

## **Devon & Severn Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority**

### **Quarterly Report for the Period Ending November 2015**

#### **General Situation**

**Chief Officer T Robbins**

This has been a very successful quarter for the Devon and Severn IFCA and the officers. The hard work of the team has begun to show very positive results in all areas of activity. The enforcement team have been busy over the quarter, the opening of the scallop fishery on the 1<sup>st</sup> October is traditionally a busy time not only with local vessels returning for the start of the fishery but also vessels from Wales and other areas along the south coast join the fishery. This year saw a quiet opening of the fishery as stocks on the grounds are very low and many vessels have decided not to bother fishing for scallops at present. A higher presence on the ground during the initial opening was planned for but in the end was not required, routine patrols were carried out.

On 1<sup>st</sup> September the EU finally announced the minimum size of bass now referred to as the Minimum Conservation Reference Size (MCRS) had increased from 36cms to 42cms. The increase represented a further management intervention in an attempt to arrest the dramatic decline in bass stocks reported by scientists. Officers produced a new bass information sticker, with funding from Defra, which set out the new MCRS and catch limits for recreational anglers. These stickers have been adopted by all IFCAs and are being handed out to recreational and commercial fishermen. Officers undertook patrols to initially help inform fishermen of the changes but also enforcement action has been taken following this initial education period of a month. A proposal has been put forward by the EU for a change to the 2016 bass management regime. The proposal asks for a prohibition on the retention on board or landing of bass from 1<sup>st</sup> January to 30<sup>th</sup> June, with a tolerance of 1% bycatch of total catches on board for demersal trawls and seines. Thereafter, a flat rate of one tonne per vessel, per month from 1<sup>st</sup> July to 31<sup>st</sup> December. There will also be a reduction in the recreational daily bag limit from the current three bass to one bass. The proposal will be debated by the Council of Ministers during the December meetings before a final decision is made.

There have been two successful prosecutions this quarter of skippers and owners whose fishing vessels have been found towing their trawls in areas closed by the D&SIFCA Byelaws. There have also been three Financial Administrative Penalties (FAP) issued during the period, one for illegal bass fishing, taking a second for undersized crab and the third for diving for scallops during the closed season. Written warnings have also been issued where the case did not require further action following the D&SIFCA guidance.

iVMS funding has now been secured and the first 30 units have been fitted to local fishing boats. It is anticipated that all 120 units will be fitted by the end of the year and funding will be sought for an additional 30 units to ensure that all vessels with a D&SIFCA Towed Gear Permit will have a black box recorder on board to allow for monitoring of their compliance with the byelaw and area closures.

At present there is a coastal netting consultation underway which is following on from a very successful estuary netting consultation. As part of this work visits were made to Minehead to observe the traditional herring fishery from the port. The findings of both surveys are being compiled by the officers and presented to the Byelaw and Permitting Sub Committee for their consideration before their recommendations will be presented to the full Authority.

The environment team have been very busy; following a successful summer of survey work they are all busy analysing the data gathered and using the findings to further assist in the completion of the assessments required under the Habitat Regulations. This work will help inform D&SIFCA management policy. As well as completing data assessment there are still surveys which are ongoing. The North Devon Skate (Ray) Project work is continuing with the

deployment of 50 data storage tags attached to live captured blonde and thornback rays. The aim is to track the rays and how they use the Bristol Channel area. The data from this work is part of the Shark Bywatch project. A second strand to the work is for the environment team to carry out habitat mapping associated with the fishing grounds and nursery grounds for ray in the Bristol Channel. This work was carried out using side scan sonar provided through funding from Defra to the IFCA and a charter cruise on the EA survey vessel Severn Guardian.

A further sonar survey using the same equipment, but using the IFCA survey vessel, is underway in the Torbay MCZ site looking at the extent of the subtidal mud areas within the site. The training and planning for both these surveys has been time consuming but will inevitably contribute to improved survey results.

In addition to work on side scan sonar surveying the environment team have been working with a local company to undertake a survey on the crab tiles in the Taw/Torridge estuaries. This work would have traditionally taken a team of at least two officers about two weeks to complete on the ground work and then a further two weeks to collate the data and map it. The work is dangerous because of the soft mud around the estuary and also the tides. This time a local company that operates drones was used to undertake the work, using a small four rotor bladed drone with a go-pro camera and gps, the work was carried out in five days. The camera pictures were very good and the safety of those involved in the survey was greatly improved. It is envisaged that following this work the south coast estuaries will now be surveyed in a similar manor.

Following on from the success of the initial PhD study into the impacts of potting on Marine Protected Area (MPA) features a second PhD has been planned to investigate the development of bass nursery areas within the district and also to make recommendations to Defra on the possible inclusion of new areas and re-drawing of the boundaries of the current sites. The PhD will start work in January. The funding for the research has been reduced following an offer from Plymouth University to share 50% of the costs with the IFCA.

Meetings this quarter have been with the MMO to work on plans to further our closer co-operation in terms of joint working. This will help to deliver the commitment made by both organisations to Defra to seek further cost savings. A project board has been developed to deliver the work set out in the letter to Sam Evans and maintain momentum on the delivery targets.

A Chief Officers' Group meeting was also held this quarter where working with the MMO was discussed, cross warranting with other enforcement bodies was considered and how the IFCA will be involved in delivery of the new Landing Obligations for demersal fisheries which come into force in January 2016. A position statement is under development by the IFCA to make our position clear in this matter.

Jonathan Burney, the marine director for Natural England, met with the CO and DCO Environment during the quarter to discuss closer working between the organisations and also to look at the possibility of the IFCA taking on enforcement powers from NE for estuary conservation sites such as SSSI.

