

WINTER 2025



# NIFCA NEWS



**LOCAL WORK**



**NATIONAL WORK**



**COMMUNITY OUTREACH**



**WILDLIFE NEWS**

## **INSIDE THIS ISSUE**

- Fishing Gear Innovation
- Collaborative Research
- Seized Gear Auction
- V-notching in the District
- FMP Update
- Successful Prosecution



## CONTENTS

03	Welcome
04	Fishing Gear Innovation
06	Collaborative Research
08	St Mary's Wildlife Festival
09	Recycling NIFCA Tags
10	Recreational Sea Angling
12	Seized Gear Auction
13	NIFCA Presentations
14	V-notching in the District
15	Aln Estuary Survey
16	Welcoming Local MPs
18	FMP Update
19	Ghanaian Delegation
20	St Aidan Maintenance
21	NIFCA Annual Report
22	Successful Prosecution

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# WELCOME

As we reflect on the past year, we are incredibly proud of what NIFCA has achieved, these successes have been made possible by the dedication of our staff and the invaluable support and expertise of our wider membership. Together, we have continued to make meaningful progress in fisheries management and marine protection.

During 2025, fisheries and the marine environment have featured prominently in both local and national news. New UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement measures have been agreed, public interest has grown following the release of Attenborough's Oceans documentary, and major consultations on offshore MPAs and bottom-towed gear have highlighted the increasing pressures facing the fishing industry, including the ongoing "spatial squeeze" from offshore marine development. The latest ICES stock advice for key species also sets out a challenging outlook for fishing opportunities in 2026.

Despite this wider uncertainty, local management has remained our focus. Collaboration with the fishing industry has been central to our shellfish data collection programmes, the roll-out of a pilot Remote Electronic Monitoring (REM), and trawl gear trials aimed at reducing seabed impacts. We are grateful to all the fishers who have worked with and supported NIFCA throughout the year. Our Recreational Sea Anglers have been contributing to citizen science through the bass scale project increasing our knowledge on key species. As National Fisheries Management Plans progress, we will continue to work closely with industry to support the transition into implementation in 2026.

Our partnership working has also remained strong during the year, we have strengthened IFCA visibility through improved communications and engagement with local MPs. Internationally, we showcased the IFCA model to the Norwegian Fisheries Directorate and supported the hosting of the Ghanaian Fisheries Department in collaboration with MMO partners.

As we look ahead, we look forward to engaging with many of our stakeholders throughout 2026. Thank you for your continued support, and we hope you enjoy this winter edition of our newsletter.

*Mark Southerton*



# FISHING GEAR INNOVATION



LOCAL WORK



# A NEW APPROACH TO REDUCING IMPACTS OF TRAWLING IN THE NIFCA DISTRICT

NIFCA is pioneering a new research project to test the use of pelagic otter boards in the local Nephrops trawl fishery in partnership with the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust. The aim is simple: to assess whether this gear type can reduce the footprint of trawling on seabed habitats, lower fuel use and running costs, and minimise unwanted bycatch, all while maintaining Nephrops catch rates comparable to traditional trawl setups.

## Why Pelagic Otter Boards?

Traditional otter boards make contact with the seabed, increasing the swept area and potentially disturbing sensitive marine habitats. In contrast, the innovative pelagic design lifts the boards into the water column, significantly reducing direct seabed contact and the overall environmental footprint of the gear.

## Survey Work and Data Collection

During a multi-day at-sea survey, depth sensors were fitted to both the otter boards and the trawl, with cameras positioned at several points across the gear. These instruments recorded how the equipment performed in the water column and how the trawl interacted with the seabed.

## A Collaborative Project

This project has been shaped with strong support from the local fishing industry. A local under-10-metre vessel and the practical expertise of local fishers (who work with this gear daily) have been central to the trial's success. The trial is expected to conclude at the end of the year. Once the analysis is complete, NIFCA will release further updates along with a full project report available on our website.



