

December 2021



NIFCA News

"Sea Fret Settling Over Blyth"

NIFCA News

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NATIONAL IFCA VISION:

"Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities will lead, champion and manage a sustainable marine environment and inshore fisheries, by successfully securing the right balance between social, environmental and economic benefits to ensure healthy seas, sustainable fisheries and a viable industry."



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Northumberland IFCA



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CEO Mike Hardy writes:- A warm welcome to the winter edition of 'NIFCA News' and if you are reading this over the Christmas / New Year period, compliments of the season and best wishes from myself and everyone at NIFCA for 2022!!

I am sure that you will find much of interest in the following pages and my thanks go to the officers of NIFCA for their reflections on our work and to our administrator Emma for assembling the Newsletter into such an impressive package.

In the next few lines, I just wanted to consider the last 18 months or so and how the Covid 19 pandemic has affected NIFCA, our officers and members, but firstly of course this has been a period where nobody has escaped from at the very least discomfort and inconvenience and in some cases much worse. Our sincere sympathies and best wishes to anyone who has suffered serious illness or loss during this difficult time.

I am pleased and relieved that at NIFCA we have not had any serious cases of Covid, although inevitably there have been some instances and periods of self-isolation and recovery, but everyone has emerged with a clean bill of health. It has also been excellent that throughout this difficult period, we have adapted to the challenge, with officers operating in the district and at sea whilst taking a safe approach. Similarly, whilst it has been felt best to close the Authority office to the public since the first lockdown

began in Spring 2020, we have been able to continue to function very effectively to meet everyone's needs and I have been pleased at the favourable response from stakeholders to the efforts of everyone at NIFCA.

Authority governance has also been affected by the pandemic, with Quarterly Meetings being held by virtual means when this was permitted by government regulation and with the public also able to then 'attend'. Recently, we have reverted to meetings in person again and I am grateful to members for their cooperation and support.

As I am writing these notes, we are just beginning to learn about the Omicron variant and by the time you are reading this, the situation may have changed again, but I am confident that NIFCA will continue to adapt and meet the challenges which lie ahead.

Please do not hesitate to contact NIFCA if you have any queries or if there is anything which you would wish to discuss and hopefully there will be the opportunity in 2022 for everyone to get back as much as possible to how things were before the pandemic and we will have the opportunity then to meet more of you.

Mike Hardy
Chief Executive

AIn Estuary Survey 2021

The NIFCA team and volunteers met in early Autumn to complete fish surveys at the AIn estuary. This area has important saltmarsh and estuarine habitats that qualified the estuary to become a marine protected area, AIn Estuary Marine Conservation Zone.

Since 2014 field work has been conducted by NIFCA at the estuary twice a year during Spring & Autumn to align with fish migratory and spawning

events. The survey helps NIFCA to gain information on which fish species use the estuary and to determine the importance of the area as a fish nursery ground. It is a team driven two days of fyke and seine net deployment and collection in different locations of the estuary. When nets are collected all fish species and measurements are recorded. This year we recorded sea trout, plaice, flounder, sprat, herring, lesser sandeel, sand and common

goby. This information allows us to create a picture of the marine life in the estuary.

NIFCA are comparing datasets across the survey years to study the fish population dynamics and the report will be accessible at www.nifca.gov.uk

Katy Smart
Environmental IFCO



The NIFCA Environmental IFCO team on survey, left to right:
Katy Smart, Andrew Boon, Beth Harvey and Alex Aitken

Updated Trawl Byelaw

NIFCA has successfully amended its Trawling Byelaw that will give greater protection to the marine environment in its district. Following a public consultation led by the Authority in July 2020, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), approved the updated 'Trawling Byelaw 1', which came into legal effect on 11th of August 2021.

The amended byelaw replaces previous legislation and prohibits the use of mobile fishing gear, except for vessels holding an exemption provided by NIFCA, within the Coquet to St Mary's Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ). The exemption requires permitted vessels to use specific 'light' ground fishing gear. These changes aim to protect rocky reef habitat in the MCZ from heavier bottom towed trawl gear and scallop dredges.