The Lyme Bay Project Board met in Lyme Regis to review the previous years' work within the site as part of the Defra funded research projects. An update was given by Adam Rees the PhD researcher looking at the effects of increased potting activity within MPA sites. The meeting also reviewed the work undertaken by the Blue Marine Foundation and its voluntary management scheme for the area, the marketing of shellfish caught from the site and provision of on shore facilities for local fishermen in the beach ports within the MPA boundary.

A salmon summit conference was called by the EA to look at measures already being undertaken and if possible future management to help stop the decline in wild salmon stocks in the UK. The main management measure under consideration is to ban all commercial netting for salmon within UK waters and to phase out licensed salmon netting in the estuaries. However, the scientific reports to the meeting showed that there are far greater issues impacting the salmon stocks through environmental factors than commercial fishing.

The annual Fishstock event in Brixham was attended by officers. The event continues to grow and with large numbers of members of the public coming to talk to officers on the stand meant it was a very busy, but enjoyable, day for all.



Sarah and Lauren on the D&SIFCA stand at Fishstock15

It has been three months since the two replacement enforcement officers joined the D&SICA and both Laura and Gavin have fitted in well. With the enforcement team now back to full strength additional enforcement patrols have been possible, this has already shown a benefit in compliance rates but also detection of infringements. Laura is taking over responsibility for the enforcement in the Bristol Channel area and utilising her contacts from her previous role in the EA is already making good progress in the area.

Our new research officer, Steph, has been a real bonus to the environment team. She has quickly got to grips with the HRA process and as well as the angling survey work is helping to make a real difference to the work of the team. Steph has been with us for three months and we have funding for her post from Defra for twelve months.

With the full enforcement team in place considerably more sea and shore patrols were undertaken despite yet again having mechanical issues on both the Authority's RIB and the EA's vessel Proteus.

The Autumn period is normally the busiest with a number of key fisheries in operation. The scallop fishery opened again on 1<sup>st</sup> October. The summer had seen a considerable number of scallop vessels working the grounds off Looe and particularly around the Eddystone. Vessels from Cornwall, Devon and Wales were joined by vessels from the North East and Ireland. The closure of so many areas at one time meant that there was considerable pressure on the scallop beds in Cornwall. The displacement of so much effort reduces the landings quickly and increases the risk that some vessels will transgress, landing undersize scallop, fishing through the curfew (1900hrs to 0700hrs) and most importantly dredging in closed areas. A number of these vessels returned to the District to fish for scallops and found that the grounds were not much better when they had been left three months previously. The level of illegal fishing reported was low and can it is felt be put down to the more effective management of the fleet since the introduction of VMS on the over 12 metre fleet earlier in the year and some high profile court cases where data from the VMS units had been key to securing convictions.

On 1<sup>st</sup> September the much anticipated announcement came that the minimum size of bass now referred to as the Minimum Conservation Reference Size (MCRS) had increased from 36cms to 42cms. The increase represented a further management intervention in an attempt to arrest the dramatic decline in bass stocks reported by scientists. Many netmen contacted the Authority to raise their concerns that they would lose a considerable amount of their income from bass due to the increase. Others were concerned that the mesh size of the nets used to target bass would increase. If the mesh size didn't increase then the nets would continue to catch undersize bass that would now have to be discarded. Estuaries in particular are characterised by having mainly 'schoolie' bass (<42cm) present. The increase in the minimum size suggested that the continued viability of a bass fishery in the estuaries was in doubt. To date no net mesh size increase has been announced.

It was immediately apparent that anglers were also well informed about the increase in bass size with very few that were encountered by Officers not being aware of the change. The bass fishery normally peaks in the Autumn months with both estuaries and particularly inshore wrecks producing a lot of fish. Officers received many complaints from licensed, commercial fishermen that 'recreational' anglers were taking a significant number of bass from the wrecks when drifting alongside the commercial boats. Officers undertook a number of shore patrols and an investigation relating to anglers retaining bass in excess of the 3 bass per recreational fisher per day is on-going.

### **Byelaw Review**

On 1<sup>st</sup> September, Officers began the pre-consultation on the much anticipated netting byelaws review. The pre-consultation was divided into two categories, estuaries and coastal netting. The estuarine consultation closed on 15<sup>th</sup> October and the coastal consultation on 30<sup>th</sup> November. Officers used a number of different communication techniques to publicise the consultation including printed flyers, Officers' e-mail signature with hyperlink and general circulation, Twitter, direct correspondence with existing permit holders and other known interested parties, estuary forum meetings and Officer presentations, newsletters (general and individual estuary focussed), press release and Officer engagement/telephone calls/visitors to the office. Although the Officers worked hard to engage with the wide range of interested groups it yet again demonstrated how the Authority should benefit from having

a dedicated, professional Communications Officer in post. The estuary consultation had closed by the time this report was prepared. A total of 177 responses were received from various different sectors. The Byelaw and Permitting Sub-committee met on 24<sup>th</sup> November to discuss the responses and to develop the Authority's position on netting in estuaries ready for the next phase of the process.

The South West IFCA Byelaw working group met on 19<sup>th</sup> November to discuss and draft legislation that would enable VMS to be introduced. Officers from the four IFCAs were joined by Cornwall's and the Authority's prosecuting solicitor and the Vice Chairman, Mike Williams and MMO Officers. Key elements of the legislation were progressed and it was agreed that drafts of the legislation (Byelaw, Permitting Byelaw, Regulatory Notice Byelaw) would be available in January 2016. The most developed draft was understandably for the Authority's permit conditions with the impending introduction of IVMS by the end of January 2016 through the Mobile Gear Permit Byelaw.

## **IVMS**

Devon and Severn IFCA has been working alongside a not for profit organisation called Common Seas, to secure the necessary funding to introduce IVMS on all vessels named on a valid mobile gear permit.