### **Chief Officer Mark Southerton said:**

*“This project shows what can be achieved when science and industry work together. We are committed to exploring innovative gear that support objectives of the Fisheries Act 2020. Early results are encouraging, helping deliver Sustainability and Ecosystem Objectives, reduce bycatch, protect the seabed, and lower fuel use in line with Climate Change Objectives. Innovation like this helps us move in the right direction.”*



# COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH

## Strengthening Nephrops Survey Expertise

This summer, NIFCA joined the Marine Directorate on a multi-day Nephrops stock assessment survey, gaining hands-on experience with a variety of methodologies, including trawls and a drop-down camera sled. This collaboration, alongside the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (Cefas), provided a valuable insight into standardising survey techniques and knowledge that will be applied to Nephrops grounds within the NIFCA district.

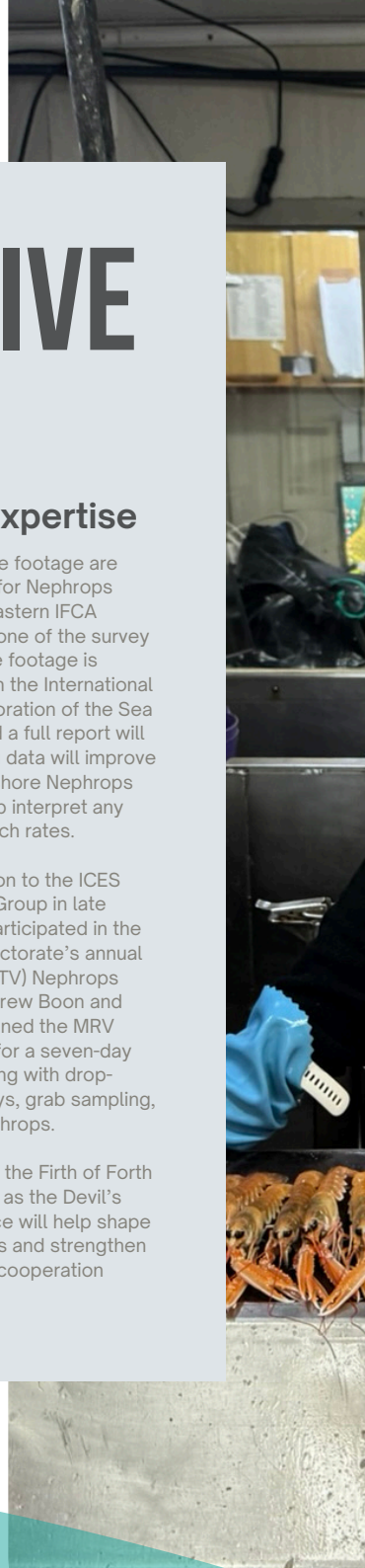
The team also received expert training from Cefas in identifying and counting Nephrops burrows, further enhancing local capacity for stock assessments. During the summer, NIFCA officers also developed a burrow count survey for inshore Nephrops areas, aligning with CEFAS surveys in the Farne Deepes.

They established a 150-station survey grid, with stations spaced 1 km apart. A random subsample of 50 stations was surveyed this year, which is up from just six stations in 2024. Using a towed sledge camera borrowed from North Eastern IFCA, officers recorded seabed footage for 12 minutes at each station.

Burrows visible in the footage are counted as a proxy for Nephrops abundance. North Eastern IFCA officers also joined one of the survey days. Analysis of the footage is underway in line with the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) guidance, and a full report will follow. The resulting data will improve understanding of inshore Nephrops populations and help interpret any changes in local catch rates.

Following an invitation to the ICES Nephrops Working Group in late 2024, NIFCA also participated in the Scottish Marine Directorate's annual Underwater TV (UWTV) Nephrops survey. Officers Andrew Boon and Sarah Richardson joined the MRV Scotia in Aberdeen for a seven-day offshore trip, assisting with drop-down camera surveys, grab sampling, and trawling for Nephrops.

