

AUTUMN 2024



NIFCA NEWS



LOCAL WORK



NATIONAL WORK



COMMUNITY OUTREACH



WILDLIFE NEWS

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- NIFCA Membership
- Prosecutions
- V-notch Project Returns
- Puffin Festival
- NIFCA at ICES
- Small-scale Fisheries Workshop



CONTENTS

03	Welcome
04	Aln Estuary Survey
06	Changes in NIFCA Membership
08	Authority welcomes new Environmental Officer, Student Placement
10	Prosecutions
12	Puffin Festival
13	Joint Coastal Enforcement training
14	Return of Lobster V-notch Scheme
16	Lights, Camera, Action
18	NIFCA at ICES Annual Science Conference 2024
22	Small Scale Fisheries Workshop

**Northumberland
Inshore Fisheries and
Conservation Authority**

8 Ennerdale Road, Blyth
Northumberland NE24 4RT

01670 797676
nifca@nifca.gov.uk
www.nifca.gov.uk

 Northumberland IFCA

 @N_IFCA

 northumberland-ifca



WELCOME

Hello and welcome to our autumn newsletter!

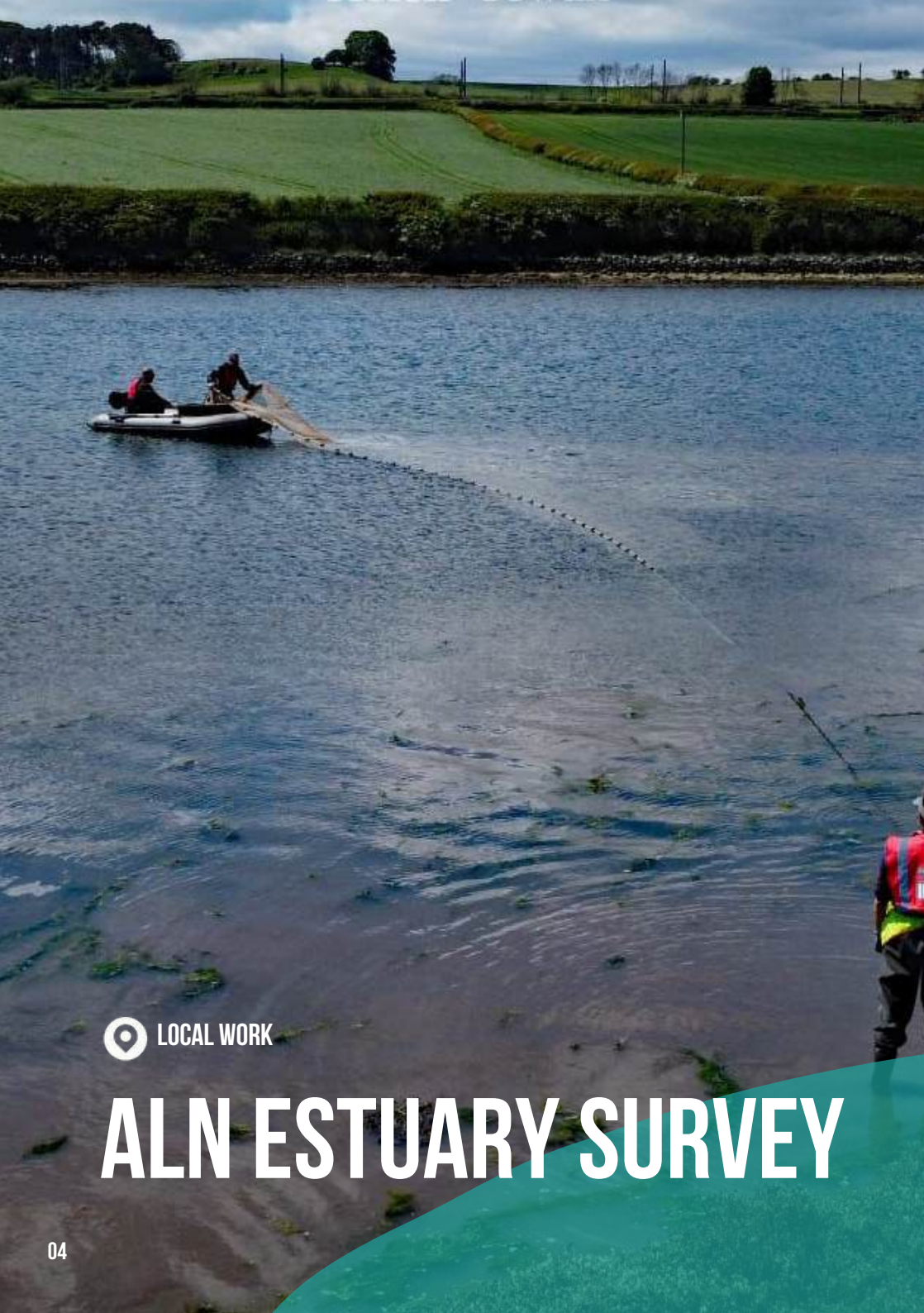
This follows another busy and rewarding period, with lots of activity taking place both locally and nationally, and we hope you enjoy reading about it in the pages that follow.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of our staff, Members and wider stakeholders for supporting and facilitating the important work that we have been undertaking over the course of the year. This includes some significant changes within the NIFCA governance structure, as we have bid a fond farewell to our longstanding Chair Les Weller, and welcoming in his stead our new Chair Amelia Henderson. More on page 6.