Funding was obtained to cover the costs associated with the purchase and installation of IVMS units on board 120 fishing vessels. Since applying for the funding the fleet has grown by 30 vessels. We are now working to find further finance to support the additional 30 vessels. A significant part of the project's funds were obtained through a bid to the European Fisheries Fund (EFF). A condition of the EFF money was that all the units were purchased and installed by 31<sup>st</sup> December 2015.

With limited time available the initial 30 units were purchased and installed on vessels with a home port of either Brixham or Plymouth in mid-November. At the same time the same IVMS units were being tested as part of the Approval Programme run by the MMO and IFCAs.

The approval programme is designed to ensure that suppliers providing IVMS products to UK fishing vessels in English waters implement the IVMS specification of requirements consistently and correctly. The submitted product is tested against the specification of requirements through an audit and technical validation process. An external testing company also carries out a number of specific, technical tests

Unfortunately the submitted unit did not meet all of the technical requirements of the Approval Programme. It was decided that no further units would be purchased and installed until the full extent of the unit's faults could be understood and rectified. A meeting with the suppliers of the IVMS units was organised to discuss the issues in detail.

## **Training**

Two Officers have started the process of renewing their power boat licence with commercial endorsement with the RYA. The renewal is subject to completing an online training module. The new Officers completed the mandatory training courses (PSSR, First Aid, Sea Survival, Firefighting) in September. With the training in place the new Officers could get to sea which meant a break from reading legislation and other documents for a number of weeks in the office. Further investigatory training courses are planned during the winter months but every patrol on sea or the shore provided further opportunities for the warranted Officers to train the new Officers. The new Officers have been involved in many different inspections so far and one Officer was instrumental in the uncovering of hidden illegal bass on a search of a vessel which has led to an on-going investigation. The other new Officer has been present

when undersize crab was found in shore landing inspections and cautioning of fishers following Bass Nursery Area surveillance.

### **Working together**

Officers have accompanied MMO Officers in a number of different inspections including, vessel landings, vehicle and premise checks and, estuary patrols. These opportunities of working together help build the working relationship between the Officers but also enable more enforcement work to be carried out by the two organisations when limited staff are available.

A number of estuary patrols have been conducted during the quarter but with no success in finding illegal netting that had been reported. With neither the MMO nor the Authority approved under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 to undertake certain covert surveillance operations dealing with illegal netting is even more challenging. Officers have planned to meet the Devon and Cornwall Police Wildlife Crime team to develop stronger links and seek greater support when undertaking estuary patrols.

Officers from Cornwall IFCA and the Authority met with their prosecuting solicitor to develop further the Enforcement Action and Decision Making Guidance document. The document is designed to set out the process by which all investigations are handled by the two IFCAs. Adherence to the document should result in consistent enforcement action being taken against fishermen that commit similar offences in the two Districts. Officers will be presenting the finalised document at the next national MMO/IFCA enforcement meeting in the New Year.

### **Enforcement**

On the 8<sup>th</sup> September 2015, at Torquay Magistrates' Court Mr Bryan Snell and Mr Mark Quentin Baillie as Master and Owner respectively of the fishing vessel Harvester PLN BM127, pleaded guilty to two separate charges relating to fishing in a prohibited area of the South Devon inshore Fishing Grounds during November and December 2014.

The prosecution resulted from partnership working between the Devon and Severn Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority and the Marine Management Organisation. Devon & Severn IFCA led the case and prosecution on behalf of both organisations. To emphasise the strength of the joint working arrangements the vessel used by the Authority's Officers to locate the vessel at sea was the Environment Agency's patrol vessel 'Proteus'. The Authority's Officers spent considerable time analysing the vessel's VMS and AIS data in order to secure the convictions.

The Master and Owner were ordered to pay a total of £18,740

*Master Charge 1, Fine £3000, Charge 2, £3000, Costs £2500, Compensation £750 and Victim surcharge £120. Total £9370.*

*Owner Charge 1, Fine £3000, Charge2, Fine £3000, Costs £2500, Compensation £750 and Victim surcharge £120. Total £9370.*

In this case the compensation, £1,500, was to the owner of the commercial potting vessel that had reported losing crab pots to the value of the award as a result of one of the offences.

On the 17<sup>th</sup> November 2015, at Torquay Magistrates' Court Mr Martyn Rogers and Amy R Trawlers Ltd as the Master and Owners of the fishing vessel Amy R PLN E495 pleaded guilty to scallop dredging in prohibited areas on 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> February 2015 within the

'Inshore Potting Agreement' and on 16<sup>th</sup> March 2015 within the Start Point to Plymouth Sound and Eddystone Candidate Special Area of Conservation.

The prosecution resulted from partnership working between the Devon and Severn Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority and the Marine Management Organisation. Devon & Severn IFCA led the case and prosecution on behalf of both organisations. Officers used a chartered vessel to observe the vessel on 10<sup>th</sup> February and the Authority's RIB on 16<sup>th</sup> March.

Similar to the above case, the Authority's Officers spent considerable time analysing the vessel's VMS data in order to secure the convictions.

The Master and Company were order to pay a total of £13,250.

*Master Charge 1, Fine £500, Charge 2, £500, Charge 3, £350, Costs £1500, and Victim surcharge £200. Total £3,050.*

*Owner Charge 1, Fine £3000, Charge2, Fine £3000, Charge 3, £1500, Costs £2500, and Victim surcharge £200 Total £10,200*

