

# NWIFCA Quarterly Meeting

## 19<sup>th</sup> March 2026

**REPORT NO.**

**4**

**HEAD OF ENFORCEMENT QUARTERLY REPORT –**  
**1<sup>ST</sup> NOVEMBER 2025 – 31<sup>ST</sup> JANUARY 2026**

**Purpose:** For information.

**Recommendations:** That the report is received.

Patch Summaries for the quarter are given in the table below:

Patch	Summary Points
Haverigg Point – Burghmarsh Point – Deputy Master Thinnesen, IFCOs Webber, Schweizer and Haile	<p><b>Shore based activities</b></p> <p>Shore patrols were undertaken throughout the north of the district during the quarter covering all known ports and hot spots between Port Carlisle and Haverigg Point. Please see appendices attached.</p> <p>A total of 48 daily patrols carried out in the quarter, with a total of 560 places visited.</p> <p><b>Angling</b></p> <p>During this quarter 60 anglers were seen on piers and beaches.</p> <p><b>Potting</b></p> <p>Activity on VMS over the quarter showed whelking vessels out of Whitehaven, Fleetwood frequently seen, with vessels engaged in whelk potting inside and outside of the district.</p> <p><b>Beach nets</b></p> <p>No nets seen in the quarter.</p> <p><b>ATV patrols</b></p> <p>No ATV patrols were carried out in the quarter.</p>
Haverigg Point – Arnside – SIFCO Dixon & IFCO Taylor	<p><b>Mussels</b></p> <p>During the reporting period over 32 tonnes of mussels were removed from Crook Scar, Walney channel by a low number of Byelaw 3 permit holders. Crook Scar was closed for Environmental health reasons between mid December to early January. No enforcement issues were recorded at Crook scar. Interest would have been increased but the mussels contained significant pearling and therefore orders were difficult to generate.</p>

Foulney mussel bed was worked on less than usual during the quarter, due to the lack of large mussels present at this time, and other mussel beds in the District being favourable. Just over 2 tonnes was removed from Foulney in November, and no activity was reported or observed during December or January.

A small area of mussels in the Morecambe area was worked occasionally during the later part of the quarter, as was Knot Spit mussel bed in the Wyre estuary.

The mussel bed known as Hard Acre in the Duddon Estuary is covered in seed mussel again, although signs of scouring was noticed, a survey is planned for March to determine the extent of the mussel bed, with a view to informing the local Environmental Health department so a decision can be made regarding the classification process.

Officers continue to assist local Environmental Health Departments with the shellfish sample collections.

### **Cockles**

Newbiggin, Flookburgh and Pilling cockle beds were open throughout the reporting period, although effort was very much reduced compared to recent years when the cockle beds were open. Up to 20 Byelaw 3 permit holders worked at Newbiggin during November, removing 7600kg of large cockles, effort then decreased to very occasional sightings.

Flookburgh cockle bed was rarely worked on at all, with only very occasional sightings or reports of 1 permit holder removing up to 30kg of large cockles using a craam for small weekly orders. IFCO observations backed up by reports from local fishermen suggest that a dense area of cockles reported in the survey results had been lost to the tidal changes in the outer central part of the Bay.

Pilling cockle bed was also worked lightly during the reporting period, having been open since July, the early season effort had decreased and only 5200kg was removed in November, with very little activity up to the end of the reporting period.

Officers continue to take shellfish samples from all classified beds for local Authority Environmental Health Departments.

### **Shrimping**

Activity was again at a very low level throughout the Morecambe Bay area. Up to 3 tractors were observed shrimping in the Leven channel area of Morecambe Bay in late November and up towards the Festive period, catches were slightly better than recent reports suggested, although it is still much less than in past times.

### **Netting**

Netting activity from vessels was at a very low level, reportedly lower numbers of large Bass being present and unsuitable weather conditions were said to be the reason for this.