The Coquet to St Mary's conservation zone is an inshore site located along the Northumberland coast. It covers 192 km² of intertidal and offshore waters near Whitley Bay in the south and close to Alnwick in the north. It also includes areas around St Mary's Island and Coquet Island.

The amended byelaw requires fishing vessels operating within the 3-6 nautical mile boundaries of the district, and below 18.3 meters in length, to have a permit. Any vessels trawling within the district must

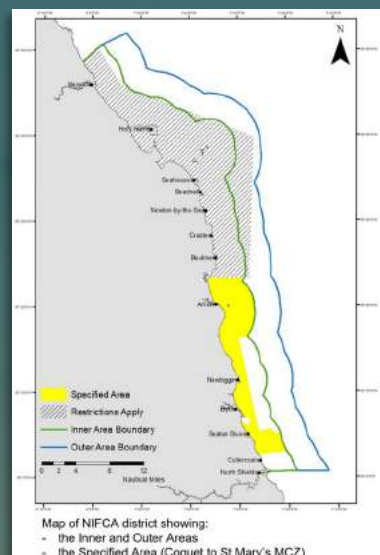
also record and share their monthly activity with NIFCA to enable the Authority to gather more data to support its marine management and conservation activities.

Mike Hardy, NIFCA Chief Executive, explains: "We are very pleased the byelaw has come into effect. It gives added protection to the precious marine environment and the fishing grounds within the district, whilst allowing fishers to undertake trawling activity in a well-regulated and carefully managed way."

The seabed protected by the Coquet to St Mary's MCZ is made up of rock, sand, mud and sediment. This range of habitats provides a home for a large variety of life. Rocks in the shallow water are a habitat for kelp and red seaweed, whilst the deep water rock is a habitat for cup coral, sea-fans, anemones, and sponges. These animals thrive in this deeper water where there is not enough sunlight for algal life to grow. These complex habitats and communities also support mobile species such as starfish, sea urchins, crabs, and lobster.

Mark Southerton
Chief IFCO

Want to trawl? Here's what you need from NIFCA:



To trawl within the inner area (0-3nm):

- ◆ Only vessels less than 12m allowed
- ◆ 2021 Trawl permit required

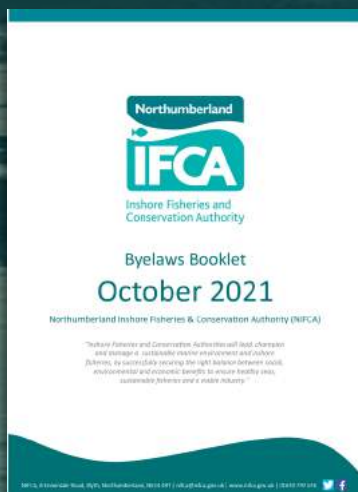
To trawl Within the Outer Area (>3-6nm):

- ◆ Only vessels less than 18.3m allowed
- ◆ 2021 Trawl permit required

To trawl within the Specified Area (Coquet to St Mary's Marine Conservation Zone):

- ◆ Only vessels less than 12m allowed
- ◆ 2021 Trawl permit required
- ◆ Exemption to trawl within the specified area (Coquet to St Mary's MCZ) required.

For more details on any of the above,
please call us on 01670 797676 or
email us at nifca@nifca.gov.uk.



New Byelaw Book

Don't get caught out!

Make sure you know about the restrictions on fishing in Northumberland by reading our byelaws. The latest edition of our byelaws booklet can be seen on the NIFCA website at www.nifca.gov.uk/byelaws

You can also request a hard copy from the NIFCA office, so please feel free to contact us and we will send a hard copy in the post.

NIFCA helps Amble Lobster Hatchery welcome back visitors after lockdown

NIFCA recently helped Amble Lobster Hatchery welcome back visitors when Covid-19 restrictions eased with the launch of a new interactive visitor experience.