## Investigations

Offence Date	Investigation complete	Prosecuting Authority	Offence	Location	Outcome/ Current Status
28/11/14 – 01/12/14	Yes	D&SIFCA	Using demersal towed gear in a closed area.	South of Start Point	Master and Owner fined a total of £18,740
15/12/14	Yes	D&SIFCA	Using demersal towed gear in a closed area.	South of Start Point	
17-18/12/14	Yes	D&SIFCA	Using demersal towed gear in a closed area.	Lyme Bay	Master and Owner fined total of £12,270
08/02/15	Yes	D&SIFCA	Using demersal towed gear in a closed area.	Northeast of Start Point	Master and Owner fined total of £13,250
09/02/15	Yes	D&SIFCA	Using demersal towed gear in a closed area.	Northeast of Start Point	
16/03/15	Yes	D&SIFCA	Using demersal towed gear in a closed area.	South of Salcombe	
28/06/15	Yes	D&SIFCA	Fishing for bass in a Bass Nursery Area, retaining undersize bass.	Exe estuary	£500 FAP accepted
29/06/15	Yes	D&SIFCA	Using demersal towed gear in a closed area.	Start Bay	Written warning
22/07/15	Yes	D&SIFCA	Removing undersize edible crab otherwise in accordance with the	East of Start Point	£250 FAP accepted

			potting permit		
25/08/15	Yes	D&SIFCA	Fishing for scallop otherwise in accordance with the diving permit	Lyme Bay	£250 FAP accepted
31/08/15	Yes	D&SIFCA	Fishing for bass in a Bass Nursery Area	Exe estuary	Written Warning
31/08/15	No	D&SIFCA	Fishing for bass in a Bass Nursery Area	Teign estuary	On-going
19/09/15	No	D&SIFCA	Retaining more than 3 bass per recreational fisher	Torquay	On-going

## Warnings

In addition a number of notices were placed in pots informing the fisher that the pot did not comply with the gear marking requirements set out in the potting permit conditions. Officers will be informing all Potting Permit holders that the Authority intends to enforce the marking of gear requirement more strictly in 2016.

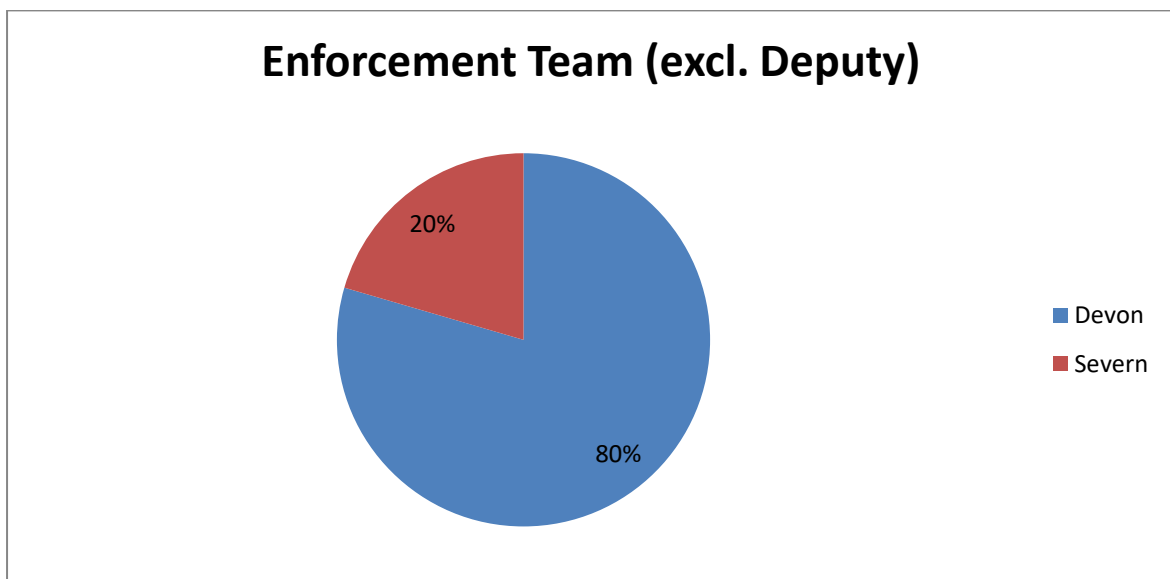
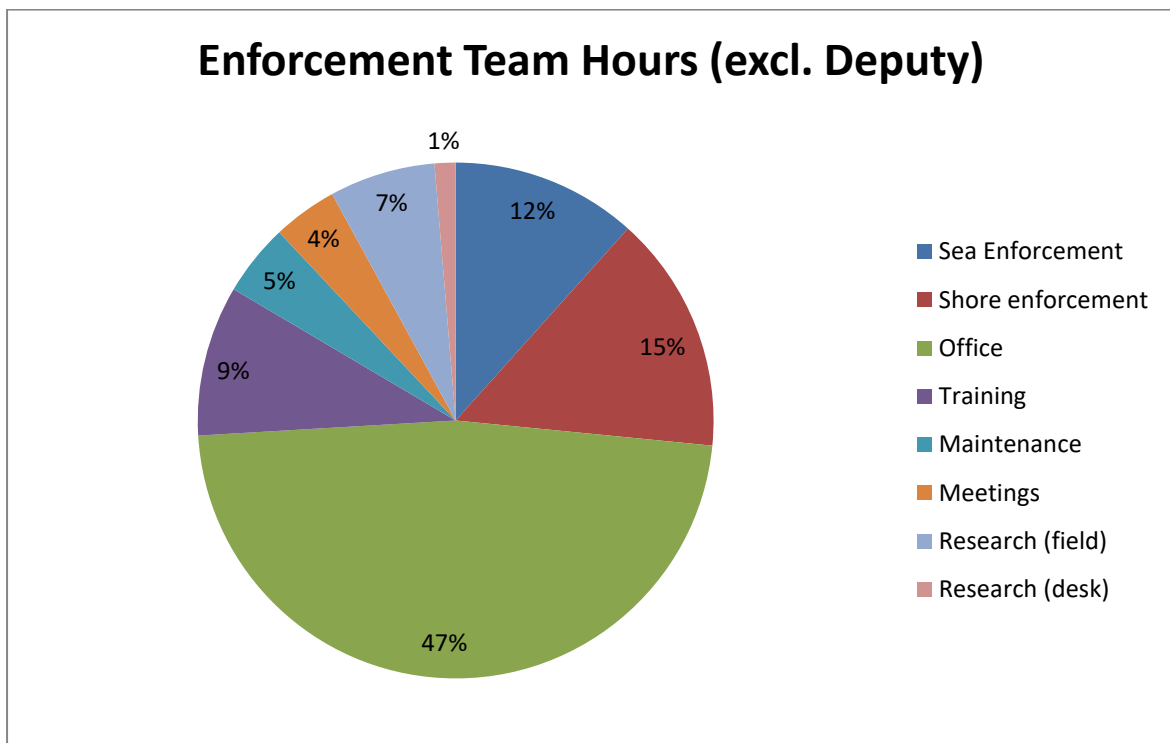
## Summary Table: Enforcement Officers' activities undertaken this quarter that fulfill Devon and Severn IFCA Success Criteria.