	<p>Very occasional reports of beach nets being used in the Leven estuary were reported.</p> <p><b>Potting</b></p> <p>Potting for lobster and crab decreased during the quarter, as is usually the case within the District in the Irish Sea west of Walney at this time of year, 2 Barrow based vessels were active within the District, and another vessel from the north of the District was observed occasionally. 3 Barrow based vessels continue to pot beyond the 6 mile limit on occasions.</p> <p><b>Long lines</b></p> <p>No long lines were observed or reported during this quarter.</p> <p><b>Angling</b></p> <p>Angling activity decreased as is usually the case at this time of year, with many of the target species migrating further off shore. Very few reports of cod angling were reported or observed, which is usually popular during the winter period.</p> <p>Occasional patrols were undertaken at Heysham Bass Nursery area, after signs of activity were recorded, although several patrols did not record any activity. New signage was developed to display at the entrance points to the closed area.</p> <p><b>Bait Collection</b></p> <p>Peeler crab collection continued at a very low level, with any inspections showing very low numbers.</p> <p>Bait digging was observed occasionally in the Duddon estuary and off Earnse Bay on Walney, and in the Newbiggin area of the coast road.</p>
<p>Dee- Southport – SIFCO Brownrigg, IFCO Taylor</p>	<p><b>General</b></p> <p>The third reporting quarter has continued in much the same format as the previous report, representing a generally quieter winter period for enforcement activity. Seasonal conditions have resulted in reduced levels of coastal activity; however, officers have maintained a consistent operational presence throughout the Southern Area.</p> <p>Byelaw 2 – North Wirral Foreshore Bivalve Molluscs remains in place along the north Wirral coastline. Following the planned expansion to the patrol area, officers have continued to undertake regular patrols in the Blackpool - Fleetwood areas to ensure compliance and maintain a visible enforcement presence.</p> <p>On behalf of West Lancashire Borough Council and Wyre Council, officers have continued to collect the required monthly MSH samples to maintain classification status.</p>

In January, the Area SIFCO attended the Byelaw 3 stakeholders' event at West Cheshire Sailing Club, alongside the CEO and Science representatives. The event provided an opportunity to engage directly with permit holders and stakeholders regarding fishery management and regulatory matters. On behalf of NWIFCA, the SIFCO also attended the Lancashire Police Rural, Wildlife & Heritage Crime Conference in Blackburn.

As part of her dual Communications and Engagement role, one officer completed the Communications Strategy and continued to develop digital and stakeholder-facing resources. This included developing dedicated pages for the Byelaw 7 Netting Permit, creating supporting factsheets for new policies including the 'Use It or Lose It' policy and Byelaw 7, and producing an instructional video outlining the Byelaw 7 bass entitlement application process to assist applicants. Byelaw 3 web pages have also been reviewed and kept up to date to ensure information remains current and accessible.

Officers have utilised this period to undertake routine maintenance of PPE, vehicles and associated operational equipment to ensure continued readiness. Through the Boat Working Group, officers also provided operational input into the design and specification of the area's proposed new patrol vessel, ensuring frontline enforcement requirements were appropriately represented. By way of professional development, all officers completed a one-day Environment Agency Cross Warranting online course to enhance future inter-agency working.

### **Specific**

#### **Hand Gathering Bivalve**

Despite the Wirral North cockle bed (Leasowe) remaining permanently closed under Byelaw 2, officers conducted targeted and, where appropriate, nocturnal patrols to deter and detect potential illegal gathering activity. These patrols were considered proportionate and necessary given the seasonal availability of open cockle fisheries in Morecambe Bay and South Wales, which can increase the potential for opportunistic or displaced gathering activity within the district.

I am pleased to report that no illegal gathering activity or related offences were detected during this reporting period.

Intermittent low-level mussel gathering activity continues to be recorded on the Dee Estuary (Caldy Blacks and West Kirby) mussel beds. This activity will continue to be monitored as part of the planned routine shore duties.