To hear more timely news and information about NIFCA, please visit our website news section, where you can also subscribe to our newsletter or alternatively, take a look at our socials and follow us on X and Facebook.

Mark Southerton





 LOCAL WORK

ALN ESTUARY SURVEY



During June we conducted the latest AIn Estuary Survey. The AIn Estuary Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ) is the smallest designated MCZ in the UK, covering an area of just 38.5 hectares.

The surveys help identify the abundance of fish communities at each site and collect additional data on the estuary's physical and chemical properties, such as temperature and salinity.

All the commercial species measured were juveniles, except for trout and a small percentage of adult sandeels (22% lesser sandeels and 7% greater sandeels). The most abundant species recorded was the Atlantic herring, with 706 individuals, marking the highest recorded species abundance in a single sample.

The 2023 survey results reaffirmed the AIn Estuary MCZ's importance as a nursery ground for various fish species, notably commercial species such as lesser and greater sandeel, Atlantic herring, European flounder, and European eel. It is important to note that sandeel and European eel both have prohibitions for commercial fisheries in the UK.



Photography by
Helen Cowan

CHANGES IN NIFCA MEMBERSHIP

Following a remarkable 15-year tenure, Les Weller, former Chair of NIFCA, announced his retirement in April. After an extensive search for his successor, the Authority was pleased to introduce Amelia Henderson, a dedicated recreational angler and advocate for marine conservation, as its new chairperson.

Mr Weller has been an unwavering advocate for sustainable fisheries management and the preservation of marine ecosystems throughout his tenure. Under his stewardship, NIFCA has made significant progress in safeguarding coastal habitats and promoting responsible fishing practices along the Northumberland and North Tyneside coasts.

In addition to his local contributions, Les also served as vice chair of the Association of IFCAs, representing all ten authorities around the English coastline. Incoming chair, Amelia Henderson, a resident of Blyth, has been a volunteer member of NIFCA since 2022 and serves as the secretary of the Bedlington Sea Angling Club. In her new role, Ms Henderson pledges to collaborate with stakeholders, fishing communities, and conservation groups to ensure the sustainable management of coastal waters and the protection of marine biodiversity.

"I am deeply honoured to follow in Les's footsteps and eager to embark on this new journey," remarked Amelia. "I am committed to working hand in hand with all stakeholders to preserve our coastal waters and uphold our rich marine biodiversity."

In addition to the change in leadership, NIFCA said farewell to Jim Stephenson, a commercial fisher and NIFCA member for more than 28 years, who retired from his position earlier in the year.

"Jim Stephenson has been a cornerstone of NIFCA's efforts for over 28 years, and we are immensely grateful for his dedicated service to our community," added Mark. "As a lifelong commercial fisher, Jim's expertise and passion for our coastal waters have been invaluable. We extend our heartfelt thanks to Jim for his public service and wish him all the best in his well-deserved retirement."

NIFCA have also been pleased to welcome two new members, Brian Douglas is an experienced commercial fisher based in Amble, and Tommy Mulvenna is a North Tyneside County Councillor.