Located in the Northumberland Seafood Centre, the popular visitor attraction closed to the public during lockdown.

NIFCA awarded the hatchery a grant of £2,000 towards the refurbishment of its public information centre. The hatchery is dedicated to enhancing lobster stocks on the Northumberland Coast and educating people of all ages on the process of rearing lobsters, from the eggs hatching to the young lobsters being ready for release.

Visitors can see a lobster's lifecycle first-hand, from female lobster 'hens' carrying thousands of eggs before they hatch, and once born, how they move to larvae tanks, then into juvenile tanks in preparation for release back into the North Sea.

The hatchery is helping to sustain the local lobster populations and also gives visitors opportunities to participate in lobster release events.

Hatchery manager, Andrew Gooding, said: "It's great to be able to welcome back visitors and show them the important work we do. The funding from NIFCA has been instrumental in helping us to up-

date the centre and ensure it provides people with a safe and enjoyable experience. The centre is designed to be as interactive, informative, and engaging as possible. It is packed full of information highlighting the importance of sea fisheries sustainability and I highly recommend a visit."

Entry to the centre is free of charge but it does encourage donations to support its work.

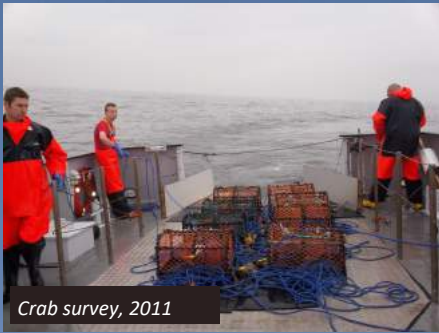
NIFCA chief executive, Mike Hardy, adds: "The Authority is delighted to support Amble Hatchery. Potting for lobsters is an extremely important fishery in the Northumberland district; the hatchery is highlighting the significance of protecting and ensuring the longevity of this fascinating marine animal and the importance of sustainable fisheries."

In addition to the grant to support the Seafood Centre and hatchery's important work to replenish local lobster stocks, NIFCA also donated an interpretation board to the visitor centre.

Katy Smart
Environmental IFCO



The Power of Partnership Working



Crab survey, 2011



Lobster survey, 2012



Marine Pathways, 2017



MSFD project, 2019



Hydrophone project, 2020

At Northumberland Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority we are committed to joint working and collaborating with organisations locally and nationally that complement our aims. We believe we can achieve great things when we actively engage with people from different organisations who share our goals to achieve a sustainable marine environment and inshore fisheries in our coastal district.

NIFCA is a member based organisation comprising general members who are acquainted with the needs and opinions of the fishing community in the district and persons with knowledge of or expertise in marine environmental matters; they work alongside statutory appointees from the Environment Agency, Natural England and the Marine Management Organisation, as well as Councillors from Northumberland County Council and North Tyneside Council.

For many years NIFCA has enjoyed a strong and rewarding relationship with Newcastle University and its marine biologists, who now form part of the School of Natural & Environmental Sciences (SNES), formerly the School of Marine Science & Technology.

Marine biologists at Newcastle University recognise that in today's environmentally conscious era, sustainable use of the seas, conservation of sea life and the management of the marine environment and coastlines are critical. Its teaching focuses on these concerns including the sustainable use of the sea and our waterways for food, energy resources, transport and leisure.

Regionally, the SNES biologists work to conduct fundamental and applied research, education and engagement work relevant to the North East coast of England, including in the NIFCA district. Their projects have sought to understand a wide range of issues including coastal heritage, long-term changes in the plankton and benthos, methodologies for quantifying biodiversity and assessing changes in abundance, and shellfish fisheries.

NIFCA's partnership with Newcastle University and SNES is mutually beneficial. Since NIFCA's inception 10 years ago, we have conducted dozens of studies and surveys in collaboration to understand the health of different habitats, including subtidal ones. Our research looks at seabed species and communities to assess the effects from different types of fishing

on the fish, lobster and mussel stocks in the district.



