

MINUTES OF THE GENERAL COMMITTEE MEETING
HELD AT EAST BEDLINGTON COMMUNITY CENTRE
ON MONDAY 25TH OCTOBER 2021 AT 1PM

PRESENT: NIFCA Members:

Mr L Weller (Chair), Vice Chair Mr G Renner-Thompson (GRT), Mr F Armstrong (FA), Mrs E Cartie (EC), Mrs L Dunn (LD), Mr S Lowe (SL), Mr P Gray (PG), Mrs C Seymour (CSe), Mr J Stephenson (JiS), Mr I Thomas (IT) and Dr J Wood (JW).

Visitors to the meeting included Nick Brodin (NB) from the Marine Nature Partnership and former members Ms W Pattison (WP), Mr N Polunin (NP), Mr A B Ritchie (SR). We were also joined by a member of public.

Also in attendance from NIFCA were the Chief Executive Officer Mr M H Hardy (CEO), Chief IFCO Mr M Southerton (MS), Senior Environmental IFCO Andrew Boon (AB), and the NIFCA Administrative Officer Ms E Stiles.

3.1 Apologies for Absence and Declarations of Interest

Apologies were received from Dr M Kitching (MK), Mr P Rippon (PR), Mr B Burdis (BB), Mr B Flux (BF), Dr C Scott (CSc) and Mr C Hardy (CH).

There were no declarations of interest.

Welcome:

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and gave thanks to the former members for joining the Authority today. Gifts were given to WP, SR and NP with sincere thanks for their service as members and in the case of Councillor Pattison as Vice Chair.

The Chair explained that for the last 5 or 6 years there have been ongoing difficulties regarding the MMO's management of IFCA members and the impending cliff-edge of losing substantial numbers of experienced members which all IFCAs have been facing. He confirmed that IFCA recruitment at the MMO has been handed over to someone new and the IFCAs have received a sincere apology for how membership has been handled to date. The Chair noted that current and former IFCA general members are now able to reapply for general membership when there are vacancies, including those who are coming to the end of their 10-years. He confirmed that if any members would wish to reapply, they can do so and if they are re-appointed by the MMO they would be very much welcomed back.

Finally, the Chair commented that he is pleased that the membership are once again meeting in person at what is an excellent venue. He confirmed that the Government has said that all public meetings of the Authority now need to be held in person.

3.2 Draft Minutes of the previous quarterly meeting held on 26 July 2021 and matters arising therefrom

These minutes were accepted as an accurate record and approved by meeting.

3.3 Marine Nature Partnership (MNP) report by its Officer Nick Brodin

A presentation was given by Nick Brodin on the Marine Nature Partnership.

The Chair asked Nick if there is view on non-native species, particularly the pacific oyster to which NB confirmed that there is not a collective view on this from the partnership as different organisations will have different views. Following a question from SR, NB confirmed that he will feedback to MH regarding why certain harbours are not included in the partnership.

3.4 Meetings attended throughout the quarter

This report was accepted with thanks.

3.5 Chief Executive's Report on second Quarter of NIFCA 2021-22 (members only)

In spite of facing a number of challenges over the last few months, the CEO said that it is felt that the Authority has met its remit with some outstanding work being produced by the Officers. Nationally, there is a huge amount for IFCAs to be aware of including regarding Brexit, the Fisheries Act and Management Plans as well as the development of HPMA's - although it is as yet unknown if one will be in Northumberland, it is understood that it would be very significant for the area if one was designated here.

The CEO confirmed that the IVMS project continues to be developed and should go ahead next year. The Chair asked if a ping time has been agreed yet to which MS said that it had not, but the working group are considering a 3 minute ping for inside the 6-mile and a 10 minute ping for outside.

The CEO also gave his congratulations to NIFCA Officers for their input to national intel, noting that exemplary work is being undertaken in Northumberland. The CEO then commented that there has been some excellent work done on the Recreational Sea Angling Strategy as led by KS, culminating in a very successful online presentation the previous week with the Angling Trust. The Chair gave his thanks to KS and the team for the Angling Trust presentation. He confirmed that the Angling Trust has said that NIFCA set an exemplary presentation standard.

It was confirmed that the IFCAs Evaluation Report has been received; this is a big read but has cast a spotlight on the IFCAs and is generally favourable. The CEO also confirmed that the Annual Report has been sent to the members and if approved, it will be sent to Defra and published on the website. SL proposed acceptance of the Report which was seconded by PG and approved by the members.