The survey spanned the Firth of Forth and extended as far as the Devil's Hole. This experience will help shape future NIFCA surveys and strengthen inter-organisational cooperation going forward.







COMMUNITY OUTREACH

## NIFCA ATTENDS ST MARY'S WILDLIFE FESTIVAL

### Celebrating the rich biodiversity of St Mary's Island

During August, NIFCA took part in the annual St Mary's Wildlife Festival, held at St Mary's Lighthouse in Whitley Bay. The popular event celebrates the rich biodiversity of St Mary's Island, a much-loved nature reserve and Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) renowned for its coastal bird populations and seal colonies.

The festival aims to both celebrate and educate visitors about local wildlife, offering a mix of educational programmes, wildlife recording opportunities, and family-friendly activities. NIFCA Environment Officers Alex Aitken and Vicky Rae joined the weekend's celebrations, spending time on a very sunny St Mary's Island alongside local organisations and charities.

The team enjoyed engaging with individuals and families attending the event, sharing information about the Authority's role in marine conservation and the importance of protecting our local coastal habitats.

Lead Environmental Officer, Alex Aitken, said: "We were pleased to see so many people come to St Mary's Island to chat about our amazing marine life and the wildlife connected to this beautiful and important Nature Reserve.

"NIFCA's attendance at the festival was an excellent opportunity to raise awareness of marine conservation efforts, strengthen links with the local community, and inspire visitors to appreciate and protect the region's unique coastal environment."



# RECYCLED TAGS INITIATIVE REWARDS RESPONSIBILITY



NIFCA continues to champion sustainability in the marine sector through its innovative Recycled Tags Prize Draw. This year, five lucky fishers each received a £100 prize, recognising their commitment to responsible tag disposal and environmental stewardship.

The initiative has sparked increased participation amongst the local fishing community, with more fishers adopting environmentally friendly practices year on year. By promoting greater awareness and rewarding positive action, the Authority is not only helping to safeguard vital marine habitats but also supporting the long-term sustainability of fisheries in our region.

NIFCA Chair, Amelia Henderson, said: “This initiative not only encourages the responsible disposal of tags but also fosters a sense of community participation, with more fishers engaging in environmentally friendly practices each year.

“By promoting awareness and rewarding positive action, the Authority continues to work towards safeguarding marine habitats and supporting sustainable fisheries management.”

Each selected tag and its associated permit holder in the NIFCA Recycled Tags Prize Draw was awarded £100.

# CHAMPIONING RECREATIONAL SEA ANGLING IN NORTHUMBERLAND WITH NIFCA

Recreational sea angling has long been a cornerstone of coastal life in Northumberland. From pier fishing in Blyth to charter trips off Amble, the sport supports livelihoods, sustains communities, and connects thousands of anglers with the marine environment. Now, thanks to the work of the Northumberland Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority (NIFCA), recreational sea angling has never been more firmly recognised as a vital part of inshore fisheries management.

## Recognition under the Fisheries Act

The Fisheries Act 2020, and later amendments in the Fisheries Act 2022, changed the landscape for UK anglers. For the first time, recreational angling was acknowledged in national fisheries management. This recognition ensures that Fisheries Management Plans (FMPs) must take recreational sea angling into account, covering access to key species like bass, pollack and wrasse, as well as possible catch restrictions such as bag limits and seasonal closures.

Importantly, the Act requires fisheries authorities to consider the socio-economic value of angling. With recreational sea angling contributing nearly £2 billion annually to the English economy and supporting over 16,000 jobs, its role in coastal economies is undeniable.

## How NIFCA Supports Anglers

NIFCA has been proactive in ensuring recreational voices are not just heard but embedded in local management. Its Recreational Sea Angling Strategy, first published in 2021 and updated annually, focuses on three clear aims:

- Building strong relationships with anglers and clubs across the district
- Improving understanding of recreational catches and inshore fish stocks
- Making evidence-based decisions to secure sustainable fishing opportunities

In practice, this means NIFCA officers are a familiar sight at competitions, in tackle shops, and on patrols. Their work includes distributing minimum size guides, installing fish measuring boards and promoting the Anglers' National Line Recycling Scheme.