A significant part of the partnership is SNES's work in robust evidence gathering. Its post graduate and PhD students regularly carry-out bespoke research projects for the Authority, which provide us with an important, solid-scientific evidence base to inform our work.

NIFCA's relationship with Newcastle University has also been strengthened by another important partnership with Natural England. Dr Catherine Scott, a Senior Marine Advisor at Natural England and a member on the Authority, has been an integral part of this partnership working, from developing research questions, to securing funding for projects, and supporting researchers in carrying out their projects. This has benefited all involved by strengthening the outputs and, in many cases, has meant research work has continued beyond set projects.

Nicholas Polunin, Professor of Marine Environmental Science at Newcastle University is a former NIFCA member who served the Authority for ten years. He explains: "Our long-standing relationship with NIFCA is important because of what the Authority does for the management of our inshore waters and supporting The Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009.

The Act modernised the way that inshore sea fisheries resources are managed in England, widening the remit to a more holistic approach, which includes broader environmental issues beyond the fishing industry, such as seabirds and marine mammal populations, and vulnerable habitats.

"The Authority's approach in Northumberland is truly collaborative; bringing together partner expertise and stakeholders from different groups and environmental backgrounds to work together on conservation and sustainability. It also enables the University to build closer links with our communities in the North East. I'm truly impressed by the Authority's commitment to inclusivity.



“Our relationship with the Authority is extremely valuable in producing the scientific data and the important evidence needed for the continued management of inshore habitats and stocks. Meanwhile our students benefit greatly by conducting real-world marine conservation research projects.

“We have several students who have gone on to pursue successful careers both in the UK and overseas in teaching and senior research posts. We have a former student teaching Marine Biology at Exeter University, another is a researcher at the University of British Columbia in Canada, one is working for the Marine Management Organisation in the UK and another is employed by its equivalent in New Zealand. We also have a number of students who have gone on to work as officers at NIFCA.”

Recent examples of research projects NIFCA has successfully undertaken with the University have been aimed at understanding how to better protect our inshore waters. These projects include:

The impacts of dredging on scallop habitats in the NIFCA district.

Knowledge of informal rules governing fishers’ behaviour to inform policy making suited to local conditions and supported by resource users.

Social networks and fishers’ behaviour: exploring the links between information flow and fishing success in the Northumberland lobster fishery.

Mapping inshore fisheries and comparing observed and perceived distribu-

tions of pot fishing activity in Northumberland.

Experimental potting impacts on common UK reef habitats in areas of high and low fishing pressure.

Movement, activity patterns and home-ranges of European lobster.

Exploring a Science - Fishing Industry Partnership for Assessing Marine Biodiversity.

Pippa Moore, Professor of Marine Science at Newcastle University’s School of Natural and Environmental Sciences is a NIFCA member. She joined the Authority in April this year.

Pippa says: “The University has a rich history in marine biological research. We have a ready supply of students who want to provide answers that address real issues.

“It’s also important to have academics on the NIFCA panel; we can bring an experienced and scientific background that can translate complicated data and provide an independent voice to give a deeper understanding of the science, including beyond the context of Northumberland. It means everyone on the panel can make informed, evidence based decisions that will ultimately support NIFCA in meeting its objectives.”

“Our aim for the next decade is to carry on working closely with the local fishing industry, recreational fishers, our partners and the wider community to create a healthy and sustainable marine environment for many generations to come.”

NIFCA celebrated its 10th Anniversary in April this year. We have come a long way in the last decade, producing a suite of byelaws and management measures which enable local fishers to work sustainably in the waters off Northumberland and North Tyneside whilst ensuring a prosperous local fishing industry.

Importantly, it is through powerful and enduring partnerships with our key stakeholders, like Newcastle University, that we hope to succeed in working to conserve environmentally important marine life and ecosystems for present and future generations.