3.6 Ghost fishing report

This report was received with thanks. GRT commented that he had previously said in a meeting that he was uncomfortable with the idea of NIFCA leaving abandoned gear in the district but noted that he is really pleased to read about the discussions that have been had with Ghost Fishing UK. FA told the meeting about the Indigo Project whose long-term aim is to develop biodegradable gear and skips for recycling; he will pass on the contact details for someone at this project. SL commented that he is an avid beach cleaner, and most fishing related recoveries are gear which is no longer in use and is thrown over the side and NIFCA should continue to be aware of this issue.

SR commented that there is an organisation called KIMO who are dedicated to recovering disused and discarded gear; they have provided a skip on the border that takes away old fishing gear and he will pass on their contact. JW confirmed that KIMO are starting a scheme which will be working with a number of ports and harbours in the UK, more details of which will be announced in April. He noted that they are working

alongside “Intermas” on the creation of gear made from compostable materials such as hemp and vanilla to make a rope which could be used as a back line for pots. This would likely break down within 1-2 years rather than in a longer time. JW also noted that he has some branded Fishing for Litter bags which he will be happy to give to NIFCA, if they will be useful. JW will speak to MS about this.

3.7 Byelaw Update including making new NIFCA Byelaw 1 re: trawling and review of Byelaw 2 dredging and Byelaw 4 update

Byelaw 1:

The CEO confirmed that the changes to this byelaw have now been made and are being implemented by the Authority.

Byelaw 2:

The CEO confirmed that a thorough debate was held at the Technical and Science meeting in September which resulted in a clear and unanimous recommendation to ban dredging, as contained in the meeting papers. The CEO explained that the decision to ban dredging is now before the Authority members, noting that the necessary legal advice has been taken and it both supports the principle and the wording of the byelaw. This is arguably the most significant but straightforward byelaw NIFCA will have made and it is a matter for this meeting to decide whether to bring in the prohibition. If agreed, the CEO confirmed that it will not come into immediate effect as the byelaw would need to go through statutory consultation by being advertised, following which it would then go to MMO and then to Defra; the new byelaw coming into legal effect would therefore still be a number of months away, if agreed today. The Chair explained that this is 3-years worth of work. The Authority has consulted on this twice, looking at both the science and socio-economic impact of a ban and also the benthic impact. He noted that Northumberland does not have a local dredging fleet to have to take into consideration but this ban will likely affect nomadic vessels. JW explained that we may want to consider adding a second point regarding transit and storage of dredge gear in the district, saying that they must be lashed and stowed securely. This was noted by the Chair with thanks.

The Chair asked for the meeting to vote on whether or not to accept the recommendation to ban dredging in the NIFCA district, including the new wording regarding lashed and stowed gear as suggested by JW. The vote was held and all members voted in favour of the ban, except for one member who abstained from the vote (FA).

Byelaw 4:

The CEO said that this is mostly a ‘tidying up’ exercise regarding the prohibition on a permit holder using the tags from multiple permits on one vessel (taking them over and above their maximum 800 tags per vessel). It has been advised by our solicitor that adding this wording should prevent any issue being raised. The CEO confirmed that as this is a permit condition, the Authority can make the amendment without going through the full byelaw process although we will still need to consult for 28 days with stakeholders giving them the opportunity to respond; if we were to receive any objections, the Authority would take legal advice. This recommendation was voted on and approved by all members voting in favour of the amendment.

3.8 Risk Matrix

The CEO confirmed that NIFCA continues to proactively risk assess, with thanks again to NCC who assisted with the introduction of the process when we became an IFCA. He explained that the Risk Matrix undergoes a review every six months where a

working group of officers assess the potential risks NIFCA could face, which at present includes the risks related to Covid. During the latest review, no major changes were made, but once the matrix has been updated it will be put onto the members section of the website for approval, following which it will go into the Annual Plan. The CEO noted that Covid remains the biggest perceived risk at the moment and the team are continuing to take a precautionary approach and function effectively.

3.9 Correspondence

The CEO confirmed that there is one correction required on page 68 (item 7); where it says “Green Link 1”, it should say “Green Link 2”.

The Chair asked if there was anything we need to consider regarding the article about attraction of crabs to electromagnetic cables to which AB explained that NIFCA is aware of this and will consider this going forward when responding to applications of this type. AB also noted that NIFCA is currently working alongside the St Abbs Marine Station on a different project but this is something they will discuss further when they next meet. The main concern is in relation to a potential disturbance of crabs on a migratory path, possibly affecting their breeding. The Chair asked if there was any information on the dead sea animals down the coast; AB said that there seems to be a mix of shellfish, both dead and shocked animals and it is trying to be determined if there is a possible pollution event occurring, although it does not appear to be likely. The other possibility being considered was a localised outbreak of disease but again there is no evidence of this yet. AB stated that NIFCA is currently awaiting the findings of tests conducted by the Environment Agency in the area.