Success Criterion (SC)	Activities undertaken
<b>SC1:</b> IFCA's have sound governance and staff are motivated and respected	<p>Production of Sep to Nov quarterly reports. Enforcement Officers provide crewing and enforcement coaching to research staff.</p> <p>Enforcement Officers are encouraged to participate in a full range of duties.</p> <p>Clarification on working hours policy provided.</p>
<b>SC2</b> Evidence based, appropriate and timely byelaws are used to manage the sustainable exploitation of sea fisheries resources within the District.	Pre-consultation on the review of the inherited netting byelaws undertaken.
<b>SC3</b> A fair and appropriate enforcement regime is in place	<p>An enforcement risk register is part of the Enforcement Plan 2015-2016.</p> <p>A summary of enforcement actions available to deal with illegal activity is part of the Enforcement Plan 2015-2016.</p> <p>A code of practice adopted with CIFCA to ensure consistent approach in the enforcement actions taken by each</p>



	<p>Authority.</p> <p>Officers have conducted targeted enforcement operations through a risk based approach.</p>
<p><b>SC4</b> IFCAs work in partnership and are engaged with their stakeholders.</p>	<p>Officers have attended estuary partnership meetings – Avon and Kingsbridge &amp; Salcombe to discuss enforcement concerns.</p> <p>Respond to legislation queries and IVMS via telephone and website.</p> <p>Provide legislation information on website.</p>
<p><b>SC5</b> IFCAs make best use of evidence to deliver their objectives.</p>	<p>Officers' enforcement activities are guided by the targeted enforcement plan referring to received information (SARs and NIRs)</p> <p>Patrol vessels task and review logs maintained.</p> <p>Officers use information on illegal activity to inform and develop enforcement plans</p> <p>EA emergency hotline operatives aware of D&amp;SIFCA</p> <p>D&amp;SIFCA introduced out of hours contact number 07740 175479 to report suspicious activity.</p> <p>D&amp;SIFCA secured finance to fully fund purchase and instalment of IVMS units on all towed gear vessels operating in D&amp;SIFCA District.</p>
<p><b>SC7:</b> IFCAs are recognised and heard</p>	<p>IFCOs attend all meetings within District in uniform.</p> <p>Communication Officer post advertised</p>

Summary of Enforcement Officers' duties carried out during the quarter.



This quarter has seen further research and assessments undertaken by all officers with full commitment in time and effort. Steph Davies, who joined the Environment Team in late August on a one year contract funded by Defra, has been a fantastic addition to the team ploughing forward with the completion of many HRAs and providing support to all team members. HRAs are taking up a great deal of the team's time especially with new conservation advice being introduced by Natural England for EMS and MCZ in the district which has meant additional work to the team. Both estuarine and coastal survey work has continued even though on some occasions the weather has been far from favourable.

### **MPA Management**

Video footage from the filming which took place in 2015 is now being analysed by Ocean Ecology consultants and this data will help inform HRA, ground truth areas that have been closed under precaution to mobile fishing gear and also to compare any environment/biodiversity changes over a three year period of collecting video evidence in the Start Point to Plymouth Sound and Eddystone SAC.

Habitat Regulations Assessments for the Severn Estuary Special Area of Conservation have been undertaken for a large number of gear-feature interactions this quarter by Libby Ross and Steph Davies and will be sent to Natural England shortly. The new interim generic conservation advice for the Severn Estuary has been reviewed and feedback given to Natural England. The re-naming of the sub-features in European Marine Sites has also generated additional work. Two meetings have been attended with Natural England in Bristol to discuss how the IFCA should use Wetland Bird Survey data in the HRA process. Several assessments now also complete for the Exe Estuary and Plymouth Sound & Estuaries EMS. Some assessments have been signed off by Natural England as finalised, while others are still awaiting feedback. HRA work was continued for the Lundy SAC, and the Lyme Bay and Torbay SAC with completed HRA submitted to Natural England for their comments and advice. Finished HRAs ready to be reviewed by Natural England for Severn Estuary SAC include five gear group types, and for Plymouth Sound and Estuaries EMS, four gear group types. The rest are in the process of Test of Likely Significant Effect and possible Appropriate Assessment. With the delivery of the new conservation advice packages from Natural England, the new sub-features and conservation objects have been integrated into the remaining HRAs to be completed for all sites. Extra HRAs have also been carried out to assess numerous derogation requests the IFCA has received for undertaking survey work within European Marine Sites.

A meeting was held with Andrew Knights and Viv Roberts from Natural England to discuss the progress of the HRAs and look at integrating NE's new Conservation Advice packages into the process. The IFCA took part in the monthly Fisheries in MPA teleconferences, with all IFCAs, Natural England, Defra and the MMO to discuss matters associated with fisheries in MPA and progress with HRAs. A teleconference regarding Skerries Bank and Surrounds MCZ with Nicholas Greenwood and Elaine Young from the MMO discussed the post survey report of new habitat maps, particularly circalittoral rock and management for towed demersal gear. The DCO attended a telecom to discuss Crustacea Species in MPAs and what management might be needed to protect those species for which sites are designated such as spiny lobster in Skerries Bank and Surrounds MCZ and Lundy MCZ. The IFCA was able to describe the management brought in under the potting and diving permit byelaws to protect the species in these areas and future management through the netting permit byelaw. Additionally, progress has been made on screening assessments for Torbay MCZ, for subtidal mud and seagrass.

