

# THE NORTHUMBERLAND SEA FISHERIES COMMITTEE



An Insight into the Fisheries throughout the  
Committee's District

# 2008

# **THE NORTHUMBERLAND SEA FISHERIES COMMITTEE**

## **AN INSIGHT INTO THE FISHERIES THROUGHOUT THE COMMITTEE'S DISTRICT**

---

### **Foreword**

The Northumberland Sea Fisheries Committee is one of 12 Sea Fisheries Committees set up in 1890, to manage and protect the inshore fisheries around the coasts of England and Wales. The initial function of SFCs was to control fisheries within their local area to ensure sustainability. However, this task has expanded over the years and today in addition to the Committee's own byelaws officers enforce current EU Regulations and British Statutory Instruments. Byelaws are made subject to confirmation from the Minister (DEFRA) and any byelaw introduced may not be less stringent than those imposed through national or community legislation. All applications of regulations comply with the relevant statutory requirements including the Police and Criminal Evidence Act (PACE).

Sea Fishery Committees now play a key role in managing the marine environment. Several statutes have given SFCs additional responsibilities.

- Sea Fisheries (Wildlife Conservation) Act 1992
- The Conservation (Natural Habitats &c) Regulations 1994 require SFCs to comply with the Habitats Directive giving the Committee a larger role to play in environmental issues i.e. participating in the management of the North Northumberland SAC.
- The Environment Act 1995 amended the Sea Fisheries Regulation Act 1996 to allow SFCs to control fisheries for environmental reasons i.e. for the protection of marine flora and fauna.
- Countryside & Rights of Way Act 2000

At the time of going to press there is every prospect of a Marine and Coastal Access Act which will particularly effect all the Committees with the transition from Sea Fisheries Committees (SFCs) to Inshore and Conservation Authorities (IFCAs). Fisheries legislation will also be consolidated and updated by the Act.

Assuming the passing of the Marine and Coastal Access Bill into an Act of Parliament, implementation of IFCAs to replace SFCs is due in April 2011. In the meantime the work of the Northumberland SFC will continue. An ever-increasing area of responsibility for SFCs is in the environmental sector and this Committee has since 1996 employed an Environmental Fishery Officer, whose role includes active liaison and collaboration with a broad spectrum of organisations including Natural England, the Environment Agency and the EMS Forum.

The Committee employs 5 full-time fishery officers (including the environmental officer) and 1 part-time fishery officer. The five full-time officers' main duties are the practical enforcement of fisheries legislation. As mentioned previously,

enforcement consists partly of byelaws and partly of EU and National law and takes place both ashore and afloat. The 6 officers split their working hours between these shore and sea patrols.

When officers carry out shore patrols, random checks are made throughout the district inspecting catches from full and part-time fishermen, anglers, cleekers and divers, in fact any persons who catch and land any type of sea fish or shellfish. The Committee's officers are also cross-warranted with the Environment Agency. This is in order to allow officers to take action on any offences uncovered during their normal duties, thus removing the inability to do nothing if an offence against EA byelaws is detected.

The Committee's officers are also employed as crew aboard the Committee's patrol vessel "St. Oswald" which is used to carry out inspections at sea. The Committee took delivery of the St. Oswald from Hepworths Boatyard on the Humber at the end of July 2001 and during 8 years of service the vessel has proved to be a good working platform with excellent sea-keeping qualities. Measuring 21metres in length and with a 6 metre beam and powered by twin 500 kW Caterpillar engines the vessel was built to meet the committee's needs to ensure compliance with National and EU legislation and local byelaws designed to promote fish stock conservation for the future. For boarding at sea purposes the vessel carries a 6metre RIB stowed in a stern ramp. This system has proved invaluable, making launch and recovery much quicker and easier and far safer for the crew.

The Committee also has a 7 metre RIB purchased in 2009 which, like the Committee's previous RIB and its trailer, will be towed by the Committee's new Land Rover to different shore locations for launching and carrying out sea patrols. Both Land Rover and RIB are stored at the workshop attached to the Committee's offices in Cramlington.

The Committee's marine jurisdiction covers an area of approximately 400 square miles extending from the Tyne in the south to the English/Scottish border in the north and extending out to six miles from baselines. There are 14 harbours and 4 landing sights situated throughout the Committee's district and these are home to all manner of fishing vessels deploying a wide range of both static and mobile gear. The landward jurisdiction for the purposes of enforcement activity is dictated by the Northumberland County Council and North Tyneside Municipal Borough Council boundaries.

Static gear boats work several types of gear including:-

- Pots or creels, which are used to catch brown crab, lobster, velvet crab and prawns (nephrops). The crab fishery is usually at its best in spring and early summer and the lobster fishery peaks at the back end of the summer. Landings of velvet crabs, once considered pests by fishermen, have increased throughout the whole of the district over the last few years, making them a marketable commodity. Most if not all are transported by wholesalers to continental markets in Spain and France where demand and prices are higher.

- Gill-nets, or trammel nets, which are used mainly to catch cod plus a small by-catch of shellfish, although this fishery tends to be carried out during the autumn and winter months. Due to quota restrictions, however, this fishery has been less exploited than in the past.
- Drift net and “T” nets are used to catch salmon and sea trout. The season for “T” nets extends from 26<sup>th</sup> March to the 30<sup>th</sup> August each year but any salmon caught before 1<sup>st</sup> June has to be released back into the sea. The drift net fishery extends from 1<sup>st</sup> June through to the end of August each year.

