

## Devon and Severn IFCA News

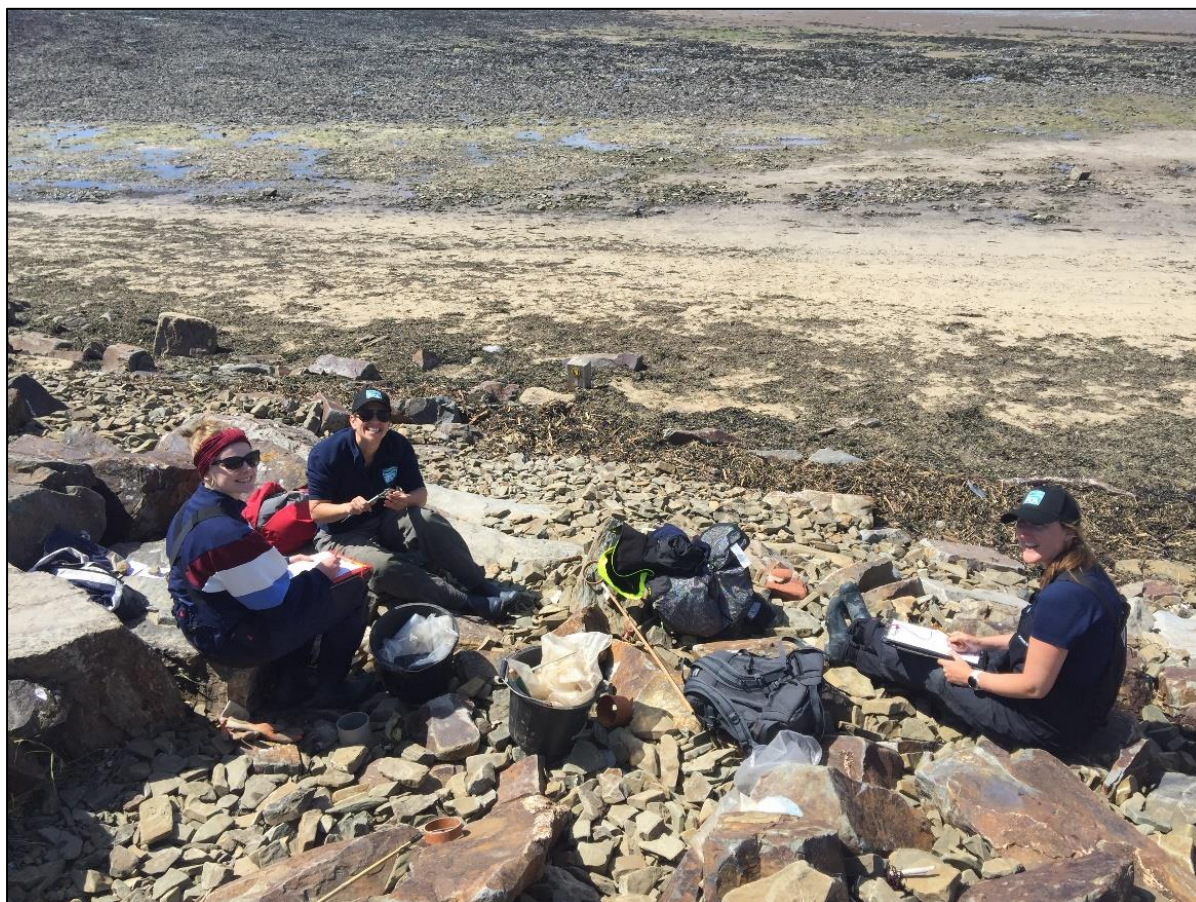
### Student Placement Assists D&S IFCA Environment Team

#### Ffion Blundell reports on her three-month placement at D&S IFCA

As part of my optional placement year studying Marine Biology and Oceanography at The University of Plymouth, I have spent 3 months at D&S IFCA experiencing life as an Environment Officer with occasional involvement with fisheries enforcement. Throughout my 3 months, I have developed transferable and marine sector specific skills which has improved my industry awareness and introduced me to other like-minded people passionate about everything marine.

Surveys to collect data on different fisheries within the D&S IFCA District are now being conducted annually/bi-annually which requires a report to be written to assist decisions on fisheries management. D&S IFCA has a [Byelaw & Permitting Sub-Committee](#) that are tasked with reviewing legacy byelaws and when required introducing new byelaws. Work is currently being undertaken reviewing the management of all Hand Working Fishing Activities and you can follow this process by visiting the [Consultation](#) page of the D&S IFCA website.

