



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

Agenda Item: 6

FISHERIES: JUNE TO SEPTEMBER 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

“SOLWAY PROTECTOR”

Once again the “Solway Protector” has provided us with three months of valued service. We did however encounter quite a number of minor running problems, which are as follows:

- Starboard engine room exhaust fan - faulty wiring replaced on the control panel.
- Engine room lights - new florescent units fitted.
- Replace port main engine control Morse cable.
- New seals fitted to port main engine fuel pump governor.
- Repair to starboard engine boost pressure pipe.
- Replace high water temperature switch on starboard main engine.
- Fit new exhaust gaskets to both port and starboard main engine exhaust bellows.
- Repair perished hose on coolant system.
- Replace faulty hose on starboard main engine heat exchanger.
- Faulty wiring repaired on vessel’s security alarm.
- Change leaking hydraulic transmission on hose on port side gearbox oil pump.
- Excessive corrosion found on relay assembly for anchor windless - repair wiring and fit new relay switches.
- Repair wiring harness from port main engine alternator to main switchboard.
- Re-seal radar and VHF wiring harnesses as water was starting to ingress through the roof into the wheelhouse.
- Due to corrosion new fuse holders were fitted to port side amp meter.
- Replace gas sensor unit in forward crew’s accommodation.
- Repack stern tubes and repair associated earth wiring.
- Fit new toilet in crew accommodation.

The above work was carried out by the patrol boat engineer with officers assisting.

- Over the past 6 months the steering gear on the “Solway Protector” had become increasingly tighter making close quarter manoeuvres more difficult. Having encountered a similar problem

once before we were quite confident that the vessel would only be out of the water for a short period of time to rectify this problem.

The Patrol boat was slipped at Maryport on the 16th May 2011. After a thorough inspection of the steering gear, it was found that a bearing inside the port side rudder tube had slightly expanded, which resulted in a very tight seal around the rudder shaft adding increased pressure on the steering system. M P Marine of Maryport carried out the necessary repairs to the system.

Whilst on the slip the hull was pressure washed before being re-treated with antifouling paint. New sacrificial anodes were also fitted prior to the vessel going back into the water on the 19th May.

- While carrying out a mussel survey in the upper Silloth channel on the 14th June, the dredging equipment in use became fast on the seabed, this resulted in the lifting davit being put under enormous strain, before finally giving way. The davit sustained significant damage rendering it unusable.

This lifting gear forms a very important part of essential equipment required onboard the patrol vessel, as it enables us to carry out seabed sampling using the day grab equipment, along with both mussel and beam trawl surveys.

I am pleased to report that the davit has been strengthened significantly and is now back in use. This work was carried out by McGrady Engineering of Whitehaven.

- All oil changes and planned essential maintenance schedules are all up to date.

SEVEN METRE RIB - "PROTECTOR BRAVO"

Again "Protector Bravo" has provided us with 3 months of excellent service with only 3 general running problems to report on:

- New propellers were fitted to the vessel's twin 100hp Yamaha engines. These had become worn due to general wear and tear when working in shallow waters.
- Wiring repairs were carried out on the boats flood lights
- A new stern light was fitted.

BOARDINGS, PATROLS & INSPECTIONS

Due to crew being deployed on enforcement duties on the shore, officers' annual leave, essential maintenance, periods of poor weather and the vessel being on the slip at Maryport, resulted in some patrol days at sea being lost.

However a total of 55 patrols were carried out in the district using both "Solway Protector" and "Protector Bravo" and the new 6.5 metre Humber RIB.

Sightings of fishing vessels along with recreational sea anglers made from the "Solway Protector" totalled 316 with 46 being logged as visiting vessels. A total of 101 boardings and inspections were carried out at sea in "Solway Protector" and "Protector Bravo".

Compliance with byelaws and other relevant fisheries legislation at sea has been on the whole very good. This has resulted in no serious infringements or incidents being detected in the district during the quarter. However one written warning was issued along with several verbal warnings to hobby fishermen for minor infringements.

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

SURVEYS

NW IFCA Survey

On the 14th June the "Solway Protector" was engaged in carrying out a mussel survey in the Silloth channel. This was in order to record how much the seed mussel had grown on from a previous survey carried out some months earlier.