#### **Recreational Rod Angling**

##### **Shore**

A total of **73 shore and beach anglers** were sighted and inspected during this reporting period. The promenades along Wallasey front and Seacombe promenade

	<p>continue to be the most popular locations for recreational rod angling activity. Kings Parade, New Brighton, also remains a regular and well-attended angling area.</p> <p><b>Commercial/ Recreational / Charter Boat Angling</b></p> <p>Recreational boat angling activity has continued within Liverpool Bay and the River Mersey areas, with several private recreational vessels and charter boats sighted and monitored during routine shore patrol activity. In addition, 2 under 10m commercial fishing vessels have remained active within the upper areas of the River Mersey and parts of Liverpool Bay. Activity levels were consistent with seasonal expectations.</p> <p><b>Shrimping Activity</b></p> <p>Officers have observed and inspected 3 shrimp tractors operating at low water off Southport. Routine inspections were conducted, and no retained catch was recorded at the time of inspection. No breaches of current regulations were identified</p> <p><b>Netting</b></p> <p>The only recreational netting activity observed during this reporting period was at Taylor’s Bank, Formby. Officers observed and inspected 4 set nets along the coastline. All nets were found to be compliant with current regulations, and no retained catch was recorded at the time of inspection.</p> <p><b>Bait Digging</b></p> <p>Bait digging activity has continued along both coastlines during this reporting period, with Mockbeggar Wharf on the north Wirral coastline and Southport beach identified as the primary areas of activity. During the quarter, officers observed and inspected 3 bait diggers. The pump method remained the most encountered technique.</p>
<p><b><u>North Western Protector</u></b></p> <p>Master Hugh Thinnesen</p>	<p>I am pleased to report that overall; the Patrol boat has performed well.</p> <p>As can be expected for this time of year the weather has been mainly very poor with a lot of patrol days at sea being lost to the weather conditions</p> <p>Fishing activity in the district amongst the local fleet and visiting vessels has again been very low-key with only a couple of light landings into Whitehaven. Whelk vessels along with scallop vessels continue to make regular landings into the port.</p> <p>The patrol boat crew along with science officers carried out a small sidescan survey west of Workington.</p>

North western Protector, along with Protector Charlie, went through their annual coding at the beginning of November. Coding was carried out by YDSA surveyor Duncan Swinson. NWP is in the process of transitioning over to the new workboat code 3. As well as the firefighting systems being inspected and tested by Marine Fire Safety.

Priorities/Patrols/Boardings/inspections statistics:

- Patrol district for large vessel infringement of byelaws.
- Record data of nets and pots in district
- Inspect Lobster/brown crab pots and carry out checks on potting vessels.
- Inspect gill nets for compliance with legislation.
- Input enforcement information and vessel activities into MCSS (and control surveillance systems)
- Record data of nets
- Inspect vessels for compliance with fishing gear legislation.
- Maintain service and repair patrol boats.
- Inspect and carry out checks with hobby fishermen vessels NW-IFCA byelaw
- Patrol throughout the district for detection of fishery limit line offences.
- Patrols in HPMA (Highly Protected Marine Area)

Activity at sea

Trawling - activity was observed on the odd occasion, from local trawlers targeting prawns (Nephrops) and bait fish (plaice – dogfish) from grounds, southwest of St Bees 6 to 10, nautical miles.

Scalloping - Scallop dredgers have made some good landings into Whitehaven, with reports of 100 plus dumpy bags of King Scallop from a single landing.

Potting - Activity on VMS over the quarter showed vessels out of Whitehaven and Fleetwood have been frequently observed, with vessels engaged in whelk potting, again mainly outside of the district. The local potting vessels have been targeting lobster and brown crab. These vessels have been mainly targeting areas north and south of Whitehaven, with mixed reports from fishers of quantities of lobsters and crab being caught.