## **Recreational Sea Angling**

Several meetings have been attended by Libby Ross, Senior Environment Officer, relating to recreational sea angling in the district. A Family Fishing day, run by Combe Martin Sea Angling Club, was attended in Ilfracombe. Information about minimum landing sizes and bass limits was distributed. A number of Angling Zone (AZ) surveys, both boat and shore surveys, have taken place within the Skerries Bank AZ this quarter. Monitoring work for the Burnham, Berrow and Brean AZ will begin in November 2015. A presentation on the work of D&S IFCA in relation to Recreational Sea Angling (RSA) was given to the Marine Conservation and Policy group at Plymouth University and resulted in an interesting debate about the pros and cons of permitting RSA.

## **Estuarine Shellfisheries**

The Initial Designation placed on the Waddeton Order shellfishery area on the Dart Estuary by Cefas while oyster mortalities were investigated, has now been withdrawn as test results were negative for notifiable and emerging diseases. The mortalities are thought to have been caused by the bacterium *Vibrio aesturaneus*. Cefas carried out their annual inspection of the fishery and were happy with the IFCA's management of the site and the Biosecurity Measures Plan.

Oysters within the Teign Regulating Order on the Teign Estuary have been found to contain the oyster Herpes virus which is a notifiable disease and therefore strict movement restriction are now in place.

## **Projects / Surveys**

The IFCA has been involved in discussions with a variety of different organisations regarding the potential to be part of two new projects. One is an Interreg Va project on harmful algal blooms, EUROHAB, and the effect on inshore bivalves and developing an algal bloom and water quality alert system in the English Channel early detection system working with Cefas, Ifremer and Plymouth Marine Laboratory. The other is looking to bring partner organisations together on research and management of the spiny lobster, *Palinurus elephas*. A workshop is likely to be held in early 2016 with Ifremer, Cefas, MBA, IoS IFCA, CIFCA and D&S IFCA to discuss the way forward.

## **North Devon Skate (Ray) Pilot Project**

Officers have worked on this project this quarter. 50 Data Storage Tags (DSTs) on 25 blonde rays and 25 thornback rays were successfully deployed in the Bristol Channel. Rays were caught in Bideford Bay and in the vicinity of Hartland Point on the commercial otter trawler FV Ann Louise to assess the movements of the species and the sustainability of the ray fishery in North Devon. Data collected on this survey involved recording trawl locations, tag numbers, size, sex, maturity and health state of rays. More information can be found in an update by Libby Ross included in the quarterly papers. A training day was spent at sea with Cefas in order to have the two IFCA officers' personal tagging licences (ASPA PIL licences) signed off. A meeting with partners from Cefas was attended via skype as part of the ASPA PIL legislation. Time has also been spent administering the project, for example putting together the first financial claim.

One of the primary aims of the North Devon Ray Pilot Project was to draw the area to the attention of other projects and funding. This was successful in the first instance by bringing in the Cefas 'Shark Bywatch UK 2' project to the area and the IFCA is now a partner. Additionally the project has resulted in conversations with Seafish about the possibility of

funding more DST tags in the area. Also the IFCA, in collaboration with Morrisons, will be contributing a recipe and information about Spotted Ray to the Marine Conservation Societies 'Fish of the Month' blog. A meeting with Welsh Government to discuss the possibility of a Bristol Channel Ray Management Forum has been delayed but will hopefully take place early in the New Year. An update on the project was given at the latest (virtual) meeting of the Seafish Skates and Rays group.

## **Shark ByWatch UK 2**

A large amount of time has been dedicated this quarter to the IFCA's contribution to the Shark Bywatch UK 2 project. This has involved meeting with North Devon skippers who target rays to map the areas which are fished for different species. This will then form the basis of a comparison of the suitability of existing ICES Bottom Trawl Survey (BTS) locations for accurately assessing the abundance of each species. The information also informed the planning of sidescan sonar surveys that were due to take place this quarter, with habitat mapping planned to look at different ray species associations with different habitats in the Bristol Channel. The planning of sidescan work was a major piece of work, including two days of training with Southern IFCA with the Edgetech sonar and two days of work on the EA vessel the Severn Guardian in North Devon. The first day was spent orientating ourselves with working on a different vessel and connecting the kit up with the vessel's GPS system. The second day was used as a recce day to investigate whether there is any static fishing gear in the proposed survey sites so adjustments could be made to the survey areas if needed. This day was also used to establish how to deploy the towfish from the vessel. A sidescan sonar survey plan has now been completed and it is hoped that the survey will now take place on the next weather window that the vessel is available for use.

## **European sea bass *Dicentrarchus labrax* developments**

The IFCA's work plan for the future management of Bass has developed this quarter. A review of bass management and protection at each life-history stage was undertaken and used to define a work plan for the research required to inform future management. This is included in the papers for this quarterly meeting. A meeting was held with Plymouth University to discuss collaborating on a bass project during which it was agreed that the IFCA and Plymouth would co-fund and co-supervise a PhD. A further meeting was held between the IFCA, Plymouth University, Bridgwater College and the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust to discuss the involvement of Bridgwater College and the inclusion of the new managed realignment at Steart Marshes in any research relating to the Parrett Estuary. A meeting held by the Blue Marine Foundation in London to discuss bass conservation was attended. This afforded an opportunity to inform other stakeholders about the IFCA's work plan and find out about other research relating to bass that is planned.