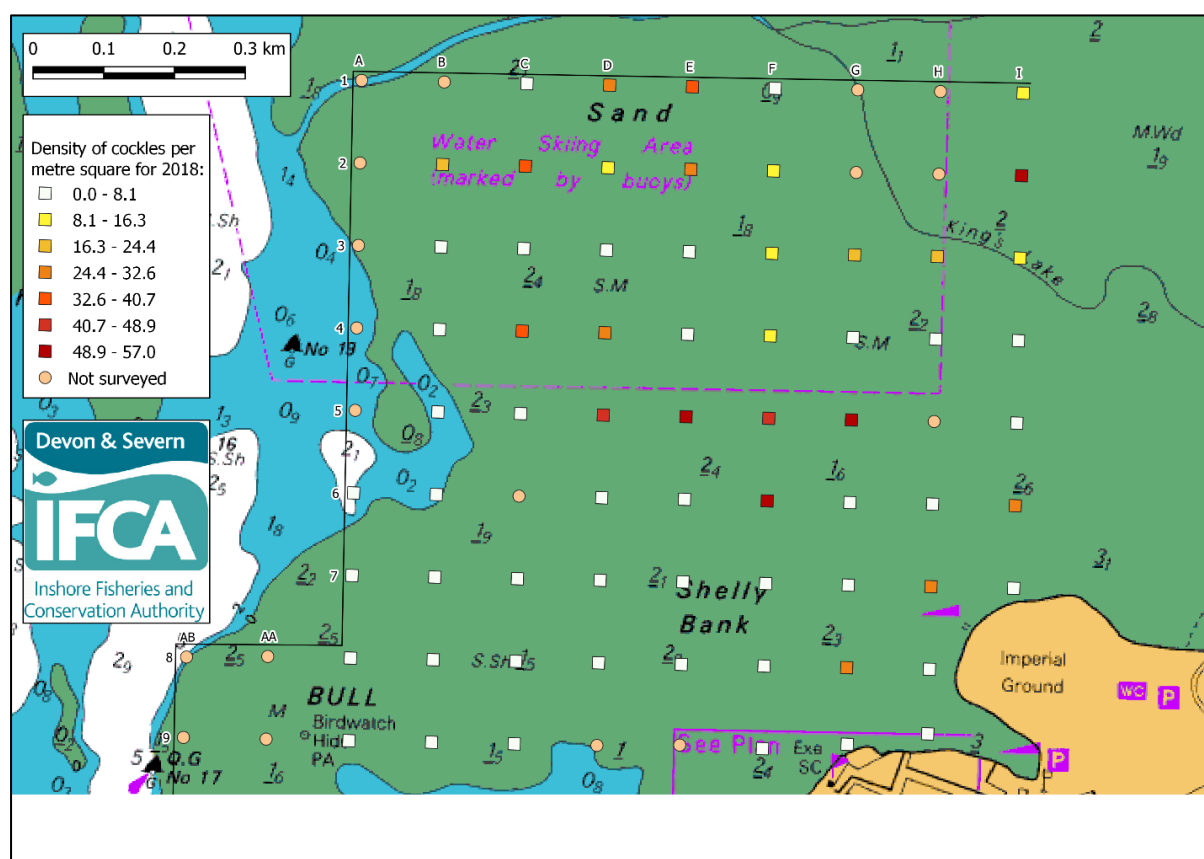
One of the tasks I was given was to work on data from an annual cockle bed stock assessment survey that was conducted in 2018, in order to update the existing report on the common cockle (*Cerastoderma edule*). The new report is due to be published this year.



Other surveys that are conducted on a regular basis are the mussel bed stock assessments on different estuaries including the Taw Torridge, Exe and Teign. These assessments are to monitor the density of blue mussel (*Mytilus edulis*). Luckily, I was given the chance to assist in 6 surveys, 3 on the Taw-Torridge Estuary and 3 on the Exe Estuary. It was interesting to compare the density of mussel found between the two estuaries given their very different positions along the Devon coast. Previously, I had previously not seen a mussel bed in person, so it was great to get involved and get a feel for how the stocks are faring especially in terms of how much spat (juvenile mussel) is present. Due to low levels of stock on the [Teign](#) and [Exe](#) Estuaries, the public beds have been subjected to a temporary closure from 1<sup>st</sup> May 2019.

Getting out of the office to get hands on experience was a brilliant chance to practise my survey technique and it enabled me to work with Natural England as well as the D&S IFCA Environment team. Engaging with more than one discipline was great, as we were able to chat about other relevant subjects such as the non-native Pacific oyster being reported more and more around the south-west coast of England. The increase in numbers in Looe, Cornwall was highlighted recently on the television program Spring Watch.

When I was back in the office, I used some of my time to practise using specialist software to statistically analyse data and produce digital maps. These techniques are used to visually demonstrate data not only making it more attractive to look at but ensures that it is easy to understand in reports such as those produced for fisheries management. (Fig.1)



**Figure 1 – Mean cockle density per m<sup>2</sup> for autumn 2018 of Cockle Sands on the Exe Estuary.**

The work of the D&S IFCA Environment Team is very varied. As part of assisting with ongoing research, the environment team were required to spend a (very early) morning at the Brixham Fish Market, which is the largest fish market by value of fish sold in the UK. There was a large



volume of fish landed that morning and our task was to measure and weigh 2 landings of mackerel (one test and one control group) and record the overall weight and grading of the catch. I appreciated getting to see behind the scenes of a fish market and witness the work of the Marine Management Organisation (MMO), who also inspect and monitor landings.

Other core work for D&S IFCA includes enforcing its own byelaws and also Domestic and EU fisheries legislation. To get an idea of how the enforcement side of IFCA works I was able to go out on the new [D&S IFCA fisheries patrol vessel \(FPV David Rowe\)](#) and gain hands on experience of enforcing byelaws by removing illegal fishing gear in Plymouth Sound. I enjoyed seeing how the onboard thermal imaging and night vision camera worked as well as its ability to track boats and record footage. This equipment can provide evidence for officers in any investigations they conduct following the detection of offences.



I now understand how inshore fisheries are managed locally and has given me the opportunity to compare management in a full government organisation (Department of Food, Environment and Agriculture, Isle of Man, where I spent 3 months prior to this placement). It has also been valuable to work within two dissimilar organisations in terms of being able to experience varying levels of funding, delegation and how legislation/byelaws are implemented, which I would not have been able to be involved with otherwise.

I have enjoyed my time on my placement and helping with different workstreams that are set out in the [D&S IFCA 2019-2020 Annual Plan](#).

If you are interested in the work being undertaken by D&S IFCA you can find a lot of information on the D&S IFCA website. The website [Resource Library](#) is well stocked with information.

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