OUTGOING CHAIR LES WELLER AND INCOMING CHAIR AMELIA HENDERSON



CHIEF OFFICER MARK SOUTHERTON, FORMER MEMBER JIM STEPHENSON AND FORMER CHAIR LES WELLER



CHIEF OFFICER MARK SOUTHERTON, NEW MEMBERS TOMMY MULVENNA AND BRIAN DOUGLAS AND CHAIR AMELIA HENDERSON



AUTHORITY WELCOMES NEW ENVIRONMENTAL OFFICER

NIFCA is pleased to announce the appointment of Sarah Richardson as the new Environmental IFCO. Sarah brings a wealth of knowledge and experience in marine consultancy, research, and fisheries liaison, making her an invaluable addition to the NIFCA team.

She holds an MSc in International Marine Consultancy from Newcastle University, where she developed a robust understanding of marine ecosystems, conservation strategies and fisheries management. During her academic journey, Sarah's research focused on sustainable marine practices and the impact of human activities on marine life, laying a strong foundation for her future career in marine conservation.

In her new role as Environmental Inshore Fisheries & Conservation Officer at NIFCA, Sarah will be responsible for developing and implementing strategies to protect and conserve Northumberland's inshore fisheries and marine habitats. She will work closely with local communities, stakeholders, and industry partners to promote sustainable fishing practices and ensure the long-term health of the region's marine ecosystems.

STUDENT PLACEMENT

Isabelle Caris, a Year 12 student from Hexham's Queen Elizabeth High School, recently completed a week-long work placement with NIFCA. With a keen interest in marine biology, Isabelle engaged in activities such as measuring lobsters and identifying their sex, contributing to crew logs, and learning about technologies used in marine conservation.

Describing her experience, Isabelle highlighted the thrill of crewing one of the Authority's patrol boats and going out to sea. She said: "It was an amazing and inspiring week; I have gained new skills and got a realistic experience of patrol duties and the vital role NIFCA plays in supporting the local shellfish population and working in partnership with the fishing community to sustain fish stocks and prevent illegal practices.

"I highly recommend the NIFCA placement to other students interested in marine science and conservation. It is a fantastic and rare opportunity to do exciting fieldwork, interact with fishers and crew, and it's also solidified my goal to study marine biology at Newcastle University after my A-levels."



PROSECUTIONS

Commercial fisher fined for using untagged pots

In April, magistrates sentenced Mr Iean Clow of Amble for breaching key local fisheries legislation regulating the shellfish fishery along the Northumberland coast.

In the previous year, NIFCA enforcement officers had undertaken routine inspections of a fleet of 25 fishing pots set off Boulmer, whose surface markers identified them as being set from the commercial fishing vessel Sterina BH47, owned and operated by Mr Clow. On inspection, 21 pots did not have current mandatory NIFCA pot tags attached.

Representing NIFCA, Andrew Oliver of Andrew Jackson Solicitors, explained to the court the importance of fishing for shellfish to commercial fishermen and the conservation measures that dictate that every pot must be fitted with up-to-date tags to ensure that no fishing vessel may fish with more than 800 pots.

Mr Clow, who represented himself in court pleaded guilty to the offence; the court decided that he had been deliberate in his actions and imposed financial penalties of a £933.00 fine, a victim surcharge of £373.00 and awarded costs of £1,870.00. In total £3,176.00 is to be paid by Mr Clow.

Commercial fisher fined for breaching fisheries legislation

A commercial fisherman from Holy Island, Mr Paul Douglas, was fined £2,690 by magistrates at the Quayside Law Courts in May. The fine comes as a consequence of breaching national fisheries legislation aimed at protecting key species along the Northumberland Coast. This related to incidents in November 2023 and January 2024, when Mr Douglas retained egg bearing Lobsters.

Representing NIFCA, Andrew Oliver informed the court that on both the 16th November 2023 and 16th January 2024, enforcement officers from NIFCA had conducted inspections on Mr Douglas's catch and vessel, Scarlet Cord R7 - on both occasions, prohibited egg bearing lobsters were found in his catch. Tests later performed on one of the lobsters showed that although there was only a limited number of eggs still present, the remainder that would have also been attached had not naturally hatched.

Mr Douglas, represented in court by Richard Arnot of Ward-Hadaway solicitors pleaded guilty to both offences. The Bench issued Mr Douglas a Band D fine of £960 and ordered him to pay a victim surcharge of £384 along with prosecution costs of £1,350.