Regarding the Environment Bill, the Chair commented that the Sentience Bill may be an issue for NIFCA to remain aware of. AB confirmed that he has been attending the Shellfish Committee and at a recent meeting, a representative confirmed that the Sentience Bill will not bring in new governance but will change the process and structure as to how legislation will be designed.

Regarding birds, SL commented that change is needed regarding the enforcement capacity in this area. The water course is managed by the Environment Agency but they do not have the capacity to deal with this and much more needs to be done as the current level of enforcement for this is not acceptable. AB explained that Dan Turner has updated NIFCA on this and AA has also spoken with Tom Cadwallender; there seems to be a knock-on effect on birds from toxic algal blooms reported off the coast of Scotland this year which may have caused birds to die, and may have caused behavioural changes in some birds which could explain their presence closer inshore and in estuaries. This has not been confirmed but seems to be the most likely cause.

Regarding item 3 about “Compensatory Measures”, SL commented that this is a welcomed measure which could potentially support NIFCA’s need for a new Enforcement Officer.

3.10 Summary Reports of Watch & Finance Committees by CEO

The CEO confirmed that the following items were discussed in the Finance Committee meeting:

The previous minutes of this meeting were accepted by the members as being an accurate record and the accounts were approved with thanks to JuS for his work in keeping on top of this. The CEO confirmed that consideration is being given to the possibility of a new Enforcement Officer, but it was decided that a paper outlining the

true costs of this would be necessary to aid a decision; one will be prepared after the meeting with JuS and a recommendation made to the Subcommittee. This paper will also outline the possibility of an apprenticeship, which was looked on very favourably by the subcommittee. The Chair confirmed that the Budget meeting will be held in December and it is hoped that we will get the majority of Councillor members in attendance as they have the veto over the budget.

The CEO confirmed that the following items were discussed in the Watch Committee meeting:

The previous minutes of this meeting were accepted by the members as being an accurate record and all other meeting reports were received. The meeting discussed two infringements and a decision was made for there to be FAPs of £250 for both cases (first offences for both). The vessels, vehicles and equipment report was approved and it was reported that the Seaspyder has had some difficulties and is currently with the manufacturers for repair. Whether it has been damaged or is a mechanical failure is yet to be decided, which will determine whether there is to be an insurance claim or not. The Chair noted that we were fortunate to have received this piece of kit gratis.

Also at the Watch Subcommittee meeting, the Chair gave an update on the Association of IFCAs which continues to do a great job for all IFCAs on the national stage. It was noted that potential Fisheries Management Plans and HPMAs (including possibly in Northumberland) will be hugely significant for IFCAs. A report on membership was also given by the Chair who has been working closely with the Association on this and it was reported to members that the 10-year rule has now been relaxed by the MMO and former members can now reapply. The Chair confirmed that the IFCAs have been through a recent round of membership interviews and while we have not heard back yet whether our 3 vacancies have been filled, it is hoped that they have. It was noted that we may need to go through another recruitment process again if not.

3.11 IFCO Reports

3.11.1. Chief IFCO Report on activities for quarter ending 30 September 2021, including guide to fishing vessels and recreational report

The CEO thanked MS for his report which gives a very comprehensive view of the work of the Enforcement team over the last few months including the national change regarding intertidal work. MS confirmed that it has been a decent season for fishers with no nets or scallop dredging in the district. The Chair said that it is good to see that AB, BH and KS have been on the Competent Officer course; AB commented that it was excellent.

3.11.2. Environmental IFCOs Report for quarter ending 30 September 2021

AB confirmed that it has been a busy quarter for the Environmental Team noting that they have resumed the Aln surveys (report to follow). It is also hoped that NIFCA Fisheries Management Plans will be completed by the end of the year. In response to a query from the Chair regarding Blyth Mussel bed decline, AB confirmed that the team have met with bait collectors in the Blyth estuary and discussed the decline about which there have been long historical reports. He confirmed that they are continuing to survey different beds including Holy Island and Blyth noting that there is not just one impact to cause this decline.

At this point, EC left the meeting.

The Chair noted that the team have found a potential new mussel bed to which AB confirmed that the team plans to revisit this.

SL declared an interest regarding NRT. He confirmed that water coast surveys are taking place regarding contamination levels in the area and this may be of relevance to the Authority in the future.

3.11.3. Maintenance Report and Engineering Log for quarter ending 30 September 2021 and Cabin RIB Report

This report was received with thanks. The Chair noted that St Aidan has had a turbo replaced which was confirmed by MS who explained that it previously only had one with no gasket but this is being changed. He noted that a lot of Cummings parts are struggling with supply issues at the moment.

3.13 Any Other Business

- a) Date of next meeting 24 January 2022 at venue TBC.

There being no further business, the meeting was closed at 15:00.