Angling – Boat Angling in the Northern part of the district was observed from Maryport to Silecroft. Catches varied from small dabs, whiting, plaice, dog fish, Thorn backed rays.

## **General Update**

### **Lobster MCRS Change**

From the 1<sup>st</sup> of March 2026 in the NWIFCA district the national minimum conservation reference size (MCRS) for European lobster (*Homarus Gammarus*) is rising from 87mm to 90mm in 2028. This increase is one of the first proposed initial management measures to be taken out of the crab and lobster fisheries management plans (FMPs). This is based on assessments made by the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (CEFAS) which have shown that increasing MCRS to 90mm will support lobster stocks resulting in a healthier fishery.

Stakeholders responded to the FMP consultation that economic impacts for inshore fishers would be high and therefore a staged approach has been implemented. The new size will first be applied through a licence condition for commercial fishers licenced and fishing in English waters, following this later in 2026 the sizes will be moved into legislation to apply to all commercial and recreational fishers.

The phased approach applying to fishers in the NW for MCRS will be as follows;

- 88mm – 1<sup>st</sup> March 2026
- 89mm January 2027
- 90mm January 2028

The principal enforcement agency for applying this change to licence conditions will be the Marine Management Organisation however cross warranting of Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Officers for a limited period to enforce licence conditions for this increase is being explored with the MMO for Authority officers to assist with inspections relating to the size of lobsters on commercial vessels. Once this becomes incorporated into legislation IFCOs will be able to enforce the sizes for commercial and recreational fishers.

The MCRS for recreational fishers in the NWIFCA district will remain at 87mm under NWIFCA Byelaw 1 until so time as national legislation is introduced which will supersede the byelaw which will be updated.

Further information can be found at [Lobster size rules are changing – here's what you need to know – Fisheries Management Plans](#)

### **Bass Fishing Guidance**

On the 6<sup>th</sup> of February the Sea Fisheries (Amendment) Regulation 2026 was laid before the House of Commons and Lords before coming in to force on the 27<sup>th</sup> of February, this statutory instrument is laid annually following negotiations with the EU and changes the recreational limits for bass. This year from the 1<sup>st</sup> of April recreational fishers using rod and line can retain three bass per day.

The MCRS remains at 42cm and bass can not be retained recreationally by nets.

Commercial vessels with an authorisation from the MMO can retain bass by hook and line as a targeted fishery or by bycatch from fixed gillnets. Vessels are subject to the limits detailed below. No authorisation is required for vessels using demersal trawls or seines to land bass and bass cannot be retained from vessels fishing ring nets, pelagic trawls or drift nets.

	<b>Demersal Trawls and Seines</b>	<b>Hooks and Lines</b>	<b>Fixed Gillnets Nets</b>	<b>All other gears (including drift nets)</b>
Fishery Restrictions	Closed February and March	Closed February and March	Closed February and March	All bass catches prohibited
Maximum catch limit	Maximum 20% by weight of all marine organisms PER TRIP. <b>Unavoidable by-catch</b> 10 tonnes per vessel per year	8 tonnes per year	<b>By-catch</b> of 5.4 tonnes per year	All bass catches prohibited

Further information can be found at [Bass Fishing Guidance - GOV.UK](#)

### **Environment Agency Cross Warranting**

At the December meeting of the National Inshore Marine Enforcement Group the Environment Agency introduced members to the new online training portal for training officers in EA legislation and powers required to achieve cross warranting. Since this time all the staff within the enforcement team have completed the modules in EA Byelaws and legislation as well as Invasive non-native species required and course certificates have been provided to the EA for processing and sign off.

The cross warrants carry limited powers for inspection and detection of offences in estuarine areas where our officers routinely work with EA Bailiffs and have operational cross over. This will greatly enhance the enforcement capabilities of both agencies and assist in joint working for the future.