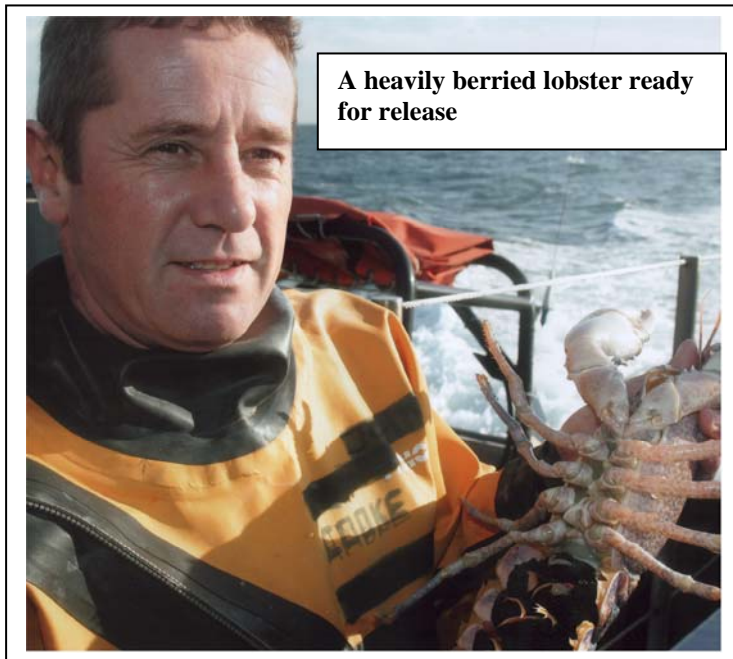
The trawl fleet has become ever more reliant on the local (nephrop) fishery, which is now the fleet’s principal fishery. The local fishery takes place between 3 and 25 miles offshore with best catches being landed during the autumn and winter months. When the fishery is at its height it also attracts a large number of visiting boats from Scotland, Northern Ireland and other English ports to the district to partake of the fishery. Larger trawlers >15metres, numbers of which have diminished considerably over the last 5 years, switch effort to grounds further offshore during the finer summer months where both white fish and prawns are targeted. Quite a large number of the smaller trawlers, mainly those under 10 metres, tend to move their operations to ports in the Firth of Forth area where there is a summer fishery for prawns.

For the purpose of patrolling on shore the Committee’s district is divided into three separate “Districts” the Southern, Central and Northern. The Committee’s Officers are each allocated one of these districts and it is their responsibility to carry out random inspections of landings etc., reporting any infringements that may be uncovered to the Chief Fishery Officer who in turn reports to the Committee. At times, especially during the summer months, officers can and do work in groups of two to four in order to cover areas where there are significant increases in activity.

On 1 June 2009 the committee’s pot limitation byelaw (No. 15) became operational requiring all committee permit holders (under byelaw 13) to fish with not more than 800 pots, creels, traps or cages within the Committee’s district. To improve monitoring and management of potting activity, the byelaw also requires all permit holders to affix a yellow tag with a serial number issued by the committee to all of their pots, creels, traps and cages up to a maximum of 800 in number. The byelaw also requires all recreational hobby fishermen, who by virtue of byelaw 13 cannot use more than 5 pots, to affix a white tag with a serial number issued by the committee to their pots. The Committee and its officers are thus able to better monitor all fisheries activity within the district, both commercial and recreational and the byelaw should also have conservation benefits by preventing overfishing in the district.

To date approximately 120 permit holders have applied for yellow tags whilst well over 100 recreational (or hobby) fishermen have applied for white tags.

## Lobster V- Notching Scheme



The Committee's lobster V-notching programme started in 2000 and is now in its ninth year and 1,039 mature egg-bearing females were v-notched and returned back to the fishery in 2008.

A v-notch takes at least two castings (2 years) to grow out, thereby possibly enabling each notched animal to release up to 2 clutches of eggs before maybe being caught again. In order to

protect v-notched animals, the Committee has a byelaw prohibiting the landing of v-notched lobsters and it is also an offence to "mutilate a lobster" meaning the removal of any part of a lobster's tail to hide the fact it has been v-notched. To distinguish between animals released each year, v-notching has been carried out on alternative uropods (inner tail flap) adjacent to the telson (centre flap), on the left one year and on the right the next. As a result it is possible to broadly identify the rate of notch loss when lobsters cast their shells during the following years. It is difficult to assess precisely the number of offspring that will be produced, since survival rates are governed by a large range of factors. However, since the start of the scheme, fishermen throughout the committee's district have continued to report an increase in the number of immature animals being seen in their respective areas which bodes well for the future of the fisheries, as the main reason for the v-notching scheme is to maintain and enhance lobster stocks throughout the committee's district.

In 2008 the v-notching programme was funded from a variety of sources including local fishermen and local organisations. Also, without the kind help of 2 local wholesalers, one in the north and the other in the south, this whole programme would not have been possible if they had not taken the time to sort and keep all the berried lobsters in their holding tanks for the committee officers to collect and release back into the sea in excellent condition. The Committee has been using these 2 wholesalers for a number of years who get very little recognition.

To summarise activity for 2008, 1,039 mature egg-bearing female lobsters were released on various suitable grounds throughout the Northumberland Sea Fisheries Committee district. However it was decided in 2008 to wait until the middle of July before starting the release programme due to the fact that this was the time when lobsters were re-emerging after their seasonal moult. The lobsters were released on 5 different dates on 13 release tracks, using either the St.

Oswald or the shore-based RIB (Bravo 1), all the releases being recorded on the St. Oswald's computerised chart system.

All information regarding the 2008 Lobster V-Notching Programme will be available to look at on the Committee's website and will also be printed into a hard copy report.

### **Annual Mussel Survey**

The mussel bed on Fenham Flats was visited at low water between 09.00 and 11.30 on a spring tide on 10 March 2008.

The Fenham Flats mussel bed was found to occupy an area of 36.72 hectares slightly down on the 37.18 hectares in 2007 and the 41.52 hectares in 2006. Within this mussel bed, mussels were found to occupy 78.58% similar to the 79.81% of the ground in 2007 which was up from 60.44% in 2006.

The mean biomass per square metre was 16.41, significantly up from the 10.52 kg/m<sup>2</sup> in 2007 and the 7.467/m<sup>2</sup> in 2006 and the mean density per m<sup>2</sup> was 1173 mussels/m<sup>2</sup> again significantly up from the 651 mussels/ m<sup>2</sup> in 2007 and 535.65 mussels/m<sup>2</sup> in 2006. From these figures the total tonnage of mussel biomass was calculated to be 6,022 tonnes which was significantly up from the 3,911 tonnes in 2007 and 3,101 tonnes in 2006 and the total population estimated at 431 million reflects the increase in biomass with estimates for 2007 and 2006 being 242 and 222 million mussels respectively.