## **Crab Tile Survey – Taw Torridge Estuary**

Crab tiles surveys were carried out on the Taw Torridge Estuary to determine the location and number of crab tiles. For these surveys the use of a drone was trialled. Prior to survey work Natural England was contacted to ensure that this method would be acceptable to them in relation to the bird use of the estuary. As this area hadn't been surveyed by the IFCA before, a day was spent locating the areas identified by a past EA study. IFCA officers accompanied a drone operator to carry out the survey. Using crab tile charts prepared by IFCA officer Lauren Parkhouse, a pre-programmed flight path was inputted into the drone which then flew at an altitude of 20m taking photos every few seconds with a Go-Pro camera. These images are now being processed by the drone operator and will be stitched together and overlaid on a mapping programme enabling the IFCA to geo-locate the tiles and determine numbers. In order to ensure the data gathered using the drone was

accurate a quality assurance exercise was carried out where IFCA officers spent a day ground truthing a small area of the survey to ensure the images and locations match up with the traditional method of surveying crab tiles. The pre-images received from the drone so far have been successful. This method of surveying could prove to be more efficient for future crab tile surveys in all the estuaries in the IFCA district as the number of officers and time needed to carry out a traditional survey is high risk to officers' safety during the survey work.

### **Exe Estuary Cackle Survey**

The annual cackle stock assessment on the Exe Estuary was carried out in September. Officers from both the Environment and Enforcement teams took part, as well as the Exe Estuary Officer. The data from this survey are yet to be analysed.

### **Torbay MCZ**

This quarter saw the start of side scan sonar surveys within the Torbay MCZ. For this work the Edge Tech towfish, which is shared between the IFCAs was used. The purpose of the survey is to determine the areas of Subtidal mud which is a feature of the MCZ. This work is on-going. Side scan survey planning took officers many days to prepare and complete as this work requires detailing tows using GIS mapping prior to the actual survey work can take place.

### **Severn Estuary Netting Survey**

IFCA officers were invited to join a commercial fishing boat from Minehead (Thistle, P7) to observe traditional herring drift netting activity. It provided an opportunity for an excellent dialogue about the history of fishing in Minehead, current fishing activities and fish distribution. In particular, the possibility of the existence of an unmapped herring spawning area around Minehead was discussed. IFCA officers have been invited back to observe the fishing of traditional fish weirs in Minehead that have been in place for many centuries.

### **Meetings & Outreach**

Presentations on the uniqueness and importance of the fish community and fisheries of the Severn Estuary were given at the Severn Estuary Forum in Bristol and the Institute of Fisheries Management Annual Conference in Plymouth. The work of the Association of Severn Estuary Relevant Authorities (ASERA) has continued, including chairing the recent management group meeting and AGM. ASERA is in the process of developing a series of codes of conduct for various recreational activities, including bait digging and recreational angling which will help minimise potential impacts on the European Marine Site. A recent meeting of the Bristol Channel Standing Environment Group (BCSEG) was also attended. The IFCA was invited to join the Cardiff Bay Tidal Lagoon 'Fish Expert Topic Group' in order to comment on the subtidal and intertidal fish monitoring survey plans. This group is designed to ensure a clear and informed dialogue takes place between fisheries experts and Tidal Lagoon Power and their various consultants.

The Chief Officer and Deputy Chief attended a meeting with Jonathan Burney Director of Marine, Natural England along with national and regional Natural England Officers to discuss the working relationship with the IFCA. Positive feedback on the IFCA and its officers was received.

Both the Exe Estuary Working Group and the Exe Sustainable Fisheries Group were attended this quarter. The Sustainable Fisheries Group was set up through funding from the Coastal Communities Fund, and aims to promote local and sustainable fish in the

communities around the Exe Estuary. The Avon Estuary Forum, the Yealm Estuary Management Group, and Sea Torbay were all attended to give updates on the IFCA's current review of netting byelaws, as well as the recent changes in Bass management from the EU. The bi-annual Lundy Marine Conservation Zone Advisory Group meeting was attended in Ilfracombe. Current and future projects for the MPA and Lundy Island were discussed at this meeting with a number of different stakeholders. The Lundy Management Group meeting was also attended.

Partnership working continues with academic institutes within the district. The DCO gave a lecture to MSC and PhD students on aquaculture giving examples of developments in aquaculture within the district. This quarter saw a completion of the MSC project with a student from Plymouth University who developed and trialled a methodology for attaching go-pro cameras to tangle nets to film the interaction of the nets with the seabed. The results of this work will help inform the netting HRAs that need to be completed. As mentioned above a meeting with Plymouth University was held to discuss the bass management PhD that the IFCA will be co-funding with the University.

A national "Whelk Assessment Day" was held at Cefas in Lowestoft. Representatives from all IFCAs undertaking whelk research, as well as Cefas and Bangor University, were present to share the results of their research and discuss the potential for a co-ordinated approach for management.

The IFCA exhibited at Brixham's annual FishStock event in September displaying information on the work the IFCA is currently undertaking in particular relating to netting and our pre-consultation on the development of a netting permitting byelaw. Officers were present to answer any questions the public had on the work we carry out and management. A presentation on the work of the IFCA in terms of both management and research was given to the Coast Watch Institute based at Prawle Point. The audience of about thirty people were very interested in the Inshore Plotting Agreement (IPA) and spatial restrictions and permitting byelaws. The IPA Annual meeting was chaired by the Deputy Chief Officer in September. After discussion and consideration of suggested/proposed changes by the fishing sectors operating in the IPA areas, it was agreed by all committee members that the IPA chart would remain the same for 2016 as it was for 2015.

Several meetings with the Shellfish Association of Great Britain (SAGB) were attended including the Mollusc Committee, Crustacea Committee, and SAGB Council meeting. The DCO is the current chair of the Crustacea Committee and the meeting in October was held at the Skipper Expo in Bournemouth. The main topics covered were the ban on exports of brown crab to China which has affected both the Inshore and Offshore potting industry; the release of non-native crustacean species, American lobsters and Dungeness crab, into coastal waters along the south coast by religious groups and the 2014 Crustacea stock assessments produced by Cefas.