Nick Weir, lead enforcement officer for NIFCA, said:

“The Authority is pleased that the court recognises the importance of NIFCA’s byelaws.

Fishing in Northumberland is an economically sensitive activity and of great social importance to our local heritage and character. Our byelaws in conjunction with national legislation, balance the social, environmental and economic needs of our stakeholders to promote healthy seas, sustainable fishing and a viable industry for future generations.”



PUFFIN FESTIVAL

During May, NIFCA made its annual appearance at the Amble Puffin Festival, an event celebrating the region's marine life. Each year, NIFCA supports the festival to connect with the local community and share insights into our work in managing and conserving Northumberland's inshore waters.

Our officers Vicky Rae and Richard Willis manned NIFCA's booth, which was a hub of activity, offering interactive displays and educational materials. Visitors learned about sustainable fishing practices, habitat protection and marine biodiversity. The NIFCA team provided information on key topics including sustainable fishing practices, minimum size limits and research work undertaken as well as ways anglers can contribute to the data held on finfish by entering our species challenge competition.

Habitat protection was also a key area, covering the safeguarding of critical habitats such as seagrass beds and rocky reefs and marine species conservation.

Children enjoyed fish identification games, fostering early interest in conservation. The festival also facilitated discussions between NIFCA officers and local fishers, helping to promote collaboration and mutual understanding.

NIFCA's annual participation in the Amble Puffin Festival not only educates the public but also strengthens community ties, reinforcing the collective effort to protect Northumberland's marine heritage.





JOINT COASTAL ENFORCEMENT TRAINING

NIFCA Officers were pleased to join partner agencies in March for a Joint Coastal Enforcement training day. The event, which brought together cross-warranted Environment Agency staff and Northumberland IFCA Officers, was centred around refresher training in common areas of concern, such as illegal activity and known offenders.

The training provided a fantastic opportunity to share information and raise awareness of working practices across the district, and to consider areas where joint working could benefit everyone.

Officers were pleased to also meet partners in the Northumbria Police Rural Crimes Team and MMO Enforcement Officers.

The day was highly successful in strengthening the working relationship with our partners. The opportunity to better understand the abilities of each team within the district was of great benefit, and led to the teams working together on joint operations in the following months. We remain grateful for these opportunities to strengthen working relationships, so we can continue to improve practices, and support our stakeholders as best as possible.



RETURN OF NIFCA'S LOBSTER V-NOTCH SCHEME

After a hiatus following the 2017 national prohibition on landing berried hens, the initiative has been reintroduced in response to industry feedback. This year, NIFCA has already measured, v-notched, and released over 1,070 female European lobsters into local waters.

From 2000 to 2017, NIFCA's lobster v-notching programme resulted in the protection of over 20,000 female lobsters, helping to sustain the region's lobster fishery.

Globally, v-notching is recognised as an essential conservation tool by both scientists and fishers alike. By protecting reproductive lobsters from being caught, v-notching ensures a healthy breeding population, which in turn supports a sustainable and profitable fishing industry.

Mark Southerton, Chief Officer at NIFCA, said: "We're thrilled to restart the lobster V-notching scheme, which has been so well supported by the local fishing community. Protecting both female and larger male lobsters will help ensure the long-term balance and health of the population, which is crucial for the future of our local fishery."

Under NIFCA's Crustacea Conservation Byelaw, any lobster with a v-notch cut in its tail is legally protected and cannot be landed. This local measure, combined with national legislation, helps to boost the reproductive capacity of the species to support stock replenishment.



In past years, the scheme received widespread support from local pot fishermen, who credited the initiative as a key factor in the sustainability of the fishery. The process involves buying lobsters from local wholesalers, measuring, and recording their details, and then marking them by removing a small v-shaped piece from the inner tail flap.

This ensures they are protected from the fishery while keeping the v-notch. V-notch pliers are being distributed free of charge to shellfish permit holders in the district. Mark Southerton added: “The NIFCA team would also like to extend our sincere thanks to local wholesalers Blyth Fish Ltd, D.R. Collins & Sons Ltd, TC Fish Ltd and several local fishermen for their generous contributions to the scheme, which would not be possible without their support and commitment to conserving lobster stocks in the district and maintaining a sustainable fishing industry.”