### **New Fisheries Challenge Fund Lobster Survey 2008/09**

In 2007 the Committee applied for, and obtained, funding for a project to define the Northumberland Lobster fishery and applied for funding under the Government's Fisheries Challenge Fund. This is a joint project led by the Committee with assistance and advice from Dr. N. Polunin from Newcastle University. A post graduate student from the university, Rachel Turner, was contracted by the committee to carry out the bulk of the analysis of the data.

There having been limited previous research and assessment of the lobster fishery in the committee district, the project therefore aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. Describe distribution of potting and estimate pot deployment densities as well as the seasonal variability of these by sub-district and also specifically by marine habitat in the NSFC district.
2. Improve estimates of landings and catch size structures by fishing port and examine landings data for temporal changes in catch volume and size structure.
3. Examine the possible effects on catches of any increase in minimum landing size (MLS).

Considerable assistance has been given by Northumberland fishermen, particularly 10 lobster fishermen who were brought into the project who complete catch returns on a daily and monthly basis. The Committee's officers also collect catch return data during sea patrols using both the committee RIBs as well as ashore at point of landings.

Progress to date is good with all objectives currently up to date. The project is due to run until July 2009 and the report should be ready in the autumn.

### **EUROPEAN MARINE SITE**

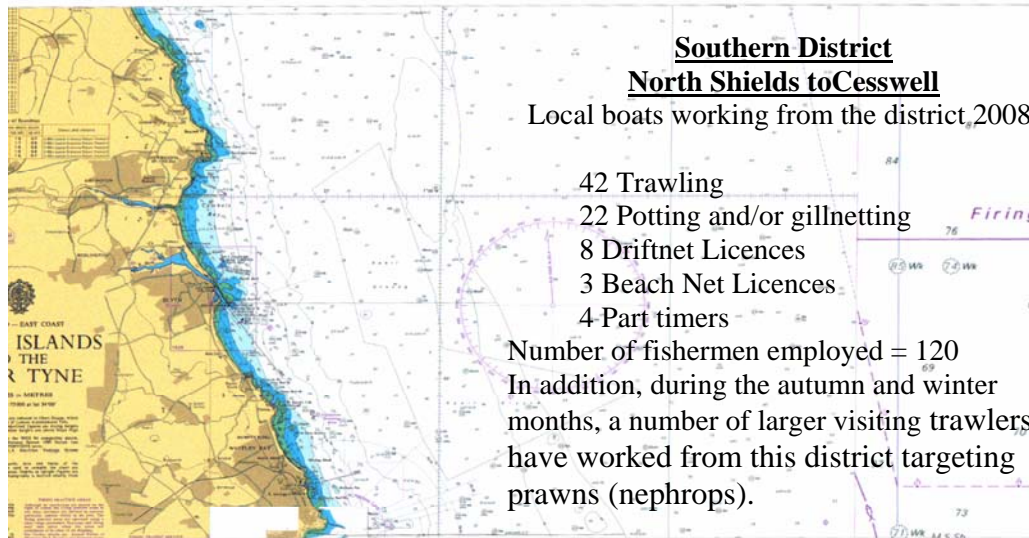
Commercial fishing within the site has generally been restricted to potting for shellfish, principally lobster, brown crab, velvet crab and to a lesser degree nephrops and whelks. One boat from Berwick has on occasion also used tangle nets to target lobster. Other fishing methods employed in the EMS have included salmon nets during the summer season, scallop dredging by local boats on a handful of occasions and trawling, on at least 2 days.

### **MISCELLANEOUS RESEARCH**

On 27 November 2008 the Committee's Environmental Fishery Officer, Jon Green, assisted Jon Hlland from CEFAS in carrying out a survey of lobster at Moir Seafoods at North Shields, Northern Seafoods at Blyth and Berwick Shellfish. The survey was undertaken to establish if the disease Gaffkemia was present in the district. "Blood" samples were taken from approximately 30 lobsters at each wholesaler which will be analysed at the CEFAS laboratory. The results are expected some time in 2009 and will be forwarded to the wholesalers who participated in the surveys.

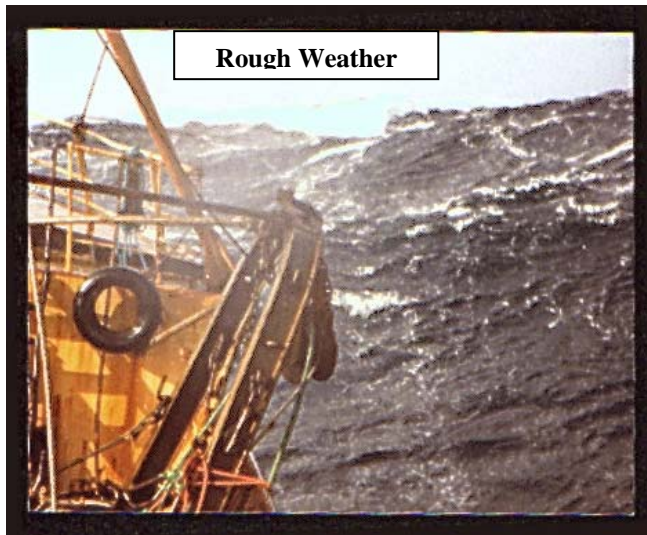
# FISHING ACTIVITY – DISTRICT REPORTS

## **SOUTHERN DISTRICT – NORTH SHIELDS to CRESSWELL**



### **North Shields**

North Shields is the only port within the Committee's district that has an officially designated fish market. A number of the larger vessels have been removed from the fishery through the national decommissioning scheme, these have been



replaced by smaller <10metre vessels which are more economical. The port is home to 20 trawlers 8 of which are over 10metres and another 12 that are under 10 metres. Prawns (nephrops) remain the mainstay of the trawl fleet with the majority of fishers targeting them year round. Boats work local grounds throughout the autumn and winter months then move to grounds either further offshore (larger boats) or to grounds in the Firth of Forth area (smaller boats)

during the spring and summer. The local fishery during 2006-7 was very good with good quality prawns and very good prices being seen. However winters in 2007-8 and 2008-9 were very poor with a number of boats finding it hard to keep their heads above water. This seemingly sustainable fishery has attracted boats from Scotland, Ireland and other English ports to the region. Good proportions of



these vessels are over 18 metres and are equipped to tow multi rig trawls. All were made aware of NSFC byelaws governing size of vessel and restriction on multi-rig trawling within the district.