## **Training**

An oil spill exercise was attended at Teignmouth Harbour. The purpose of the exercise was to ensure that the Harbour's Oil Pollution Contingency Plan was up to date, and that all the correct procedures are in place in case there is a real oil spill event. Environment Officer Katherine Stephenson provided training in MapInfo GIS to Research Officer Steph Davies. Before carrying out the side scan survey in Torbay, Patrick Copper from Southern IFCA came and spent a day with us out in the bay to go over the set up and deployment of the Edge Tech towfish as this is a new piece of equipment to the majority of the environment team. Research Officer Steph Davies received essential training by Western Maritime Training Ltd for STCW'95 A-VI/1-3 essential first aid and one day Seafish firefighting course in September. A training day was spent at sea with Cefas in order to have the two IFCA officers' personal tagging licences (ASPA PIL licences) signed off.

## Enforcement work

IFCO Laura Bullock has taken over primary responsibility for the planning of enforcement work in the Severn Estuary and Libby Ross spent a day handing over information on fishing activities and intelligence on illegal fishing in this area. A landings per unit effort survey was carried out with members of the Enforcement Team on a crabbing vessel in Plymouth. This is part of the on-going brown crab stock assessment work alongside enforcement of the new 150mm minimum conservation reference size for hen crab. Enforcement was also carried out on a scallop vessel which was landing into Plymouth at the time. Both vessels complied with the Byelaw regulations. Other enforcement work has included monitoring of recreational sea anglers targeting bass and night patrols on the south coast estuaries for netting infringement.

Success Criterion (SC)	Activities undertaken
SC1: IFCA's have sound governance and staff are motivated and respected	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Production of quarterly reports.</li> <li>• On-going meetings with all environment staff on the progress of research projects</li> <li>• Training was given in various research techniques</li> </ul>
SC2 Evidence based, appropriate and timely byelaws are used to manage the sustainable exploitation of sea fisheries resources within the District	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shellfish catches and landing surveys continued to inform byelaw consultation</li> <li>• Netting survey within the Severn EMS will inform byelaw review</li> </ul>
SC3: A fair and appropriate enforcement regime is in place	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Many stakeholder meetings especially with members of the fishing industry and anglers were undertaken to inform the Byelaw review process, EMS and MCZ work, and New Bass regulations</li> <li>• Several enforcement patrols were undertaken</li> </ul>
SC4: IFCA work in partnership and are engaged with their stakeholders.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Authority Officers met, engaged and worked with members of SD&amp;CSA, NE, EA, and with fishers around the district</li> <li>• Many recreational Sea angling meetings and events were attended and presentations given.</li> <li>• Survey work planned in partnership with other IFCA's, NE, and Cefas</li> <li>• A stand was manned at Spirit of the Exe Estuary Festival</li> <li>• Telecoms have been attended to discuss EMS and MCZ work.</li> <li>• Responded to research and environment enquiries via telephone, e-mail and attended telecoms.</li> <li>• Officers attended EMS working and management group meetings.</li> <li>• Officers attended several meetings and a workshop on developing projects on skate and ray management in the district.</li> <li>• On-board shellfish surveys in partnership with fishers</li> <li>• Local partnership meetings and fora were attended.</li> <li>• Update on ray project given to the Seafish Skates and Rays group</li> <li>• Shark ByWatch UK2 project development including meeting with fishermen</li> <li>• Severn Estuary Netting survey undertaken with local stakeholders</li> <li>• Lundy Management meetings and forum attending</li> </ul>
SC5: IFCA's make best use of evidence to deliver their objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• HRAs undertaken for amber gear feature interactions using available data and fishing activity reports completed.</li> <li>• Meetings with PhD and MSC students to look at impacts</li> </ul>



	<p>of fishing activities (potting and netting) in EMS have taken place.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shore landings surveys of shellfish continued to support byelaw review and stock assessments.</li> <li>• Project based training undertaken.</li> <li>• Data from Angling Zone surveys have been GIS mapped.</li> <li>• Sidescan sonar survey planning for North Devon</li> <li>• Taw Torridge Estuary Crab Tile Survey</li> <li>• Exe cockle survey</li> </ul>
<p>SC6:IFCAs support and promote the sustainable management of the marine environment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Detailed shore and boat monitoring of the Angling Zones has commenced.</li> <li>• HRA were undertaken this quarter on activities in MPA</li> <li>• HRA undertaken for derogation requests</li> <li>• Meetings with NE attended to discuss new conservation advice packages</li> <li>• Meetings held with Natural England on MCZ in the district.</li> <li>• Meetings held with NE to discuss use of Wetland Bird survey data in SPA assessments</li> <li>• Bass management papers, fliers and information produced</li> <li>• Meetings with angling clubs and angling representatives to discuss its development and management.</li> <li>• Management of the Waddeton Regulating order</li> <li>• New project development – Harmful algae alert system and Spiny lobster management</li> <li>• Tagging of rays to assess movements and sustainability of the fishery</li> <li>• A review of bass management and development of a Bass management plan</li> <li>• Development of PhD on Bass programme with Plymouth University</li> </ul>
<p>SC7: IFCAS are recognised and heard</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• EnvO Officer sits on TAG.</li> <li>• SEO chaired ASERA meetings and AGM</li> <li>• BCSEG attended</li> <li>• EnvO presented the work of the IFCA at angling club meetings</li> <li>• Officers manned stall at FishStock</li> <li>• DCO attended national meetings of SAGB</li> <li>• DCO gave a lecture on Aquaculture to Plymouth University students</li> </ul>

**Summary of Environment Officers' duties carried out during the quarter**