Mike Hardy
CEO

NIFCA NEWS SNIIPPETS



Sea Angling Forum

In October NIFCA were invited to be a part of the Angling Trust's series of virtual Sea Angling Forums. The Angling Trust has been bringing a variety of experts to present topics relevant to anglers, including tope interactions and shark handling.

A big part of the virtual forum meetings has been presentations by IFCA around the coastline with an aim to share information about the work of IFCA and offer an opportunity for local recreational sea anglers to ask questions.

During the evening with NIFCA a general introduction to the Authority was delivered by our CEO Mike Hardy, alongside a focus on enforcement from Chief IFCO Mark Southerton and the new Recreational Sea Angling Strategy (available in the Angling section of the NIFCA website) from Environmental IFCO Katy Smart.

It was a great success with engaging attendees and we hope it was useful for recreational sea anglers in the district. The presentation is now online and can be viewed on the Angling Trusts' website.

Katy Smart
Environmental IFCO

Enforcement Course

On 20th-22nd September, Environmental IFCOs Andrew, Beth and Katy attended the IFCA Competent Officer Remote Training course led by Stevie Travis, the Lead National Training Officer for the Association of IFCAs.

It was the first time the course has been carried out in a virtual format, as a result of the ongoing Covid-19 situation preventing the typical training course in Torquay taking place in January of this year.

The course aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the legislation in place and powers available to fisheries officers to enforce these when required. It was an intensive course which covered all the classroom aspects that would usually be covered when attending the course in Torquay. Despite being the first course to be held remotely, it was a resounding success and all those in attendance found the course to be greatly beneficial to the work that we do.

The course was well-attended by IFCOs from all around the country which led to some interesting discussions on how the fisheries vary around the coast and how different IFCAs operate.

Whilst it was not possible to do the 'typical' hands on practical exercises and role play situations that are done during the Torquay course, we often went into 'break out rooms' which helped us tailor what we had covered in the classroom session to the different exercises that we were tasked with.

The course, led by Stevie, was also supported by senior officers from around the coast who shared their wealth of knowledge and kept the course fresh and engaging for everyone who attended, which was a credit to all who gave up their time to support the course.

No Competent Officer Course would be complete without a session from Andrew Oliver, an expert solicitor in maritime and fisheries law who gave a comprehensive overview of evidence and disclosure and a general insight into the legal process overall, from discovering an offence to a successful prosecution.

The days flew by in a whirlwind of legislation and powers and left us all in a far stronger position to support officers during enforcement situations should they arise. Whilst the course can hopefully return to a face-to-face format next year, this was a brilliant adaptation of the format to the 'new normal' of virtual meetings. A huge thanks to Stevie Travis for his passion and organisation throughout the course!

Andrew Boon
Senior Environmental IFCO

Dredging in the NIFCA District

At our quarterly meeting on 25th October, the NIFCA members confirmed the making of a byelaw prohibiting dredging activity in the NIFCA district and requiring all dredging gear to be lashed and stowed onboard fishing vessels transiting through the district. Before coming into legal effect, there must be statutory consultation and this is taking place between 2nd December 2021 and 7th January 2022. Any comments or objections to the byelaw must be forwarded to the MIMO and NIFCA before 7th January. Further details of the consultation and the byelaw/related Impact Assessment can be found on the NIFCA website.

Commercial Shellfish Permit Conditions

Northumberland IFCA have reviewed the permit conditions of the Commercial Shellfish permit. The changes to the permit conditions consist of an addition to paragraphs 11 and 12 as written in the current byelaw. Please see the additions outlined in red in the text below. Commercial Permit Conditions:

11. A commercial permit holder must not fish for specified shellfish with more than 800 pots **from the named vessel** at any one time.
12. A commercial permit holder must not fish for specified shellfish using a pot unless a tag issued to the commercial permit holder **and the named vessel** is affixed to the pot.

These changes are to ensure that the byelaw fulfils its intended purpose that tags are used only from the vessel for which they are issued.