LIGHTS, CAMERA, ACTION!

NIFCA'S V-NOTCH FILM

NIFCA is delighted to announce the release of our short v-notch film! The 5 minute short film explains the importance of our v-notch scheme, which returned to the district in 2024, where Officers purchase lobsters which have been landed in the area, and cut a small 'V' shape in their tail fin. The lobster is then released back into the sea to continue to breed.

Chief Officer Mark Southerton and Senior Environmental Officer Andrew Boon both feature on the film to explain how the scheme works. They are also joined by commercial fisher Michael Nugent who offers an industry perspective of the effectiveness of v-notching in the district.

Thank you to all the fishers and wholesalers who have contributed to and supported this conservation program.

You can watch our film on the NIFCA website by visiting: www.nifca.gov.uk/species/lobster





NIFCA AT ICES ANNUAL SCIENCE CONFERENCE 2024

The International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) Annual Science Conference, held from the 9th of September at the Glass House conference centre in Gateshead, brought together over 600 scientists from 22 countries across Europe and beyond.

For four days, attendees explored vital topics in marine science, fisheries management, and the future of our oceans. Among the attendees, the Northumberland Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority (NIFCA), alongside the Association of IFCAs, highlighted its work to promote sustainable fisheries and marine conservation efforts in the Northumberland district.

Representing NIFCA, Lead Environmental IFCO Alex Aitken delivered a presentation on the value of collaborative working. She emphasised how partnerships between conservation authorities, including Natural England in partnership with strong links to Newcastle University, and scientists are critical to achieving effective marine conservation while maintaining sustainable fishing practices.

NIFCA's Senior Environmental Officer Andrew Boon also contributed by showcasing the work done in Berwickshire and Northumberland in comparing the size of onset sexual maturity of edible crab. Additional information was also provided on the impacts and recovery of historic dredging within marine protected areas (MPAs). Delegates were also given the opportunity to tour NIFCA's patrol vessel, St Aidan, which was moored on the Tyne opposite the conference hall. Mark Southerton, Chief Officer of NIFCA led the tours which were fully subscribed from day one. Aboard the vessel, visitors gained insight into the vital research and enforcement work carried out by NIFCA, which helps to balance marine conservation with the interests of local fishermen.

The ICES Annual Science Conference spanned a broad range of marine-related topics, covering themes such as the ecosystem impacts of offshore energy expansion, climate change, and welfare-conscious, sustainable fishing for the 21st century. These discussions were distinct from the ICES working groups, which regularly bring together scientists and fishing experts to compile data and create stock assessments. These assessments form the basis of the advice given to governments for fisheries management and quota decisions.

at north
run



ST ADAN

NO SMOKING
SMOKING IS NOT
ALLOWED ON THE
HOSPITAL ECK

CAUTION



NIFCA Chief, Mark Southerton, commented on the significance of the event:

“The ICES conference provided an excellent opportunity for Alex and her team to share the work of Northumberland IFCA and our counterparts up and down the country on an international stage.

It allowed us to demonstrate how our efforts in Northumberland, from stock assessments to collaborative conservation, contribute to the broader, global conversation on sustainable fisheries management.

We need to integrate local expertise and experience with international scientific endeavours. By engaging with the global scientific community, NIFCA not only showcases its initiatives but also learns from the latest developments in marine science, ensuring that Northumberland’s fisheries remain resilient and well-managed for future generations.”

One of the features of the conference was the English incarnation of the Scottish Fishermen’s Federation (SFF) ‘Pride in the Seas’ exhibition, which made its way to Gateshead after its initial unveiling in Holyrood earlier in the year. The exhibition tells the stories of individuals from the inshore fishing sector, including several fishers from the NIFCA district, and highlights the dramatic changes the industry has faced over the past decade. The exhibition was made possible through new funding from Newcastle University and showcases the many challenges faced by the industry as it navigates uncertain waters.

Sarah Coulthard, the Newcastle University researcher who spearheaded the project, explained the importance of the exhibition:

“Pride in the Seas invites the public to reflect on our commercial fishing industry, the many contributions our fishing families make to society, and the accumulation of challenges they must navigate in a sector experiencing unprecedented change and uncertainty.

The exhibition also seeks to send a message that whilst the scientific community may not always be able to support what fishers want, we are listening and take pride in the work of fishing and the many partnerships we forge in our collective pursuit of sustainable fisheries.”