The survey involved towing a modified mussel dredge from the stern of the "Solway Protector". Unfortunately only 6 tows were carried out before the dredge became fast on the seabed. Damage to the lifting davit resulted in the survey having to be aborted.

MARYPORT TRAWLER RACE

Once again on the 13th August the "Solway Protector" took part in the annual Maryport trawler race. This annual event has become very popular in recent years, and this year attracted quite a number of visiting vessels, mainly from the Isle of Man. Over the years Maryport has created strong links with the island, due mainly to our local vessels fishing scallops there at certain times of the year. Accompanying these vessels in the race was the Isle of Man's fisheries protection vessel "Barrule".

The "Solway Protector" had many roles in the event which included, start boat, official photographer, safety boat, and time keeper. Apart from being good fun it also helps the Authority's officers maintain a good working relationship with the fishing industry.

Master "Solway Protector"
12th September 2011

" Solway Protector "
DURATION OF PATROLS AND SIGHTINGS

Date	Area Patrolled	Sightings	Sea time	
			Hrs.	Mins.
03/05/2011	Passage from Maryport	4	1	30
04/05/2011	Prawn pitch/Harrington/Workington	9	6	0
05/05/2011	Workington/Silloth	5	5	30
16/05/2011	Passage to Maryport	0	1	0
19/05/2011	Passage back to Whitehaven	0	1	0
02/06/2011	W of Eskmeals/Sellafield/Maryport	14	7	30
03/06/2011	Whitehaven/Maryport/Workington/Whitehaven	22	5	45
06/06/2011	W of Sellafield/Silloth/Whitehaven	5	4	40
07/06/2011	Workington/Maryport/Silloth	3	3	35
08/06/2011	Prawn pitch/Blackpool/N W Corner	7	9	40
10/06/2011	Prawn pitch/Selker/Walney	4	6	45
13/06/2011	Prawn pitch/St Bees	0	4	0
14/06/2011	Silloth Channel	4	5	0
15/06/2011	Harrington/Workington/Maryport/Silloth	0	3	40
16/06/2011	Prawn pitch/Sellafield	6	3	30
21/06/2011	Outer Prawn Grounds/Eskmeals	9	7	0
23/06/2011	Prawn pitch/Walney	9	6	40
27/06/2011	Workington/Three Fathom Bank/Maryport	4	9	0
28/06/2011	Silloth/Maryport/Workington/Harrington	18	5	35
29/06/2011	Prawn pitch/Walney/Lune Deep/Workington	0	9	45
30/06/2011	St Bees Head/Sellafield	0	3	0
01/07/2011	Parton/Harrington/Workington/Maryport	19	5	30
02/07/2011	Sellafield/St Bees	6	3	30
06/07/2011	Prawn pitch/Walney/Blackpool	8	9	0
08/07/2011	Prawn pitch/Haverigg/Ravenglass	9	9	0

Statistics continued.....

"Solway Protector"

11/07/2011	Sellafield/Walney/Heysham Lake	17	10	45
12/07/2011	Maryport/Harrington/Workington/St Bees	0	7	10
13/07/2011	Silloth/Maryport/Workington/W of Whitehaven	10	7	0
14/07/2011	St Bees/Selker/Whitehaven	15	6	20
15/07/2011	Whitehaven/St Bees Head/Sellafield	9	2	10
25/07/2011	Prawn pitch/Haverigg/Drigg/Maryport/Workington	3	6	45
26/07/2011	Prawn pitch/Fleetwood/Heysham/Selker/St Bees	16	9	15
27/07/2011	Workington Bank/Maryport	6	3	40
28/07/2011	Prawn pitch/Scallop Bank/NW Corner	13	12	44
29/07/2011	Prawn pitch/W of Whitehaven	11	8	30
01/08/2011	Outer Prawn Pitch/Selker	5	5	50
11/08/2011	Prawn pitch/RTB weather	0	2	55
12/08/2011	S W St Bees/Silecroft	10	5	30
13/08/2011	Maryport Trawler Race	0	4	55
17/08/2011	Prawn pitch/Selker/St Bees Head/Whitehaven	7	5	20
22/08/2011	Prawn pitch/Fleetwood	21	8	0
24/08/11	Eskmeals/River Ribble/Haverigg	8	10	15