NIFCA Permit holders have been invited to provide any comments on the above changes and the consultation runs until Wednesday 29th December 2021.

Further information can be obtained from the Authority office.

Fire Fighting and Sea Survival Training

With Current regulation requiring Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping (STCW) training courses to be refreshed every 4 years it was time to pack my shorts and towel and head back to South Shields marine training Centre to undergo a day's refresher. This comprises a desk based learning session to jog the memory banks of the previous materials taught, followed by a multiple choice exam.

With the paperwork side now out the way we were led to the pool facility and prepared for the practical elements of the refresher. Once changed we were given a survival suit, helmet and lifejacket. Several exercises were demonstrated then carried out involving correctly entering the water from height, activating a Life raft, righting an upturned life raft, survival techniques with a group and best practices in the event anyone finds themselves in this position. After these exercises were completed by all it was time for the final realistic exercise.

Lights out, waves on, rain activated, breaking into two groups, the order to abandon ship was given and one by one we jumped from the platform into what was described as a force 5 simulation. Once in the water, we grouped together and made our way to the end of the pool where a Life raft was tethered, scrambling onboard and getting the remaining team inboard before taking the necessary measures to manoeuvre the raft to pick up a lone trainer survivor. Halfway down the pool the wind fans spin up and we were now trying to paddle a laden 10 man life raft in wind, rain and swell and quickly realised the laws of physics won't allow this.

A well targeted throw of a safety rope and we eventually managed to recover our lone survivor and with that the exercise was over and we clambered out of the pool, tired but buzzing from the experience! and that was the end for another 4 years.

The training facilities and staff were fantastic, and we are fortunate to have this training Centre almost on our doorstep. All of the officers undertaking the training have given nothing but positive feedback from the delivery and the facility.

Mark Southerton
Chief IFCO



Fire Fighting Training



Sea Survival Training

Subtidal Camera Survey Work

One of the great difficulties in working in marine conservation and fisheries is not always being able to easily see what we are working with! In the northern part of the NIFCA district, the Berwickshire and North Northumberland Coast SAC (BNNC SAC) is an MPA designated to protect a number of seabed habitats and important species. While we have a good idea of the extent of habitats within the MPA, there are areas where it would be great to have some more information. To find out a bit more about our seabed, NIFCA have underwater camera systems to allow us to video and photograph under the waves, as shown in the background image to this article.

We have a Remotely Operated Vehicle (ROV) which is a small camera operated with a remote control which can easily be deployed from a vessel.

We also have a Seaspyder camera which is larger and more bulky so requires deployment via a winch system. But the quality of the photos is brilliant!

We used both of the systems for a project with Natural England to identify sensitive seabed habitats in the BNNC SAC. The project aimed to capture imagery of stony reef, subtidal seagrass, and subtidal mussel and brittle star beds.

We were able to capture fantastic images of most of these habitats. The information on the location of these habitats can be used to generate a larger

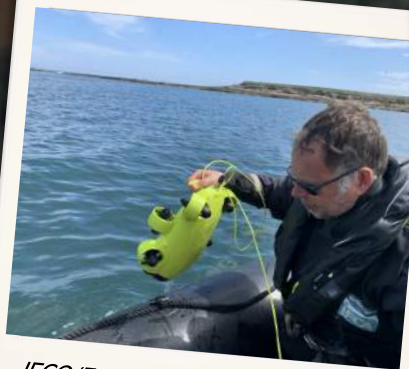
project looking at mapping the extent of these habitats.

NIFCA highly value our relationship with partner organisations, and the work we do with Natural England has led to some fantastic data collection and results which are of interest to both NIFCA and wider stakeholders.

Alex Aitken
Lead Environmental Officer



Subtidal Camera kit



IFCO/Engineer Paul Ridley preparing to submerge the subtidal camera



Imagery of the seabed captured by the subtidal camera

Are you interested to learn more about the work of NIFCA?