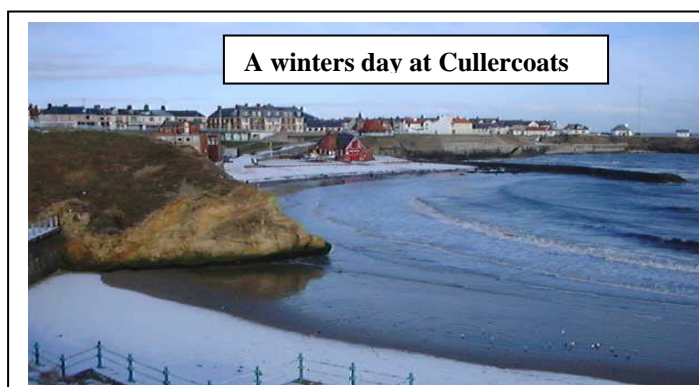
The number of boats working pots is dependent on seasonal catches and varies between 5 and 7 throughout the year. Numbers of pots worked varied between 150 and 800 with main species targeted being lobster and edible crab. Velvet crabs, which used to be caught mainly as by-catch are now also targeted as numbers of animals on the grounds have increased over the last 4 years. Brown crab is caught in reasonable quantities early and late each year. Lobster catches are seasonally low throughout the first six months of each year, catches though increase dramatically throughout the months of July, August and September when lobsters begin to emerge after their seasonal moult. 2008 was a very good year for lobster landings with most fishermen saying many small lobsters have been seen on the grounds. During the winter months, because of weather conditions and poor catches, gear tends to be left for up to 3 days before hauling. The boats which had prawn pots in did not do as well this year as in previous years, but when they did have the odd good catch, prices were not as good.

Gillnets have usually been worked over the autumn and winter periods during finer spells of weather and suitable tidal conditions. Boats have worked between 2 and 8 "bins" each containing nets of approximately 500 metres in length. The scarcity of codling on the grounds and the quota restrictions have meant that only a handful of boats have persevered with the fishery. Catches have been very variable; at times some acceptable landings of mixed fish i.e. codling, whiting, coley and flats, were brought ashore and other boats have been fortunate if they had a couple of fish.

The port has 6 boats that hold a salmon licence and 5 with drift net licences. 3 of these licence holders operate "T" nets just south of the Tyne. The reduced fishing time brought about by the later start to the season has naturally affected the total yearly landings. However, prices have increased giving those involved good returns for their efforts, but overall 2008 was a poor year.

The number of wholesale fish merchants continued to fall over the last few years with only 6 remaining as out and out processors. Continuity of supply has been blamed for most closures; with local suppliers not meeting demand, quite a large amount of raw produce has to be brought in from other areas such as Scotland \with this in mind a number of units have changed to retail trade.

## **Cullercoats**



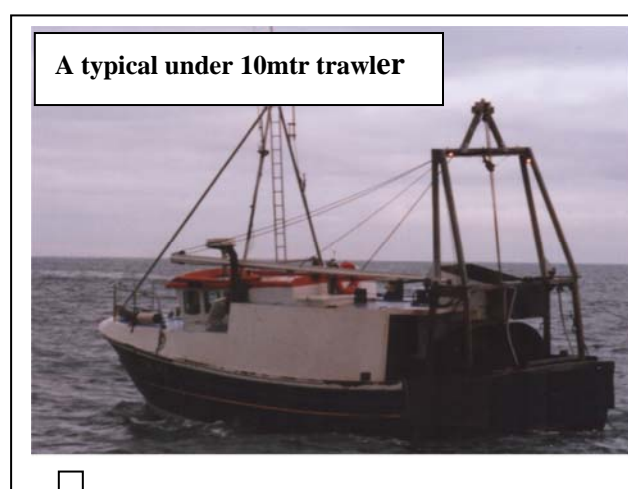
There are 2 boats, 1 full time and 1 seasonal fisherman (only working pots in summer months) working from the harbour, 1 also working pots and nets. Potting is carried out year round with brown crab, lobsters and velvet crab

being the species targeted. Gill nets are also worked throughout the winter months with codling and coley being the main species caught. One boat holds a salmon licence and uses both "T" net and drift net, however the preferred method of fishing is the "T" net.

### **Seaton Sluice**

One full time boat attempts to work from this port year round and there are a number of part timers, which limit effort to summer months. Potting and gillnetting, weather permitting, are carried out year round. However, unsuitable weather conditions limits activity when winds blow from off the sea prohibiting boats from leaving the harbour.

### **Blyth**



Trawlers stationed here total 22, (18 under plus 4 over 10 metres). Prawns (nephrops) have become the mainstay of the trawler fleet working from this port. The local fishery takes place over the autumn and winter periods after which most boats move operations to the Firth of Forth area to partake of the summer prawn fishery in that area. The 2006-7 prawn fishery proved to be very good and the prices were high, however 2008

has been a disaster with most boats finding it hard to make any kind of a living. There have been spells during summer months when boats landed some good quantities of whiting and haddock. However, these fish being of a small size, commanded low market prices, and in fact were so low that some boats ended up selling their catches to potting boats to use as bait.

A total of 10 boats work pots, 2 of these boats also worked gill nets. Potting is carried out all year round especially by those boats without salmon licences. The amount of gear worked is dependent on the type of vessel used and ranges from 120 up to 1500 pots, which in turn reflects in landings. As is usual landings of lobster were seasonally low early in each year picking up at the end of July and reaching a peak in August and September. As with the rest of the district, landings of lobsters have been very good. There has been a big increase in the amount of boats targeting prawns (nephrops). Although catches have not been huge the prawns caught are of good size and quality thereby producing high prices.