### **St Bees Voluntary Code 2026**

From the 15<sup>th</sup> of March until the 25<sup>th</sup> of July the annual voluntary closure area around St Bees Head is place for netting. The code of practice is as follows;

- No netting of any type in the area highlighted in the map below during the period **15th March to 25th July\***
- If you do accidentally catch a bird in your net outside of the area or in any non-netting gear within the area ensure that you contact NWIFCA by email at [science@nw-ifca.gov.uk](mailto:science@nw-ifca.gov.uk) or by phone on 01524 727970 (Option 2) with details of the capture including location, number of birds and species

This important voluntary measure is in place to protect diving birds vulnerable to entanglement in nets at a time of year when they are present in greater numbers due to breeding and nesting on the cliffs around St Bees Head. This area forms part of the Cumbria Coast MCZ, is a Site of Special Scientific Interest and an RSPB reserve.

## **Vessel procurement**

During this quarter officers working with the marine architect to finalise the tender specification for the Procurement of a new vessel for the Authority. A final meeting was held with members of the committee who volunteering to be a part of the vessel task and finish group, after some final feedback and amendments made to the tender documents our architect was able to send out the tender to boat yards. The tender is currently live at the point on writing and closes on the 19<sup>th</sup> of March.

The next step is for short listing of boat yards based on the scoring criteria in the tender before officers will visit yards of a shortlist before a final decision is made on awarding the build.

## **Intelligence Reporting**

The following table demonstrate the information reports submitted to CLUE for this reporting quarter.

<b>Intelligence Reports</b>	<b>November</b>	<b>December</b>	<b>January</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>IFCOs</b>	16	17	19	52

Officers continue to conduct risk based and intel led patrols across the district, taskings are based upon seasonal, operational and priority areas allowing the strategic deployment of resources where required. There are currently four ongoing operational plans running across the district.

Op Albion- Enforcement of the Flookburgh cockle fishery.

Op Notorious- Enforcement of the River Dee mussel fishery.

Op Gambon- Enforcement of the Pilling cockle fishery.

Op Tidal- Enforcement of the Newbiggin cockle fishery.

Tasking and coordination group meetings continue to be held bi-weekly between, Head of Enforcement, Intel officer, Senior IFCOs and are regularly attended by colleagues from the Environment Agency. Intel lead (HoE) and Intel Officer continue to attend the MMO, NW & Irish sea TCG meetings.

In response to ongoing priorities around interactions between NWIFCA cockle fisheries and intertidal hand gathered fisheries in Wales, officers have accepted an invite to the North/South Wales cockle fisheries group to assist in partner working between NWIFCA, Natural Resources Wales and Welsh Government.