## Data for the Future

One of the standout initiatives has been the NIFCA Species Challenge, a friendly, shore-based competition designed not just for bragging rights but for science. Launched in 2023, the Species Challenge has already engaged over 120 anglers, with nearly 1,200 fish submissions covering 38 species. Popular catches include flounder, whiting, dab, cod, and mackerel, while rarer finds like shad, bonito, and tompot blenny have added to the excitement.



The Challenge has given NIFCA a new dataset on local fish populations, information previously lacking due to the shellfish-dominated commercial fleet. It's already helping to highlight seasonal patterns and even gaps in knowledge, such as the need for better data on northern parts of the district.

**Anglers as Citizen Scientists**

Alongside the Species Challenge, NIFCA recently launched a Bass Scale Project. By collecting scales and measurements from bass caught in the district, anglers are helping build an age and growth profile of local populations. This work is particularly important as bass shift their range northwards due to climate change. The results will feed into wider national research and Fisheries Management Plans, helping to support evidence gaps in local populations and catches from recreational fishers.

**Working Together for Sustainable Seas**

NIFCA's work shows what's possible when anglers, regulators, and scientists collaborate. From championing catch-and-release practices in local clubs to addressing challenges like litter, fixed nets, and fish stock declines, the Authority is ensuring the recreational sea angling community has a real say in fisheries management.

As one angler put it at a recent NIFCA forum: "It's about more than just the fish, we're investing in the future of our sport and our seas."

**Looking Ahead**

With climate change reshaping fish populations, government identifying evidence gaps in FMPs,

and local communities depending on a healthy marine environment, the role of RSAs has never been more important. NIFCA is showing how angler engagement can deliver both better science and stronger fisheries management.

For sea anglers in Northumberland, this means not just being consulted but being part of the solution. Recreational anglers are not just stakeholders, they are partners. With continued engagement, stronger data, and government recognition, the future of recreational sea angling in Northumberland looks more secure than ever.

If you're a recreational sea angler in the NIFCA district, your voice matters. Look out for future Species Challenge updates, contribute to the Bass Scale Project, or simply share your catch data with officers on patrol or submit fish catches nationally using the Cefas Sea Angling Diary app. By taking part, you're helping safeguard fish stocks, strengthen the case for recreational access, and shape the future of angling in Northumberland.

**READY TO READ MORE:**

RECREATIONAL SEA ANGLING STRATEGY (2024)

NIFCA SPECIES CHALLENGE REPORT (23/24)

HYDER ET AL, CEFAS REPORT (2020)

SEA ANGLING 2012: SURVEY

**CLICK HERE TO SUPPORT THE NIFCA BASS SCALE PROJECT**



# SEIZED GEAR AUCTION BENEFITS COASTAL HEROES



NIFCA has raised £4,450 for charity through an online auction of seized fishing equipment. The auction featured three fleets of lobster pots. The gear had been seized earlier this year after failing to comply with local IFCA byelaws.

A report of the seizure was made, as required under the Marine and Coastal Access Act, but no one came forward to claim the equipment. NIFCA members agreed that the proceeds from the online auction should go to charity, with the Fishermen's Mission and the Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI), chosen as the beneficiaries with each organisation to receive £2,225.

To select which RNLI station within the NIFCA district would benefit, all 8 local stations were placed into a draw, with Berwick-upon-Tweed RNLI picked as the recipient.

Speaking about the donations, Mark Southerton, Chief Officer at NIFCA, said: "We are delighted that the proceeds from this auction can support two charities which play such a vital role in our coastal communities. The Fishermen's Mission and the RNLI are vital to the wellbeing and safety of those working at sea, and we're proud to be able to contribute to their work."