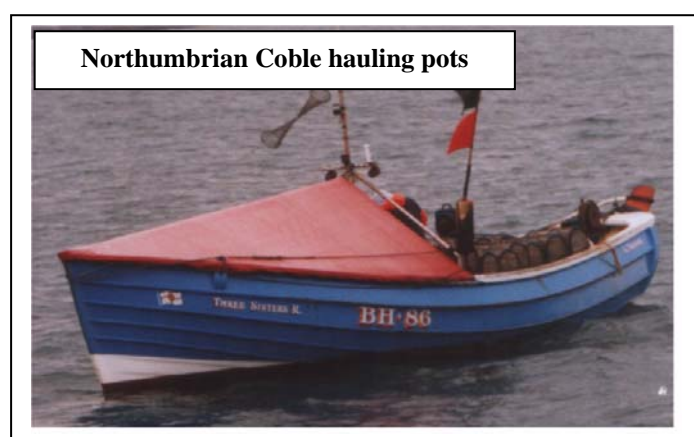
Here also gear is left for 2 to 3 days before hauling during the winter because of the lower levels of catches.

A lack of consistency in catches meant there has been very little activity with gill nets. Those who did turn effort to this mode of fishing worked from 2 to 8 bins of

net, the amount of net used having bearing on catches and they were also restricted as to how much they could catch due to quotas. One of these boats used his gillnets to catch pot bait. Two boats that worked turbot nets during the summer months had little return for effort; even after leaving gear for up to 4 days before hauling, and only a few fish were caught.

Two other boats which still hold their drift net licences, and although not catching huge quantities, have been compensated with increased prices. Two other boats have beach or "T" net licences although landings were poor. The seal presence remains a problem, netsmen speaking of seals meeting boats as soon as they put to sea and then following them till they shoot their nets, awaiting an easy meal.

### **Newbiggin**



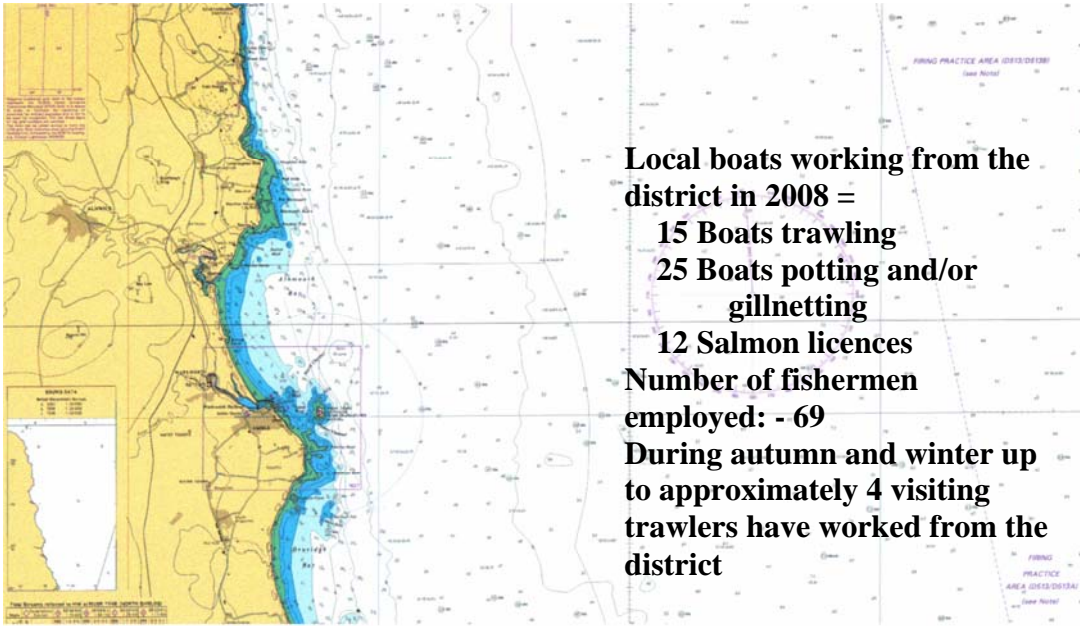
Three full time boats work from this port, mainly potting, on a year round basis. Numbers of pots worked by the full time fishermen have been between 120 and 400. Main species targeted are lobster, brown crab and more recently velvet crab with a couple of boats targeting prawns throughout the winter months. Lobster catches were

seasonally low early in each year increasing seasonally throughout the months of August September and October. Catches of brown crab have not been as good as in previous years but a welcome increase of velvet crab catches boosted earnings somewhat with some reasonable quantities being landed. The one boat that works prawn pots during the winter months, although not landing huge amounts, had some catches of really excellent quality and size of prawns, which commanded high prices.

Due to the restrictions in quotas and the number of seals, no boats from here now use gillnets.

There are only 2 boats which work from here with drift net licences and these fishermen are seasonal and work from June to August. Again catches have not been fantastic but good market prices for wild caught salmon have increased. This, it is reported, is due to the fall in landings generally caused in turn by the drop in licence holders as quite a number have taken advantage of the offered buyout. The other salmon licence holder now works out of North Shields as he has a larger boat and it is more difficult to recover at Newbiggin.

## CENTRAL DISTRICT – HADSTON to CRASTER



### Amble

The numbers of local trawlers working from the port total 15, 8 under and 7 over 10 metres. As with the other ports the main effort with the trawl fleet is ever more concentrated on the prawn fishery. Most of the year boats work the local grounds putting their catches ashore on a daily basis. Boats tend to work a little farther offshore during the finer summer months targeting both prawns and whitefish and tend to land every other day. Prawn landings over the period covered have been of a very small size, which in turn have commanded poor market prices. Whitefish has followed a similar vein, quite a large amount of small haddock being caught and landed over the summer months, which have also met with poor market prices. Around August fuel prices peaked to the point where most of the smaller trawlers kept tied up more than in previous years.