## **Meetings attended**

Mobile Working App Group

National Inshore Marine Enforcement Group

North/South Welsh Cockle Group

Dee Regulating Order Meetings

Sea Fish fishing restrictions group

IFCA – RIFG meeting

IFCA Enforcement Training, Brixham

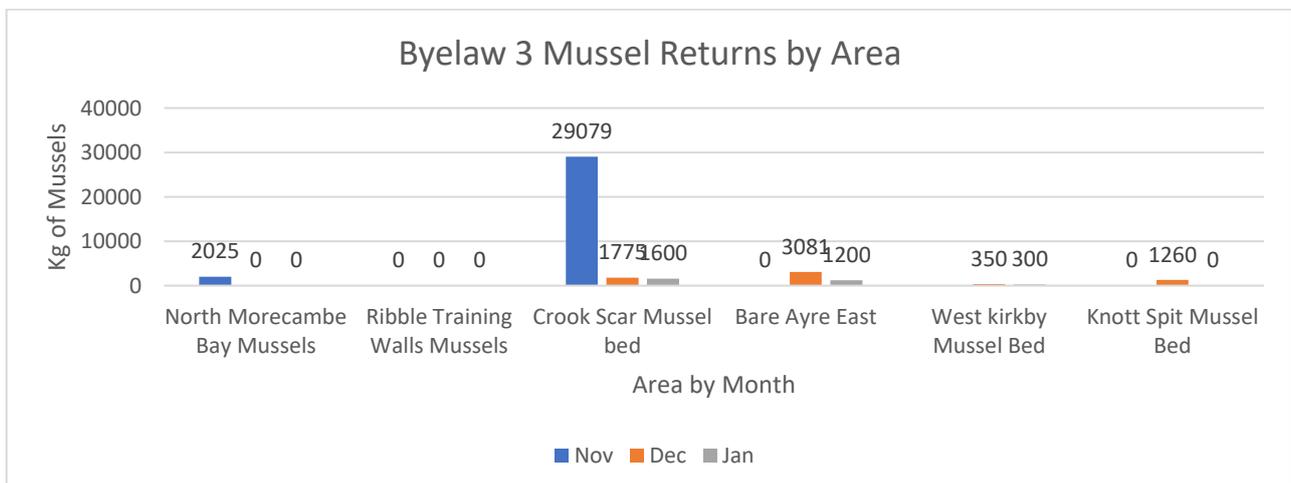
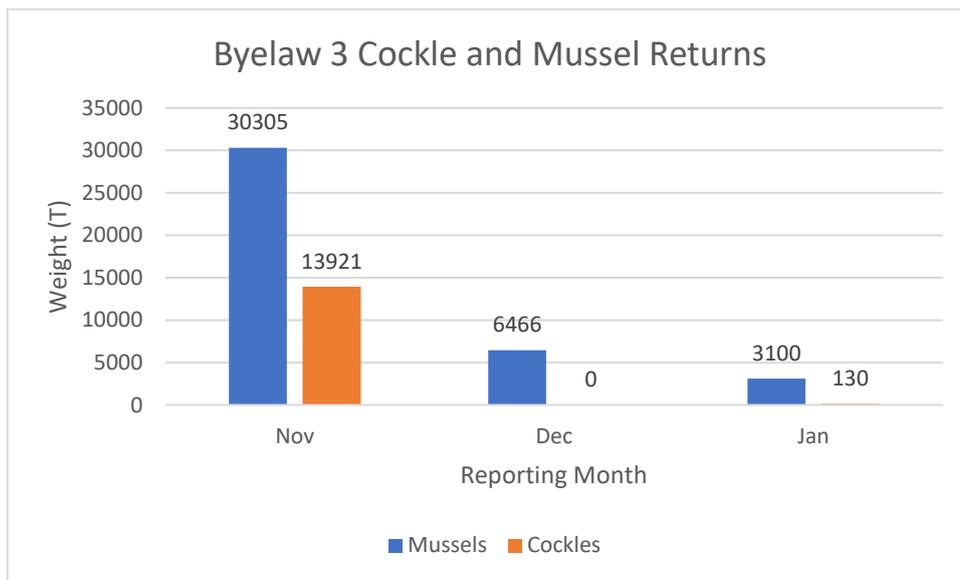
REM in practice conference.