" Solway Protector "
PATROL STATISTICS

	<u>1/5/11 - 31/8/11</u>		<u>13/02/11 - 30/04/11</u>	
Number of patrols and passages	42	patrols	20	patrols
Seatime	242 hrs	15 mins	153 hrs	15 mins
Average length of patrol	5 hrs	47 mins	7 hrs	39 mins
Total distance covered	2357	miles	1367	miles
Average distance per patrol	56	miles	68	miles
Fuel used	5414	gallons	2745	gallons
Average fuel used per patrol	129	gallons	137	gallons
<u>Total identified sightings:</u>	316	vessels	104	vessels
Local	270	vessels	70	vessels
Visiting	46	vessels	34	vessels
<u>Types of fishing vessels sighted:</u>	<u>< 45'</u>	<u>> 45'</u>	<u>< 45'</u>	<u>> 45'</u>
Trawlers	92	19	46	12
Beam Trawlers	0	2	0	0
Twin Rig Trawlers	0	19	0	21
Pair Trawlers	0	0	0	0
Anchor Seiners	0	0	0	0
Fly Draggars	0	0	0	0
Gill Netters	6	0	0	0
Shrimpers	0	0	0	0
Twin Beam Shrimpers	11	0	0	0
Whelk Potters	0	1	0	1
Potting Boats	40	1	11	0
Scallop Dredgers	0	4	0	0
Mussel Dredgers	0	0	0	0
Cockle Dredgers	0	0	0	0
Netters	0	0	1	0
Anglers	121	0	12	0
<u>Total:</u>	270	46	70	34

NORTHERN (CUMBRIA)

BURGHMARSH POINT TO HAVERIGG POINT

Senior Fishery Officer E Thinnesen
Senior Fishery Officer M Dobson

GENERAL

This reporting period for the shore was limited to some extent due to unforeseen illness to one of the shore officers, thus hampering the amount of beach quad patrols that could be carried out.

TRAWLING

There were good catches of Nephrops throughout the period for most local boats from both Whitehaven and Maryport and also some visiting Irish vessels. The majority of the catches were made during the hours of darkness, with daylight fishing picking up towards the end of the period. Local boats have been averaging around 40 stone catches of Nephrops for a night's work. The Shrimp Beamers fishing from Silloth have been catching below average totals with checks made by officers showing catches of 50-200Kg, with prices being discussed of £1.20 per Kg. The Northern Irish Seine netter, 'Arcane' N907, has landed on a regular basis into Whitehaven, with most landings consisting of well over 300 boxes of mainly Haddock (approximately 18 tons).

SCALLOPS

Very few Scallop catches were landed in the district during this reporting period and the changes in regulations for larger vessels in the Isle of Man grounds curtailed the activity of the larger Scottish vessels that would normally land into Whitehaven.

POTTING

There was a reduced potting effort compared to previous years, with reports of Lobster catches from those boats still working being lower than previously. There is still effort on the ground mainly off the rough grounds between Parton and Maryport, with some increased activity off Walney, mainly by the 'Kerry Marie', as well as this vessel's usual effort off Ravenglass/Selker. Edible Brown Crab catches remain healthy with some good catches throughout the region.

OFFSHORE NETTING

There has been activity from vessels from Whitehaven and Maryport netting in the area, targeting mainly Skate and Turbot with mixed returns.

BEACH NETTING

During this period the beaches in Cumbria were closed to netting under Byelaw 10 (Cumbria SFC) from 31st May. Prior to this there were very few nets identified, with some effort in the area of Braystones, seen only at weekends. There was one breach of Byelaw 10 identified north of Maryport pier, a net which was seized by officers with no identified owner.

ANGLING

Recreational angling in Cumbria has continued to be popular, especially through the warmer weather where good catches of Mackerel have been made off Whitehaven Pier and from angling vessels throughout the region. There were reports of good catches of Cod for a short period for angling boats off both Harrington and St Bees Head. Maryport Pier had a short period of good returns of both Mackerel and Cod during July. The warmer periods also provided good fishing for Bass at most of the Cumbrian marks both on and offshore. Other species caught at times

included Flounder, Dab, and small Whiting. Lesser-spotted Dogfish have continued to be caught in such numbers to be considered a nuisance to local anglers.

