation Zone's recommendations and the full 450 page report can be downloaded from www.irishseaconservation.org.uk

ENFORCEMENT OF COCKLE FISHERIES (post 1st September 2011)

Cockle fishing areas on the south side of the Ribble Estuary and at Leasowe on the Wirral, opened for harvesting on 1st September 2011. Morecambe Bay and beds in the Solway Firth will remain closed until further notice as stocks in these areas remain low.

The North Western IFCA worked with other regulatory bodies to implement a comprehensive multi-agency plan for managing the Ribble fishery, as it was expected that several hundred fishers would turn up at Southport on 1st September 2011.

From an IFCA perspective, if management of the Ribble fishery was to be effective, we knew that this was likely to be very resource intensive. Despite some staff taking annual

leave, a team of 8 operational officers was assembled. The team, complete with quad bikes, rigid inflatable boat and all other essential equipment, was based at a hotel in the vicinity of Southport on 30th August. The operation was planned in the first instance to last for around 5 days. The principal aims of the exercise were to prevent any further illegal fishing before 1st September, check that fishermen were in possession of Byelaw 5 permits, prevent those without permits from fishing on a commercial scale, and to enforce the minimum removal size for cockles.

Whilst officers would not be so naïve as to expect to achieve 100% compliance, I do consider that the operation proved to be successful in that it attained most of its original objectives. Management of the fishery is ongoing as this report is being prepared, I shall therefore provide Members with a verbal update on the 30th September.

BODY – WORN VIDEO SURVEILLANCE SYSTEM

Prior to commencement of the operation at Southport, a decision was taken at short notice to provide some officers with body worn video cameras.

This equipment enables officers to record picture and sound evidence in any situation where it is considered appropriate to the circumstances which are encountered during the course of their work. Digital pictures and sound records could be critical to show exactly what happened and what was said, and may help to avoid disputes, reduce time taken to establish important facts and clearly show the truth of matters. Furthermore the use of cameras is considered a detriment against aggressive and abusive behaviour towards officers.

Officers who used the cameras during the Southport operation were all of the opinion that these proved to be extremely useful. I would expect that in future all the Authority's operational officers will be provided with this equipment.

D T DOBSON

Enforcement Director
14 September 2011