Up to 20 boats from the port work pots and gillnets. Potters target lobster, brown and velvet crabs. Boats work from 200 to 600 pots from anywhere close inshore and out to 9 miles. Catches of lobster throughout this period have been slightly up on previous years, again seasonally low for the first half and the usual seasonal improvement at the back-end of the summer and into autumn. Brown crab

landings throughout the period have been fairly good with boats working further offshore obtaining the best results. However, large amounts proved to be "white" which wholesalers rejected as unsuitable for sale. Velvet crab landings, from boats working close inshore, continued to increase over the period with boats obtaining some good catches. The market for velvet crabs though remains

very unstable; with animals needing to be alive and fresh for shipping to the continent prices can fluctuate considerably.

Most of the fishermen have commented that a lot of juvenile lobsters have been seen, which is a good indication that the committee's lobster v-notching scheme is working.

A scarcity of fish on the inshore grounds over the period covered has meant that very little fishing with gillnets has taken place. When boats have turned to this mode of fishing very poor returns have been experienced for the effort put in.

There are currently 8 boats that are holders of a salmon licence. The number of licence holders in the port has diminished due mainly to the licence buyout in 2003. As with other ports although catches have not been as high as expected better prices have gone some way to compensate for this. Part of the blame for poor catches has been apportioned to the large amount of seals present which seem to appear as soon as nets are shot. Boats, because of the poor catches and the problems experienced with seals, have turned effort to potting usually before the seasons end.

### **Boulmer**



Only three boats continue to work from this port prosecuting the lobster and brown crab fishery virtually all year round. Good catches of lobster are obtained at the end of each summer and into the autumn. The remainder of the year though catches tend to fall significantly causing boats to move gear

offshore to concentrate on crabs. Best landings of crab have been obtained early in each year mainly during the spring when gear was moved further offshore, up to 7 miles from port.

Four other boats here are salmon licence holders and although "T" netting in one of the local "Stell" fishery, operated under a rota system, is the favoured method of fishing a number of days are spent drift netting.

### **Craster**

Most of the year there are two boats working from this port, one of these is engaged in potting and the other takes angling trips. There is also one boat that operates from here with a "T" net salmon licence. Lobster and velvet crab are

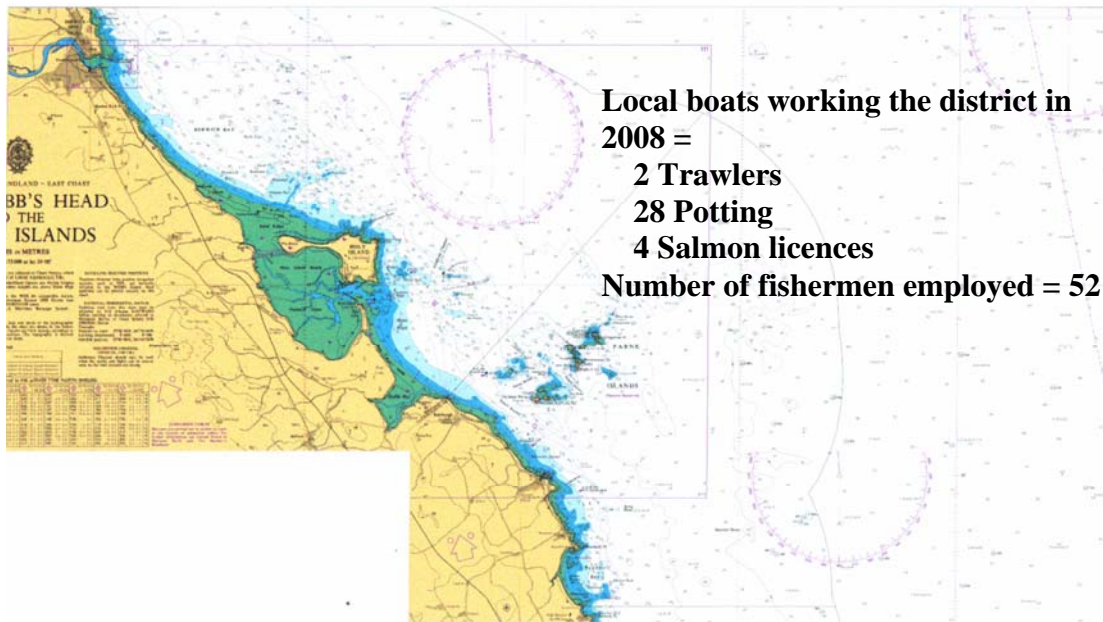


targeted on areas of hard ground both inshore and further offshore. Catches of lobster have been reasonable even during the off-season picking up and reaching a peak at the backend of each summer. Crab landings are usually quite good in the spring falling away as the year progresses. One boat, during periods of slack fishing, turns effort to taking angling parties throughout the summer months thus boosting income. The boat that holds a salmon licence worked a "T" net during the season, catches though have proved to be low causing effort to be switched back to potting earlier than usual.

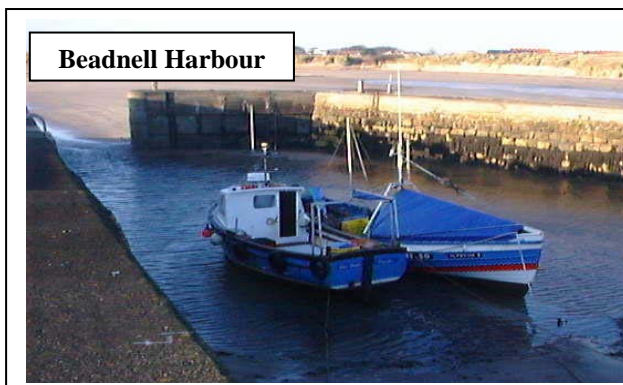
### **Cleekers**

A lot of time during the big tides throughout the finer months was spent by the officers at the local hotspots of Hauxley, Seaton Point and Boulmer Steel. A lot of cleekers were checked with a small number of infringements of legislation encountered.