BAIT DIGGING

There has been activity for Lugworm digging identified mainly in the areas of Allonby, Ellisons Scar, Nethertown and also in Whitehaven Harbour. The one regular bait digger revealed that current prices for locally dug Lugworm is £35 per 100 worms. However, these are sporadic sightings due to the reduced number of Beach patrols this period through both illness to one of the shore officers and also requirement to cover as crew on the 'Solway Protector'. There have been no sightings of any Ragworm diggers through the period, nor any Razor Clam gatherers. The period saw a reduced emergence of peeling Common Shore Crabs, compared to previous years and there was only a period of 2 weeks where any amount of gatherers were identified, mainly off Dubmill Point.

OTHER DUTIES

This period has seen increased assistance to Officers in the south of the NWIFCA district, including 3 defined risk-based enforcement operations with regards to potential cockle poaching. The good weather in the earlier part of the reporting period saw the 'Solway Protector' at sea for a high percentage of time and the increased requirement for a shore officer on board covering leave and toil time.

ENFORCEMENT

Enforcement activity within Cumbria has included 2 persons reported for the offences of landing and transshipping a number of undersized Lobsters. It is hoped that these will proceed down the lines of a Fixed Administrative Penalty (FAP); otherwise they will likely have to be put forward for prosecution. This cannot proceed further until advice is received from the MMO regarding the current use of FAPs and the single individual that can advise the IFCA is currently on 3 weeks leave. One person was also given a verbal warning for landing an undersized Codling from his set line off Silecroft. Officers from the Cumbria region were also instrumental in the discovery and relaying of in excess of 1 ton of cockles at Humphrey Head, assisted with the seizure of 2 nets off Askam and also, along with our Central Area Officer, dealt with 20 illegal cockle fishermen (Byelaw 5 breach), fishing at Leasowe, of which 8 offers of a Home Office Caution have been offered and are pending.

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.

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 returned their inshore boats to their seasonal moorings during the last quarter. Although fishermen have concentrated their efforts in other seasonal fisheries, I expect effort in this fishery to improve during the next quarter.

As with the last quarter, I have observed no activity in this fishery from fishermen working on a hobby basis.

SHRIMPS

During this last quarter fishermen associated with the inshore shrimp fishery have continued to work on a regular basis. Landings throughout the last quarter have proved better than in corresponding years. As a result fishermen are optimistic about the inshore shrimp fishery this season. Due to landings improving on the last quarter, effort from fishermen working their inshore boats on a part time basis has increased again with good landings being checked and reported.

During this last quarter I have also observed an increase in activity from hobby fishermen working push nets working between the Morecambe Stone Jetty and Heysham Harbour. Landings have shown a marked improvement on the last quarter.

Fishermen associated with the inshore fishery continue to voice their concerns regarding the future introduction of the Marine Conservation Zones. Although at present there are no plans to turn Morecambe Bay into a Marine Conservation Zone, fishermen have voiced concerns regarding the possible increase to the traditional inshore fishery from inshore fishermen currently working other areas.

COCKLES

During this last period I have observed no activity taking place in this fishery. I have, however, had occasional reports of 3–4 Chinese ladies removing small amounts of cockles on a very occasional basis. During this last quarter I have continued to check all the cockle beds in my area but 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 I have observed no harvesting of mussels on any of the recognised skears between Bare and Heysham Harbour. Mussels have continued to be harvested on a very occasional basis from skears in the Knott End area. Effort, however, remains extremely low key.

During this last quarter I have continued to monitor all mussel beds in my area on a regular basis. The early signs of seed on Heysham Flat Skear, mentioned in my last report, have proved disappointing due to large areas of both seed and mature mussel having been stripped away by wind and tidal influence. I have observed very few skears with any sign of either seed or mature mussels in commercial quantities.

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

DRIFT STAKE AND SET NETS

Fisherman associated with the inshore drift net fishery returned their inshore drift net boats to their seasonal moorings after their winter overhaul. Effort in this fishery remains poor with fishermen associated with the inshore drift net fishery concentrating their efforts in other seasonal fisheries. Early reports proved very disappointing with very few Bass being caught. Fishermen, however, have noticed a slight improvement in landings towards the end of this quarter and have also reported an increase in undersize Bass being landed in recent years.

During this last quarter I have observed the return of both stake or set nets throughout my area although effort has proved disappointing. Fishermen associated with the fishery have reported a few Plaice, occasional small Bass and a few large Smooth Hounds being caught. Their efforts have also been compounded by large amounts of seaweed.