Come along to our next Quarterly Meeting on Monday 24th January 2022 at the East Bedlington Community Centre at 1pm. All of our upcoming meetings are listed on our website at: www.nifca.gov.uk/about/meeting-dates. All welcome!

Grab Sampling Survey Work

During a couple of weeks of unseasonably calm and sunny weather in November, we went out on the St Aidan to collect samples for a Newcastle University project tracking different species of lobsters. On two busy days we conducted sediment grab sampling, which involved a grab – a device which pinches together to pick up bottom sediment – being hauled over the back of the boat and washed down into a bucket. After that it got sieved through a fine mesh to leave only tiny pieces of clean gravel and any small animals.

The whole lot was sifted through by eye very carefully to find juvenile lobsters – or at least being about 2mm long, things that looked like they could be juvenile lobsters – to be collected and sent to Newcastle University to find out what

they are. As might be imagined, everyone got pretty wet and muddy by the end of the day!

We also used a couple of baited underwater video cameras dropped onto the seabed and left for an hour to record what critters might come and investigate, which is always an interesting peek into the lives and behaviour of lobster, crabs and other animals. Finally we used an environmental DNA (eDNA) sampler, leaving it for 24 hours to filter sea water through and leave behind evidence in the form of eDNA.

This is released from organisms into the environment and includes things like shed skin, mucous and poo. These miniscule amounts are picked up in the sampler and can be amplified using Pol-

ymerase Chain Reaction or PCR methods (sound familiar?). This can detect all the different types of animals within kilometres of the location the sampler was placed which is pretty amazing. It was exciting to be involved in this research as eDNA is a relatively new approach for assessing marine biodiversity, to complement traditional surveys.

As well as being fortunate with the weather, on two occasions the crew saw large pods of bottlenose dolphins near the Tyne to mark the end of the day, and one day saw what looked very much like the top fin of a basking shark!

Beth Harvey
Environmental IFCO



Thanks and Farewell NIFCA Members



Chair Les Weller and former member Wendy Pattison



Chair Les Weller (centre) and former member Sandy Ritchie (right) with Vice Chair Councillor Guy Renner Thompson



Chair Les Weller (centre) and former member Nick Polunin (right) with Vice Chair Councillor Guy Renner Thompson

The Authority bid a fond farewell to three of its members during its latest quarterly meeting, held on 25th of October at the East Bedlington Community Centre. A number of memberships ended during the COVID-19 lockdown which prevented the Authority from offering their usual farewell and best wishes to those leaving. Of those members who left NIFCA in the last 18-months, three were able to join us again for the latest meeting of the Authority to say goodbye to their colleagues and

receive the thanks they deserved for their commitment to the Authority as a member. Those members who have recently left include:

Former Vice Chair, Wendy Pattison, Councillor for Longhoughton Ward in Northumberland who was a member since 2017.

Sandy Ritchie, General member from the Anglo-Scottish Fisherman's Association who joined the Authority in 2011.

Professor Nick Polunin from the school of Marine Environmental Science at Newcastle University and who joined the Authority as a General member in 2011.

NIFCA Chair Les Weller gave sincere thanks to the three members, presenting them with a gift from the members and Officers with very best wishes for their future endeavours.

Emma Stiles,
Admin Officer



Successful prosecution for illegal recreational fishing

Commercial fisherman Mr James Arkle of Pegswood, Northumberland, pleaded guilty to illegal recreational fishing and failing to comply with fisheries officers on the 8th of April this year.

He admitted two breaches of fisheries legislation relating to the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 and Northumber-

land Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority byelaws. NIFCA brought the case against Mr Arkle, an experienced commercial fisherman, who had been observed by officers on patrol, working shellfish pots from the West Pier of Blyth Harbour without the required recreational shellfish permit issued by NIFCA.

After considering Mr Arkle's fishing experience and familiarity with fisheries legislation, his early guilty plea and that he is no longer a commercial fisherman, the district judge ruled he should be fined £262 and ordered to pay costs to the sum of £1,500 and a £26.20 victim surcharge.