## Specific Fishery Reporting

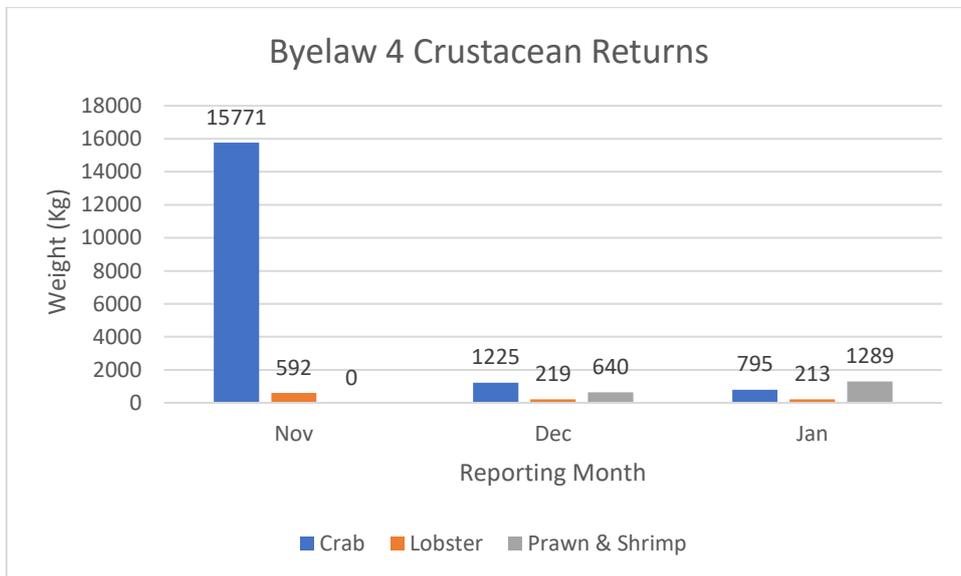
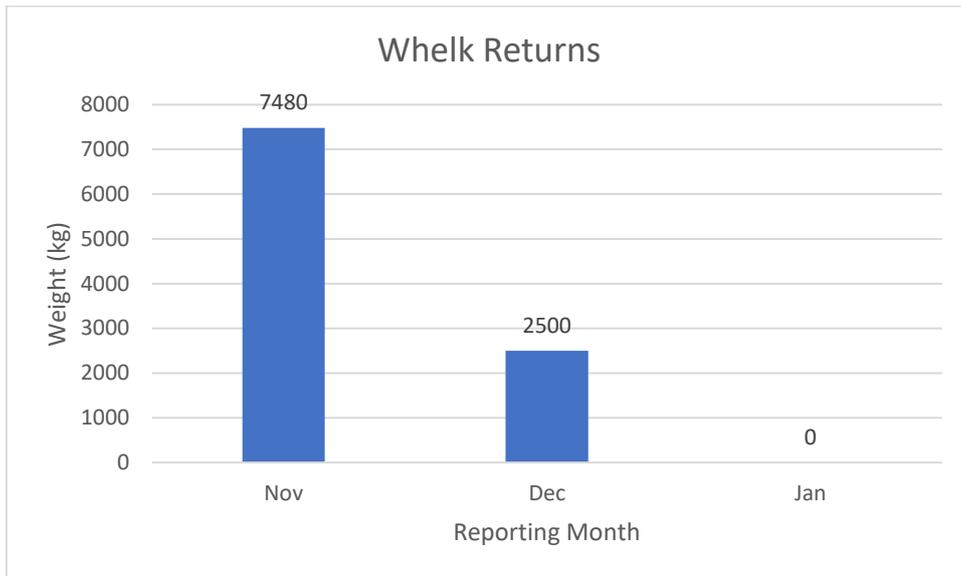
### Returns data

During this quarter, mussels continued to be the predominant species fished by Byelaw 3 permit holders with fishers permit holders accessing fisheries across the NW to gather high quality size mussel for market. Only the Newbiggin cockle fishery saw any activity of any significance with 13,000kg reported in November, with the Flookburgh and Pilling cockle beds left. The Flookburgh fishery had a total allowable catch of 800 tonnes for the season from the 1<sup>st</sup> of September to 28<sup>th</sup> of February this year with the early open season trial, despite the reasonable stock only 300kg was reported from returns data and officers have observed no activity. This is partly due to market factors discussed in the previous reporting period but also has been reported that the good area of size cockle further down the fishery was washed area by channel movements.

Fishers have continued to report pressures around classification and closures due to environmental health incidents or reduced classification status. Officers of the Authority assisted in the extension of the Bare Ayre East classified area by providing additional evidence of the mussel bed to the local council EH office.



As expected during the winter period static gear fisheries reduced with limited landings of whelks from inside the district with boats often fishing further of shore. Crustacea landings were very limited during the reporting period.