## NIFCA PRESENTS AT SEAFISH DECKHAND PREPARATION COURSE IN AMBLE

NIFCA was pleased to take part in the recent Seafish five-day Deckhand Preparation Course in Amble, offering an excellent opportunity to highlight the vital role IFCA's play in managing inshore fisheries. Officers also enjoyed speaking with students about sustainable fishing, compliance, and career pathways within the industry.

Each student received information on fish and shellfish minimum sizes along with measuring gauges and boards. The Deckhand Preparation Course provides essential training for anyone entering the commercial fishing sector. Over five days, participants gain core skills and the mandatory qualifications needed to work safely aboard UK fishing vessels.

The programme blends practical sessions with classroom learning, covering vessel and crew safety, gear handling, catch management, and maritime regulations, with two mandatory qualifications: Sea Survival and Health & Safety.

After completing the course, participants undertake at least one month's sea time on a UK commercial fishing vessel, allowing them to apply their new skills in real conditions while building confidence and experience.



[CLICK HERE FOR MORE ABOUT THE PARTNERSHIP](#)

## MARINE NATURE PARTNERSHIP

NIFCA officers recently joined partners in Newcastle to mark 25 years of the Berwickshire and Northumberland Marine Nature Partnership. The Partnership brings together nearly thirty organisations and community groups, all working toward a shared goal: protecting the region's outstanding marine environment.

Its work includes coordinated Marine Protected Area management, nature recovery projects, evidence sharing, and support for responsible use of the coast and sea. By joining effort across sectors, the Partnership helps safeguard ecological, cultural, and economic value of the Berwickshire Coast.

At the anniversary event, NIFCA presented on how inshore fisheries management has changed over the past quarter century, reflecting on the evolution from the Northumberland Sea Fisheries Committee to the current IFCA model and the growing role of science, engagement, and adaptive management.





# NIFCA MARKS ANOTHER SUCCESSFUL V-NOTCHING YEAR

The Authority has completed another strong year of lobster v-notching, with the 2025 report now available on the Northumberland IFCA website. This year, officers v-notched 1,217 lobsters, bringing the total to almost 23,000 since the work first began in 2000.

Each v-notch protects a female lobster from being landed for around two to three years. This gives the animal time to breed and helps maintain a sustainable local fishery. The 2025 report outlines how lobsters were purchased from local wholesalers, measured, v-notched, and released across five sectors of the district in areas of hard ground.

The work was carried out through the summer months when lobsters are most abundant. This is the second year of the scheme since it restarted in 2024, following earlier success between 2000 and 2017.

NIFCA thanks everyone who has supported the programme and helped keep it moving forward.



READY TO LEARN MORE?



[VIEW THE NIFCA 2025 V-NOTCHING REPORT HERE](#)

[MORE ABOUT OUR LOBSTER AND CRAB FISHERY](#)

[VIEW THE NIFCA V-NOTCHING FILM](#)



## LATEST ALN ESTUARY SURVEY CONFIRMS ITS IMPORTANCE FOR JUVENILE FISH

NIFCA has completed the latest round of monitoring in the Aln Estuary at Alnmouth, continuing a long-running survey series that began with preliminary assessments in 2012 to 2014 and followed the site's designation as a Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ) in 2013.

The work tracks the estuary's role as a key nursery ground and the continued presence of the critically endangered European Eel. Surveys take place each Spring and Autumn to match migration and spawning periods and have been carried out every year except 2020, due to Covid 19.

Four sites were sampled using seine nets and one fyke net set overnight. All methods follow the Environment Agency's Transitional and Coastal Monitoring approach. This year's team included volunteers from Coast Care, students from Newcastle University, colleagues from the Environment Agency, and members of the public.

A total of 679 fish were recorded. Eleven species were identified to species level and one to genus.

A Lesser Sandeel was the most abundant with 344 individuals. Goby species followed with 144, then Atlantic herring with 81.

These species have been recorded every year from 2015 to 2025 and consistently dominate the dataset. European Eel, European Flounder, and Saithe also appeared again, although in lower numbers. Notably, Seabass was recorded for the first time, caught at the mouth sampling site during the Spring survey.