## **NORTHERN DISTRICT – NEWTON to BERWICK**



### **Beadnell and Newton**



Only one part time or seasonal fisherman now works from Newton. Boats tend to only work throughout the finer summer months targeting lobster with a by-catch of velvet crab. Boats not eligible to have a shellfish permit are limited to working only 5 pots and catches tend to reflect this.

Beadnell still has 3 full time boats, all are involved in potting and two boats have salmon licences. One crewman also holds a beach licence. As with other ports catches of lobster are more prolific toward the end of each summer into autumn. Catches of crab are reasonable early and late in each year with spells of slacker catches being taken throughout the middle of each year.

One of the boats with a salmon licence worked "T" nets close to the shore with catches of at best 40 trout landed. Catches, apart from some good days at the "T" net have been poor for all seasons covered.

### **Seahouses**

The trawl fleet here has dropped to only 2 boats, 1 over and 1 under 10metres and one of these only trawls in between potting activity. The under 10 metre boat is also rigged for scallop dredging, which is carried out during the summer months when prawn catches fall. The larger boat fishes local grounds with day/multi-day trips for prawns and fishes the west coast of Oban during summer months for prawns. Working the Farne Deeps area for most of the year, prawns are the main species targeted with a small bycatch of haddock and whiting being taken. One boat at times switches effort to clam dredging but scallops have proved to be scarce on the grounds.

There are now 10 boats and 2 trawlers working pots from this port working between 250 and 1000 pots. Lobster and brown crab have been the main species targeted and latterly velvet crabs. Two boats have also invested in prawn pots working grounds approximately 20 miles from Seahouses and hauling 1-2 times per week when catches were average with 1-3 trays of top quality prawns per fleet. Lobster landings are seasonally low throughout the winter and spring of each year picking up toward the end of July and peaking in September. Landings of brown crab are usually at their best early in the year through to spring before falling away. Boats that work the grounds further offshore pick up large quantities of crab however, substantial amounts tend to be "white" and being unsuitable for the market are returned to the sea. A marked increase in velvet crabs on the grounds especially around Holy Island and the Farne Islands, plus an increase in demand over recent years saw some good quantities being landed especially by those boats working gear very close inshore. As mentioned earlier in this report prices are dependent on quality and mortality, the animals needing to be alive if they were to be transported to markets on the continent. Typical of the strict quality controls is that when large quantities of animals landed were in a soft shelled state, which lowers the chance of survival during transportation, wholesalers suspended landings.

Boats, because of poor catches and weather restraints during winter months, tend to haul gear only twice or thrice a week.

There is an ever growing number of local boats which have turned their attentions to taking angling or diving parties, especially during the finer summer months. Although the area still has a big influx of divers throughout the summer months, numbers over the last three years have slowly decreased. Checks by

the Committee's officers have been carried out throughout the seasonal periods both on land and at sea and all divers spoken to have been made aware of the Committee's shellfish permit byelaw limiting landings to one lobster and 5 crabs per day from each boat. These checks on skin divers are usually carried out when activity is at its highest, namely at weekends and evenings.



### **Holy Island**

The island is home to 6 full time potting boats which target mainly lobster and brown crab and velvet crabs all year round and each boat works between 300 and 800 pots. Pots are usually worked on the grounds closer to shore in late summer and autumn when boats target lobster

and are moved further off into deeper water when crabs become more prolific during the spring. Lobster catches as with other ports were seasonally low early in each year picking up at the end of July and peaking in September. Lobster catches from this station were the highest from the northern district with one of the best seasons to date. Crab landings early in each year are quite reasonable, usually lasting right through to the start of summer before falling. One fisherman also fishes a "T"/"J" net during the salmon season landing up to 30 fish most of which are trout. Also tried netting for bass with reports of up to 50 fish landed on occasions.

### **Berwick**



This port has seen a number of replacements of older wooden hull potting boats with new fibreglass purpose-built potting boats. 5 full time boats continue to work from this port all working pots year round. Weather conditions play a large part in time spent at sea especially during the winter months when boats are sometimes kept in

harbour for weeks rather than days. Lobster landings, although not copious, have remained steady over the period. Catches of brown crab as with other ports have diminished after the good years of 1999 and 2000, the spring and early summer months each year proving to be the most prolific. Here also, the increase in velvet crabs catches has given a welcome boost to the majority of boats' incomes.



One boat works gillnets, mainly throughout the winter months, targeting lobsters. Turbot nets have also been worked during slack fishing periods but catches have been low due to seal predation. Most boats hand-lined for mackerel during the summer to be salted down for pot bait.

## **PATROL VESSEL AND RIBs**

The St. Oswald, which was built at Hepworths Shipyard at Paul on the river Humber IN 2001 is 21 metres overall in length and has a beam of 7 metres and is constructed of steel. The vessel is powered by twin Caterpillar engines which



at 2,100 revs develop 520 kW each giving a top speed, on trials, of 13.5 knots. During normal patrols the engines are run at 1750 to 1800 revs allowing the vessel to cruise at an economical speed of approximately 11 knots. The St. Oswald also carries a 6 metre RIB which is stored in a stern ramp, making both launch and recovery safer and quicker. The system means that the RIB, is with the vessel

at all times and can be put into action in a few minutes.

The Committee also owns and operates a shore-based RIB which is used mainly throughout the summer months which along with a Land Rover, used for towing, is stored at the Committee's office unit in Cramlington. The RIB is towed to different locations throughout the Committee district and is usually launched from the beach enabling officers to carry out random checks on all types of activity including static gear and skin divers.



Sea patrols using the Patrol vessel and RIBs are listed in the 8 year enforcement summary, as are sightings, boardings and inspections.

Assistance has been given to vessels and/or crew on several occasions, as has assistance with search and rescue involving local lifeboats stationed throughout the Committee's district. Training exercises involving the Boulmer search and Rescue Helicopter 131 are carried out whenever requested. These exercises entail the lowering onto and recovery of their personnel from the deck of the St. Oswald and our cooperation with these exercises is much appreciated.