DINGHY AND SHORE ANGLING

Effort has steadily increased throughout this last quarter. Anglers have reported landings of Plaice, Dabs, a large quantity of undersize Bass and mature fish being landed. Fishermen have also continued to catch Smooth Hounds as mentioned in my last report.

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 with the exception of the Heysham Bass Nursery Area. This area has been checked on both day and night time tides. Fishermen continue to fish the area for Bass although very few landed are of a legal size. I have observed fishermen continually landing circa 50+ undersize Bass only to throw them back damaged. This practice should not be occurring in a Bass Nursery Area and will continue to be checked on a regular basis throughout the next quarter.

CENTRAL AREA

RIVER WYRE TO RIVER ALT

Senior Fishery Officer, S. Brown

TRAWLING

One full time inshore trawler and one inshore twin beam trawler have worked regularly from Fleetwood despite the unseasonable weather conditions.

Reasonable catches including some sole have been taken from Lune Deep, catches of plaice and roker from the "Edge of the Bank" below Shell Wharf.

The area's one remaining larger trawler is struggling with many of her traditional prawn grounds now being lost to windfarms.

SHRIMPING

The Lytham shrimp boats have benefited from the Ribble changing its course to the west. The shift has provided a productive and sheltered area from which modest landings have been taken throughout the spring season.

The flatter areas along the Sefton coast have not been as productive, the onshore winds and variable temperatures resulting in extremely erratic fishing conditions. Some respectable landings have been made from the Penfold Channel and Southport however many of the shrimp fishermen have also been laid up for prolonged periods.

Reports from push and hand netters along the Fylde Coast reflect a similar story of erratic conditions, catches have however generally been sufficient for domestic purposes.

COCKLES AND MUSSELS

The prospect of the developing Southport cockle fishery is the source of a great deal of excitement within the industry. The reality is a lot more prosaic.

We have experienced very significant losses of stock to this year's unseasonable weather conditions. The Penfold Channel beds have contracted to their traditional size and hold modest stocks of cockle that is still mostly just undersize.

There have been similar losses on the North Ribble beds off Lytham and St Annes. The bed in the N. Run at St Annes appears to have survived the worst ravages of the weather but sitting as high as it does the cockles generally grow much slower than those in more sheltered areas.

The Belfast mussel dredger 'Drie Gebroeders' B927 has been transshipping seed mussel from the Morecambe Bay fishery through Fleetwood to Ireland. The transshipment process proved too traumatic for the seed mussel and led to unacceptably high losses in transit. This combined with the crane used for landing breaking through the quay (it made a very substantial hole) brought a stop to this operation. The operator was however extremely impressed with the potential of the seed mussel fishery in Morecambe Bay, he is looking into more efficient means of moving seed mussel to his lays in Ireland.

NETS, POTS AND COMMERCIAL ANGLING

The growing fleet of small registered fast boats based at Fleetwood is beginning to show the area's potential. Lobster landings have been a little disappointing so most vessels have concentrated on the Bass fishery. Some respectable landings have been made from drift nets but rod fishing has proved far more productive. Some very productive landings have been made by individuals skilled in this method of fishing.

The Lytham drift netters have worked steadily, modest landings of Bass have been observed.

Set nets have been seen or reported on Salters Bank, along the Lower Penfold Channel, off Ainsdale and out on Tailors Bank. Catches have reflected the weather conditions, generally poor and a little erratic.

ANGLING

Beach launched angling boats based on the Fylde and Sefton Coast have fished weather permitting regularly throughout the spring season, the Bass fishery being the prime target for their efforts.

Shore angling remains as popular as ever however catches have been a little disappointing consisting of the occasional Bass, Codling and flatfish.

GENERAL

I have worked with Officers Steve Waite and Andrew Brownrigg on patrols both afloat and ashore targeting the many potential problems we have at present. These include the Heysham Bass Nursery Area and the Ribble and Leasowe cockle fisheries all of which have needed considerable attention. A great deal of officer time has been taken up collecting MSH shellfish samples, it is expected that the major Ribble cockle beds will receive classification in time for opening on 1st September. I have attended several meetings with other local government bodies to try and ensure that the Ribble fishery runs with the minimum of disruption to other beach users.

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.