The 2025 analysis and full report are now being finalised. Early results reaffirm that the Aln Estuary remains an important juvenile development site for many commercially important species. Average lengths for Lesser Sandeels, Flounders, Herrings, European eels, Sand Smelt, Saithe, Salmon, and Sea Trout all fell below maturity size, underscoring the nursery value of the estuary.

The full report will be available on the NIFCA website soon.

# NORTHUMBERLAND IFCA WELCOMES LOCAL MPS

## WELCOMING IAN LAVERY, MP

Ian Lavery, MP for Blyth and Ashington, has praised the work of NIFCA following a visit to learn more about its role in protecting marine habitats and supporting the local fishing community. Mr Lavery met NIFCA Chair Amelia Henderson and Chief Officer Mark Southerton aboard the patrol vessel St Aidan to see how the Authority manages the region's valuable lobster fishery and other inshore resources.

During the visit, the MP was shown how data collection and monitoring help safeguard fish stocks, and he learned about NIFCA's V-notching scheme, which protects female breeding lobsters to ensure a sustainable fishery for the future. He also heard about the Authority's enforcement work, investment in new equipment, and ongoing research projects aimed at improving the understanding of local marine ecosystems.

The discussions also covered national challenges, including offshore development pressures, fishing gear regulation consultations, and the work of the Inshore Small-Scale Fisheries consortium.

Mr Lavery said: "NIFCA plays a vital role in managing our sea fisheries resources, ensuring that fishing is carried out sustainably while balancing the social and economic benefits with the need to protect our marine environment. I was hugely impressed by the dedication of the team and the vital work they do along our coast."

NIFCA Chair Amelia Henderson added: "We were delighted to welcome Ian Lavery MP and share the wide range of work we do. It was a great opportunity to discuss local and national challenges and our commitment to working with the fishing community to protect Northumberland's marine habitats."



## WELCOMING EMMA FOODY, MP

NIFCA recently welcomed Emma Foody, MP for Cramlington and Killingworth, to its base in Blyth. Ms Foody met with NIFCA Chair Amelia Henderson and Chief Officer Mark Southerton to learn more about the Authority's work in protecting marine habitats and supporting the local fishing community.

The visit focused on the management of the region's important lobster fishery, highlighting how shellfish permit returns and biometric data collection at sea and onshore is helping to monitor stock health and harvest rates. Ms Foody also learned about initiatives such as NIFCA's pioneering V-notching scheme, which supports the sustainability of local lobster populations.

The visit also highlighted the Authority's compliance and enforcement work, including inspections at sea and from shore, and recent investments in new equipment to boost the organisation's monitoring and research capabilities.

On a national level, the conversation touched on the challenges facing the inshore fishing sector, including the spatial pressures from offshore developments, consultations on bottom-towed fishing gear, and NIFCA's role in the work of the

Inshore Small-Scale Fisheries (ISSF) consortium, which is looking at the drivers behind the gradual decline of small scale fisheries.

Ms Foody was briefed on the Fair Funding Review which could mean changes to DEFRA funding for the Authority from 2026, its role in Marine Protected Area management, and adaptive approaches to trawling which includes a pioneering gear trial designed to reduce fishing impacts on the seabed. Following her visit, Ms Foody praised the Authority's commitment to both the environment and local communities: "It was great to see first-hand how NIFCA balances protecting our marine environment with supporting the livelihoods of our local fishing communities. I will be raising the importance of recognising and safeguarding key fishing grounds, as well as ensuring IFCA's are properly supported to continue their essential work."

NIFCA Chair Amelia Henderson welcomed the visit, she said: "We were very pleased to host Emma Foody MP and to share the breadth of work we do. The meeting provided an opportunity to discuss current initiatives, challenges in the sector, and our unwavering commitment to protect marine habitats while working closely with the local fishing industry. We look forward to working with Ms Foody and other partners moving forward."