## Eight Year Summary of Enforcement

	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
<b>Sea patrols - PV</b>	94	125	107	101	99	86	85	75
<b>Observations</b>	3,055	3,144	2,595	2,648	1,714	2,430	1,350	889
<b>Visual Inspections</b>	544	639	1103	725	512	695	574	675
<b>Sea Patrols Cancelled</b>	56	58	29	36	36	13	21	27
<b>Sea Patrols RIB</b>	44	41	46	42	60	19	28	30
<b>Boardings at Sea</b>	516	255	473	389	223	223	162	124
<b>Boardings in Port</b>	37	66	78	51	51	36	23	15
<b>Nets Measured</b>	39	62	73	42	25	12	5	1
<b>Static Gear checked</b>	56	217	606	525	294	412	406	278
<b>Inspections of Landings</b>	1,263	1,204	1,352	1,426	736	922	891	592
<b>Inspections of Wholesalers</b>	245	233	258	212	177	222	201	215
<b>Anglers</b>	506	507	633	661	315	350	259	271
<b>Skin divers</b>	606	719	784	698	150	226	115	100
<b>Cleekers</b>	199	179	215	236	150	246	207	226
<b>Verbal Warnings Issued</b>	24	12	17	10	12	19	20	29
<b>Written Warnings Issued</b>	2	6	2	0	4	3	1	14
<b>Infringements Reported</b>	0	5	5	6	5	6	8	6

**Observations:** - Vessels sighted visually while on sea patrols.

**Visual Inspections:** - Vessels that are visually checked in order to prove they are licensed/permited to fish in certain areas

**Inspection of landings:** - Officers checking vessel catches when landing

**Monthly Lobster Landings 2006 to 2008**  
**Figures Obtained from Defra National Shellfish Permit Scheme Returns**

<b><u>Lobster Catches 2006-2008 (kg)</u></b>													
<b>Year</b>	<b>Jan</b>	<b>Feb</b>	<b>Mar</b>	<b>Apr</b>	<b>May</b>	<b>Jun</b>	<b>Jul</b>	<b>Aug</b>	<b>Sep</b>	<b>Oct</b>	<b>Nov</b>	<b>Dec</b>	<b>Totals</b>
<b>2006</b>	4,449	1,987	2,521	4,899	2,771	2,013	6,470	23,715	25,198	8,667	3,216	2,563	90,475
<b>2007</b>	2,846	3,835	2,252	3,820	3,158	2,970	27,259	33,426	21,926	18,550	6,410	3,709	132,168
<b>2008</b>	2,685	5,627	2,059	4,093	5,070	8,809	29,856	42,979	34,730	16,232	9,232	9,110	172,490

**Total 2006 = 90,475 tonnes at an average price of £12.75 per kg = Total value of £1,153,556**

**Total 2007 = 132,168 tonnes at an average price of £12.75 per kg = Total value of £1,685,142**

**Total 2008 = 172,490 tonnes at an average price of £12.00 per kg = Total value of £2,069,880**

**Monthly Brown Crab Landings 2006 to 2008**  
**Figures Obtained from Defra National Shellfish Permit Scheme Returns**

<b>Brown Crab Catches 2006-2008 (kg)</b>													
<b>Year</b>	<b>Jan</b>	<b>Feb</b>	<b>Mar</b>	<b>Apr</b>	<b>May</b>	<b>Jun</b>	<b>Jul</b>	<b>Aug</b>	<b>Sep</b>	<b>Oct</b>	<b>Nov</b>	<b>Dec</b>	<b>Totals</b>
<b>2006</b>	21,719	15,628	18,514	14,487	16,592	13,860	18,907	13,060	18,381	25,156	27,160	14,516	219,986
<b>2007</b>	22,868	22,083	19,278	14,319	11,325	13,062	14,308	20,660	15,919	42,517	29,908	18,132	246,386
<b>2008</b>	19,700	27,029	12,231	17,181	21,848	32,070	19,947	15,860	27,456	24,143	23,937	27,137	270,547

**Total 2006 = 219,986 tonnes at an average price of 81p per kg = Total value of £17,889**  
**Total 2007 = 246,386 tonnes at an average price of 85p per kg = Total value of £209,428**  
**Total 2008 = 270,547 tonnes at an average price of 90p per kg = Total value of £243,492**

**THE NORTHUMBERLAND SEA FISHERIES COMMITTEE**

**CONCLUDED PROSECUTIONS DURING 2008**  
**AT NORTH TYNESIDE MAGISTRATES COURT**

<b><u>COURT DATE</u></b>	<b><u>DATE AND PLACE OF OFFENCE</u></b>	<b><u>DETAILS OF OFFENCE(S)</u></b>	<b><u>FINES/DECISIONS</u></b>
11/1/2008	28/09/2007 Seaton Point	(1) Landing of 24 undersize lobsters (2) Landing of more than 1 lobster without a permit (3) Landing 2 lobsters in a soft state	(1) £100 fine (2) £100 fine  (3) £100 fine  Costs awarded £100
11/1/2008	30/08/2007 Boulmer Village	(1) Landing of 10 undersize lobsters (2) Landing more than 1 lobster without a permit	(1) £100 fine (2) £100 fine  Costs awarded £75
11/1/2008	3/10/2007 Amble	(1) Landing of 7 undersize lobsters (2) Landing more than 1 lobster without a permit	(1) £75 fine (2) £75 fine  Costs awarded £50
11/1/2008	5/09/2007 Newbiggin by the Sea	(1) Landing of 2 undersize lobsters	(1) £100 fine  Costs awarded £50
11/1/2008	13/07/2007 Hauxley	(1) Retention of 112 undersized whiting, 26 undersize plaice and 1 undersize hake	(1) £300 fine  Costs awarded £200
18/12/2008	12/08/2007 Blyth	(1) Landing of 44 undersize lobsters	(1) £500 fine  Costs awarded £1,000
18/12/2008	12/08/2007 Blyth	(1) Landing of 44 undersize lobsters	(1) £500 fine  Costs awarded £1,000
19/12/2008	14/09/2008 Seaton Sluice	(1) Landing of 3 undersize lobsters (2) Landing more than 1 lobster without a permit	(1) £50 fine (2) £50 fine Costs awarded £150