## **Sanctions, Infringements and Court Activity**

As seen in the table below a compliant quarter with low levels of sanctions reported

<b>Sanction Applied</b>	<b>Details</b>
<b>Verbal Warning</b>	N/A
<b>Advisory Letter</b>	One- Returns compliance
<b>Official Warning Letter</b>	Three- Returns compliance
<b>Financial Admin Penalty</b>	N/A
<b>Gear Notice</b>	N/A
<b>Caution</b>	N/A
<b>Prosecution</b>	N/A

## **Shore Based Activity Report**

<b>Number of:</b>	<b>Burgh Marsh Point -Haverigg Point –</b>	<b>Haverigg Point – Arnside</b>	<b>Arnside – Knott End</b>	<b>River Wyre – River Alt</b>	<b>Mersey, Wirral and Dee</b>
Shore patrols by all NWIFCA officers*	48	89	19		81
ATV patrols	0	23	3		7
Inspections under taken	33	44	14		78

\* undertaken either by vehicle or on foot without using ATV

## **Annex A**

<b>Vessel</b>	<b>No of patrol (days)</b>	<b>Patrol time (hrs)</b>	<b>Distance patrolled (nm)</b>	<b>Boarding's</b>	<b>Closings</b>	<b>Sightings</b>	<b>Inspections (inc. gear inspections)</b>
North Western Protector & PC	11	56.23	519.4	0	4	43	0
<b>Totals for the quarter</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>56.23</b>	<b>519.4</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>0</b>

## Annex B

Patrol Date	Patrol Time	Distance (nm)	Area Covered	Risk/ Purpose	Sectors Covered	No. Boarding	No. Closings	No. Sightings	No. Inspections
<b>North Western Protector (and Protector Charlie)</b>									
01.10.2025	02.00	17	Whitehaven – Maryport - St Bees	Engine trial	N/A	0	0	0	0
15.10.2025	07.50	74	Whitehaven – HPMA – Prawn Grounds – Selker	Trawling, potting, angling	Allonby Bay HPMA, Cumbria Coast MCZ	0	0	0	0
17.10.2025	06.25	52	Whitehaven – Prawn Grounds – Selker – Maryport	Trawling, potting, angling	Allonby Bay HPMA Cumbria Coast MCZ	0	2	12	0
20.10.2025	03.08	31	Whitehaven – Northern Prawn Grounds – SW St Bees Head - Harrington	Potting, angling, trawling	Allonby Bay HPMA Cumbria Coast MCZ	0	0	4	0
30.10.2025	07.33	66	Whitehaven – HPMA – Prawn Grounds	Potting, angling, trawling	Allonby Bay HPMA, Cumbria Coast MCZ	0	0	4	0
06.11.2025	05.33	63	Whitehaven – HPMA – SW St Bees Head	Potting, angling, trawling	Allonby Bay HPMA, Cumbria Coast MCZ	0	0	8	0
25.11.2025	03.00	15	Whitehaven – Silloth - W Marport	Sidescan survey	Allonby Bay HPMA,	0	0	4	0
16.12.2025	04.83	40	Whitehaven – Marport	Potting, netting, angling, trawling		0	2	10	0

08.01.2026	07.16	65	Whitehaven – HPMA - Prawn Grounds,	Potting, trawling	Allonby Bay HPMA, Cumbria Coast MCZ	0	0	45	0
19.01.2026	04.75	48	Whitehaven – Prawn Grounds – Calder – St Bees Head – NW corner	Potting, netting trawling	Cumbria Coast MCZ	0	0	26	0
20.01.2026	05.00	48.4	Whitehaven – Beckfoot	Potting, netting, angling	Allonby Bay HPMA	0	0	25	0
<b>11</b>	<b>56.23</b>	<b>519.4</b>				<b>0</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>138</b>	<b>0</b>