## FISHERIES MANAGEMENT PLANS UPDATE

The Crab and Lobster FMP remains the most significant plan for the Northumberland district, reflecting the economic importance of this fishery.

[CLICK HERE FOR MORE DETAILS OF THE CRAB & LOBSTER FMP](#)



The Government has confirmed that the Minimum Conservation Reference Size will increase by one millimetre per year until it reaches 90mm. This change is expected to come into force early next year, although the exact date is still to be confirmed.

To support fishers through the transition, NIFCA will commission new measuring gauges and will contact all permit holders once they are ready.

The Marine Directorate is leading on the Nephrop FMP. A consultation on the draft plan, including the North Sea component, is expected to launch in early 2026. The Authority will publish updates on our website as soon as consultation details are announced.

[CLICK HERE TO VIEW THE LATEST NEWS ON FISHERIES MANAGEMENT PLANS](#)



## MAYOR OF NORTH TYNESIDE VISITS NORTHUMBERLAND IFCA

The Authority recently hosted North Tyneside Mayor Karen Clark aboard its 'St Aidan' patrol and research vessel to discuss marine habitat protection and local fishing support. The Mayor met with NIFCA Chair Amelia Henderson and Chief Officer Mark Southerton to learn more about lobster fishery management, including shellfish permit returns, biometric monitoring, and the latest V-notching scheme for lobster sustainability.

Discussions also covered NIFCA's compliance and enforcement activities, new equipment investments, and national challenges such as Fisheries Management Plans and implementation, offshore development pressures, bottom-towed gear consultations, and participation in the Inshore Small-Scale Fisheries consortium. Additionally, the Mayor was informed about potential DEFRA funding changes, Marine Protected Area management, and adaptive trawling initiatives.

# NIFCA HOSTS GHANAIAN DELEGATION ON ST AIDAN



In September, NIFCA welcomed a delegation from the Ghanaian Fisheries Department aboard the St Aidan Patrol Vessel as part of the UK-funded Ocean Country Partnership Programme (OCPP).

The OCPP works with Ghana and other partner nations to address marine and fisheries challenges through collaboration, research, and capacity building. The programme supports sustainable aquaculture, strengthens marine protected area (MPA) implementation and awareness, and provides scholarships for marine science research in Ghana.

The visit, organised in partnership with the Marine Management Organisation (MMO), gave the

Ghanaian team first-hand insight into NIFCA's fishery management and enforcement and compliance operations.

NIFCA Chief Officer, Mark Southerton, said: "The Ghanaian delegation welcomed the opportunity to join the Northumberland IFCA patrol and see some of the fisheries management and compliance work in action.

"We were delighted to contribute to this international exchange, helping share best practice in fisheries management and building connections that support sustainable oceans for all."

# MAINTAINING ST AIDAN

The NIFCA patrol vessel St Aidan recently underwent a period of essential maintenance following necessary servicing and repairs to the A-frame and hydraulic systems. To make best use of the vessel's time out of the water, the decision was taken to bring forward the spring maintenance programme, including antifouling the hull, below-waterline servicing of critical components, and detailed work on the vessel's propeller.

As part of this wider maintenance window, several adaptations were also made to enhance operational capability and improve ergonomics for the crew. Additional aluminium plate protection was fitted in high-impact working areas to improve durability during routine patrol and survey activities.

## Specialist Support

Parkol Marine, based in Whitby, was selected to carry out the works due to its extensive expertise in vessel maintenance and repair. St Aidan was lifted onto the floating dry dock, providing full access for the skipper and engineer to undertake in-house maintenance alongside the contracted work.

## Return to Service

With all work successfully completed, the crew waited for a suitable weather window to return St Aidan to her berth at Royal Quays Marina, North Shields. The vessel is now back on station and ready for continued patrol and survey operations.





## INTRODUCING NIFCA'S NEW-LOOK ANNUAL REPORT

The Authority has released its refreshed Annual Report, a statutory requirement for all IFCAs. Each year we update the Secretary of State on our performance against the previous year's Annual Plan, and this edition arrives in a new digital format with direct links to supporting data throughout.

