

THE NORTHUMBERLAND SEA FISHERIES COMMITTEE

Constitution

The Northumberland Sea Fisheries Committee is a joint committee of Northumberland County Council and North Tyneside Metropolitan Borough Council. It was set up in 1890 under the Sea Fisheries Regulation Act 1888 (now replaced by the Sea Fisheries Regulation Act 1966) and after Local Government re-organisation was reconstituted with effect from 1st April 1974 in virtually its present form, the only recent change being the substitution of a reference to Tyne and Wear County Council by a reference to North Tyneside MBC.

There are twenty members, nine of whom are appointed by Northumberland County Council, one by North Tyneside MBC, nine by the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and one by the Environment Agency. Members are appointed for four years at a time and any casual vacancies caused by resignations etc. are filled by the appointing authority to cover the remainder of the four year period. The present period commenced on 1st July 2002 and a list of current members will be supplied as soon as all the members are known.

Purpose

The object of the Committee is to regulate the sea fisheries, other than the salmon and trout fishery, within the Committee's District. The Committee's District is essentially in length from the Scottish Border to the River Tyne and extends in depth six miles out from the coastline.

Meetings

Meetings of the Committee are usually held on the fourth Tuesday of the months of January, April, July and October although, to assist the fishermen members of the Committee, the July meeting may be held on a Saturday, which is decided at the January meeting each year. The July meeting is the annual meeting when the office holders, subcommittees, i.e. the Watch and Finance Committees, are elected and, to aid fishermen members of the Committee, the annual meeting is sometimes held on a Saturday. . By agreement the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs' District Inspector of Fisheries is invited to the meetings and the Sea Fish Industry Authority is also asked to send a representative.

The meetings of the Committee are public meetings and the Press normally attend the main meeting.

Finance

Financial contributions are provided as to nine-tenths by Northumberland County Council and one-tenth by North Tyneside MBC. The Committee's accounting year runs from 1st April to 31st March and the Accounts are subject to audit by the District Auditor.

Prior to the January meeting an estimate of expenditure expected to be made during the following year is prepared and placed before the Finance Committee meeting. This will also recommend the amount to be called for from the constituent Authorities which may, in some cases, be different from the actual amount of the estimate. Once the estimate is approved the Councils are informed what their contributions will be during the following financial year.

Money from the constituent Authorities is received in two parts, normally two equal parts, the first during the half year commencing the 1st April and the second contribution during the half year commencing 1st October.

Sub-Committees

There are two main sub-committees, the Watch Committee and the Finance Committee. The maximum number of members appointed to each is twelve and it is usual for the same members to be appointed to both Committees. In order to avoid expense, meetings of the Watch and Finance Committees are held on the same day as the main meetings but prior to them, and reports of these meetings are submitted to the main meeting for approval.

The duties of the Watch Committee concern the enforcement of the Bye-laws and other applicable legislation including prosecutions and the maintenance and running of the patrol boat.

Occasionally it is helpful in connection with the supervision of the patrol boat to set up a Patrol Boat Committee and one is in place now.

Personnel

At present the Committee has six full-time employees who are concerned with the practical enforcement of Fisheries Regulations which consist partly of Bye-laws and partly of European and National Law. The Senior Fishery Officer is Mr. A.F. Coe who supervises the work of the other Fishery Officers in general and is skipper of the Committee's patrol vessel "St. Oswald". Three of the Fishery Officers operate from either the Northern, Southern or Central Districts, and one of them also doubles up as Patrol Boat Engineer. The fifth Fishery Officer has a roving commission in all areas but is employed specifically for scientific duties to advise the Committee on environmental matters. All Fishery Officers, save for the Engineer, act as deck-hands when they are aboard the patrol vessel.

Fisheries Regulation

The Regulations for the Inshore Fisheries are a combination of European Law, Statute Law, Statutory Instruments and Byelaws, the Committee having power to make Byelaws subject to confirmation by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and it is important to appreciate that it is only the Committee which has power to make byelaws for fisheries purposes in the six mile district, except in relation to salmon and trout.

Patrol Vessel

The Committee owns and operates a twin engined patrol vessel the 'St. Oswald' which replaced the previous vessel 'Dunstanburgh' and patrols some 2/3 days per week, On other days shore patrols are carried out by the Officers and in the summer there is a considerable amount of weekend work checking the activities of part-time and hobby fishermen. The permanent berth for the St. Oswald is at Royal Quays, North Shields.

In addition, the St. Oswald carries a 6 metre RIB which is stored in a stern ramp and makes launch and recovery both safer and quicker. The Committee also owns and operates a shore-based RIB, used mainly throughout the summer months, which along with a Land Rover Defender used for towing it, is stored at the Committee's office unit in Cramlington.