Sarah also emphasised that the exhibition aims to foster dialogue and inspire positive change within the fishing industry, ensuring that the sector can continue to thrive despite its challenges.

SMALL SCALE FISHERIES WORKSHOP - WHITBY



Officers were pleased to attend, in October, the residential workshop, “Securing sustainable small-scale fisheries in the UK”. This was the second workshop of its kind, designed to take a closer look at the significant decline of the inshore fishing industry over the last 18 years.

Held in Whitby, the workshop was attended by over 60 people, providing representation from the fishing industry, wholesalers and regional regulators from the north west and east coast. Attendees discussed the challenges faced by the industry, particularly within the under 10 metre fleet, and ways to address the decline.

The workshop was also joined by an illustrator with the aim of producing a visual summary of the discussion from the two-day event. Attendees were pleased with the resultant infographic (right) which they felt effectively captured the thought process of the discussion in a concise and easy to digest format.

These workshops are the first part of a broader conversation about addressing the decline across the entire fishing fleet.



OUR VISION for

SPATIAL SQUEEZE



QUOTAS



REDESIGN OF QUOTA SYSTEM TO HAVE MORE CUSTOMISED MANAGEMENT OF FISHING OPPORTUNITIES FOR SMALL BOATS - TO REFLECT THE ADDITIONAL CHALLENGES THEY FACE

HAVING MORE FLEXIBILITY TO DIVERSIFY

ALLEVIATE PERSISTENT PRESSURE ON ONE SPECIES

PROVIDES SECURITY AGAINST LOSING OUR LIVELIHOOD OVERNIGHT WITH A SPECIES BAN

GOING BACK TO BEING ABLE TO FISH FOR 'A LITTLE OF A LOT' (of species)

HAVING A FAIRER OPPORTUNITY TO FISH - WHERE THE FISH ARE

TECHNOLOGY + DATA



ENVIRONMENT

BEING REWARDED ENVIRONMENTALLY SEAL MANAGEMENT

MARKETING



SUPPORTIVE INFRASTRUCTURE



LACK OF FISH REVERSED

There's a Natural Way in the Industry for YOUNG PEOPLE - CREATING THE NEXT GENERATION

MORE FLEXIBILITY TO ENCOURAGE NEW ENTRANTS

LOWER SEA SURVIVAL AGE at 16 (AGED IS 15/16)



MAKING IT EASIER FOR YOUNG PEOPLE TO TRIAL FISHING ON AN EARLY AGE

MENTOR APPRENTICESHIPS AND FUNDED TRAININGS

KEEPING PRICES STABLE



MAKING IT A VIABLE OPTION FOR YOUNG PEOPLE + PROVIDING US WITH QUALITY CREWS FOR THE FUTURE

WHERE THE ESSENTIAL ECONOMICS WORK

WHERE ALL OUR MANY COSTS ARE COMPENSATED FOR, BY THE PRICE WE GET FOR OUR FISH



FLEXIBILITY OF MARKET OPTIONS

ACCESS TO MARKETS

A FAIR AND BETTER PRICE

BEING PRICE MAKERS NOT JUST PRICE TAKERS

DIRECT SALES



FISHERS LIVING WELL

LESS BUREAUCRACY



HAVING TIME TO BE WITH FAMILY AND FRIENDS, DOING OTHER THINGS



INSHORE FISHING AS A VIABLE LIVELIHOOD

FISHERS RECOGNISED & CELEBRATED

THANKS FOR DOING THE HARD DAILY WORK THAT WE ALL ENJOY



IT SHOULD BE THE SAME WITH THE FISHERMEN

SUPPORT FROM THE COMMUNITY TO KEEP QUALITY FISH FRESH -> BETTER PRICES

THRIVING INSHORE FISHING INDUSTRY

WHITBY WORKSHOP

Visual: chapple cartoons.co.uk

Northumberland


IFCA


Inshore Fisheries and
Conservation Authority


**Northumberland
Inshore Fisheries and
Conservation Authority**

8 Ennerdale Road, Blyth
Northumberland NE24 4RT

01670 797676
nifca@nifca.gov.uk
www.nifca.gov.uk

 Northumberland IFCA

 @N_IFCA

 northumberland-ifca