The report covers a year of steady progress and important change. It highlights updates in leadership within our governance structure, including the appointment of a new Chair – Amelia Handerson. It also outlines our work within Marine Protected Areas (MPA), most notably the pilot use of Remote Electronic Monitoring to manage trawling activity in the Coquet to St Mary's Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ).

Fisheries management remains a core focus. This year saw the re-introduction of the lobster V-notching programme, continued data collection across local fisheries, and collaborative work to refine Nephrops survey methods.

Our citizen science work also grew through the Sea Angling Species Challenge, which brought the public into the heart of local monitoring. NIFCA engagement stretched from community outreach to international links, including support for the annual science conference held in Gateshead.



**READ OUR ANNUAL REPORT HERE**

# SUCCESSFUL PROSECUTION FOR FISHERIES OFFENCES

**On 20 November at Newcastle's Quayside Court,** Magistrates found Mr Charles "Michael" Denton and Mrs Brenda Denton of Atlee Terrace, Newbiggin by the Sea guilty of breaching national and local fisheries legislation designed to regulate and protect key fisheries along the Northumberland coast. This related to incidents in January 2025 when Mrs Denton's fishing vessel was observed fishing without a permit and later found to be retaining prohibited shellfish.

The case was brought against Mr and Mrs Denton, by the Northumberland Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority (NIFCA) who manage the inshore fishery along the Northumberland and North Tyneside coastline.

During the trial, Howard Shaw of Park Square Barristers, prosecuting on behalf of NIFCA, informed the court that on the 16<sup>th</sup> of January 2025 Mrs Denton's vessel the Andigee WY372 fishing from Blyth harbour, with her husband Michael acting as Master was observed fishing within the NIFCA district with pots without a valid commercial shellfish permit.

On a joint sea patrol on 17<sup>th</sup> of January, Enforcement Officers from NIFCA and the Marine Management Organisation (MMO) inspected pots by Andigee and found 174 lobsters that measured beneath minimum conservation reference size of 87mm one of which was egg bearing, deliberately stored inside for later collection.

The Enforcement Officers seized 3 illegally set fleets of gear comprising of 70 pots, one of these fleets, which also contained the stored undersize lobsters, was not displaying required information on its surface markers.

Mr and Mrs Denton as Master and Owner of the Andigee respectively had committed 4 offences:

- They failed to immediately return to the sea 174 European Lobsters contrary to Section 4 Article 13 of Council Regulation 2019/1241.
- Failed to return to the sea one berried European Lobster contrary to Sea Fish (Conservation) Act 1967 in respect of UK SI 2017 No 899.

## **NIFCA Lead Enforcement Officer Nick Weir says:**

*"Fishing in Northumberland is economically sensitive and central to our local heritage. Our byelaws and national legislation protect sustainable fishing and healthy seas. NIFCA will pursue anyone who jeopardises the fishery or fails to comply. We also thank the Marine Management Organisation for their assistance."*





- They fished within the NIFCA district for specified shellfish without a commercial permit contrary to NIFCA Byelaw 4 Crustacea and Mollusc Permitting and Pot Limitation and Section 163 of the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009.
- They failed to display the Name, Port Letters and Number of their fishing boat on pots used to fish and store sea fish, contrary to NIFCA byelaw 5 Marking of Fishing Gear and Keep Pots and Section 163 of the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009.

After hearing evidence from four Enforcement Officers from NIFCA and one from the MMO, the Bench found Mr and Mrs Denton guilty of the four offences. Sentencing for the offending was adjourned to early 2026.


Mr Denton was previously given a 12-month disqualification from holding a NIFCA permit after being prosecuted by NIFCA in March 2023 and fined for retaining 179 undersize Lobsters and for failing to comply with fisheries officers in 2022, he has numerous other convictions for fisheries offences over the last 25 years.




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