

MINUTES OF THE GENERAL COMMITTEE MEETING
HELD BY MICROSOFT TEAMS ON MONDAY 26TH
APRIL 2021 AT 2:15PM

PRESENT: NIFCA Members:

Mr L Weller (Chair and LW), Mr F Armstrong (FA), Mr B Burdis (BB), Mrs E Cartie (EC), Mrs L Dunn (LD), Mr P Gray (PG), Dr M Kitching (MK), Mr S Lowe (SL), Professor P Moore (PM), Mr G Renner-Thompson (GRT), Mr P Rippon (PR), Mr G Roughead (GR), Mr A B Ritchie (SR), C Seymour (CSe), Dr C Scott (CSc), Mr J Stephenson (JiS), Mr B Burdis (BB), Mr I Thomas (IT) and Mr J Wood (JW).

The meeting was also joined by Ms S Haly (SH) from Portsmouth City Council and Mr E Hind-Ozan (EHO) from Defra.

Also in attendance from NIFCA were the Chief Executive Officer Mr M H Hardy (CEO), Chief IFCO Mr M Southerton (MS), Lead IFCO Alex Aitken (AA) and the NIFCA Administrative Officer Mrs E Stiles (ES).

3.1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE; DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST; ELECTION OF CHAIR AND VICE CHAIR FOR THE TERM OF OFFICE TO 25TH APRIL 2022; AND TO REVIEW APPOINTMENT OF MEMBERS TO THE AUTHORITY SUBCOMMITTEES

Apologies:

Apologies for absence were received from Ms W Pattison (WP).

Declarations of Interest:

No declarations of interest were given.

Welcome from the Chair:

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting including visitors SH from Portsmouth City Council and EHO from Defra. He also welcomed new members, JW who is Fisheries and Research Manager at the North Sea Trust and PM, Professor of Marine Science at Newcastle University.

The Chair welcomed Admin Officer ES back from maternity leave and confirmed that KS has now successfully joined the Environmental Team after providing excellent admin cover during ES's absence.

Election of Chair and Vice Chair:

The CEO then led the meeting and confirmed that the meeting needed to elect the Chair and Vice Chair for the year ahead. He confirmed that LW has been nominated for Chair by IT. The nomination of LW was seconded by SL and the meeting voted unanimously in favour of LW continuing as the Chair for the year 2021-22.

LW resumed as the Chair and explained that WP has decided to step down as Vice Chair of the Authority; he gave his sincere thanks to WP for her work in this position over the last 4 years and confirmed his understanding that she has nominated GRT to take over as Vice Chair and he would second this. GRT said that it would be better to

do this after the Local Council Elections have taken place to which the Chair explained that this would leave the Authority with a Governance deficit and even if it is only temporary, he would be grateful if a Vice Chair could be elected today. This was accepted by GRT and agreed by the meeting and GRT was duly elected as Vice Chair.

Authority Subcommittees:

The CEO confirmed that anyone wishing to become part of the Finance or Watch Committees should say so now or contact him after the meeting. There were no comments and the present membership of these subcommittees were confirmed.

Presentation from EHO from Defra:

The Chair welcomed EHO to the meeting who then spoke about his work. He confirmed that he is Head of Fisheries Social Science at Defra and his team of 6-7 people look at the social dimension of fisheries management and have carried out the IFCA Review, which is still “in a queue” in Whitehall awaiting publication. His team are also linking with coastal communities around the country including Scarborough and North Shields. The team is also heavily involved in the Fisheries White Paper and are working on policies to implement partnership working and are keen to receive feedback from agencies about this. SL commented that NIFCA have been an exemplar in trying to engage with the wider community, both within their statutory remit and voluntarily and feels that the Authority often goes beyond its remit, including opening surveys up to other agencies; he noted that if others did the same as NIFCA we would be in a much better place. EHO thanked SL for his feedback and commented that the team will also be releasing a participation report for Sea Anglers soon.

3.2 DRAFT MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS QUARTERLY MEETING HELD ON 25 JANUARY 2021 AND MATTERS ARISING THEREFROM

These minutes were accepted as an accurate record of the meeting.

3.3 MEETINGS ATTENDED THROUGHOUT THE QUARTER

This report was received by the meeting with thanks. The CEO confirmed that thanks to many meetings moving to a digital format, Officers have been able to attend meetings and conferences with ease, including the SAGB meeting in January attended by AB and the Coastal Futures conference which was attended in part by all of the Environmental Team. Regarding the legislation allowing Local Authority meetings to take place online, the CEO confirmed that this expires on 7th May and currently is not going to be replaced which means all future meetings may need to be held in person, if other legislation is not brought in.

3.4 CHIEF EXECUTIVE’S REPORT ON SECOND QUARTER OF NIFCA 2020-21

This report was received with thanks by the meeting. The CEO was pleased to report that no one in the team have had COVID although there have been a number of people required to isolate due to being in close contact either with someone with a positive COVID result recently, or someone who themselves had been in close contact with somebody else who had tested positive, and those Officers/staff had been able to continue to work from home effectively during that time.

The CEO confirmed that the Annual Plan has now been completed and will be sent to Defra at the end of April, subject to any comments from members. The Chair gave thanks to all involved in producing this document.

The Chair explained that there are likely to be new HPMA's introduced in the next year or so, although it is yet to be seen whether there will be one in Northumberland.

3.5 PROJECTS INCLUDING WITH NEWCASTLE UNIVERSITY

The Chair confirmed that NP has retired as a NIFCA member and welcomed PM from Newcastle University who has recently joined the membership. He extended his sincere thanks to NP for all of his hard work with the Authority and the excellent relationship that has been maintained between NIFCA and the University with NP's support.

3.6 BYELAW UPDATE

The CEO confirmed that byelaw 1, Trawling, is now with the MMO and hopefully it will go to Defra and be made soon. The Authority are currently preparing forms, paperwork and permits in anticipation of it being made. The CEO also confirmed that the Minimum Sizes Byelaw has now been made permanent, the creation of which is an excellent example of joint working, being created in partnership with 3 other IFCA's.

3.7 RECREATIONAL ACTIVITY

This report was received with thanks by the meeting.

3.8 RISK ASSESSMENT

The CEO confirmed that the Authority carried out its 6-monthly review of the risk assessment matrix, in March. The document was initially developed some 9-10 years ago for NIFCA by NCC and gives great prominence to any potential risks we may face. He confirmed that our financial position is currently very satisfactory which was highlighted during the review of the matrix and the greatest risk at the moment continues to be COVID. The CEO confirmed that this requires proactive management and extended his thanks to MS who has diligently given attention to the health and safety requirements of the Authority during the pandemic. The CEO confirmed that the Risk Assessment Matrix is a public document and if anyone has any comments about this, they are welcome to feed them back.

3.9 CORRESPONDENCE

The Chair confirmed that the virtual Sea Angling meetings held so far at some of the other IFCA's have been well attended. He also noted that the Authority has had contact again from Ivor Rackham regarding mine water at Hauxley and information about this has been received by Mr Rackham from NIFCA with his thanks. The Chair asked CSe if there was an update about jet skis to which she confirmed that there are plans to regulate this and other similar activities in the future. Finally, the Chair extended his thanks to the NIFCA team for their work in the NE IFCA district resulting in a large fine in a prosecution brought by NE IFCA; the CEO confirmed that the enforcement team did a great job by going into the NE IFCA district and recognition of this was given by David McCandless in widespread media coverage for the case with thanks for the work carried out by our Officers.

3.10 SUMMARY REPORTS OF WATCH AND FINANCE COMMITTEES BY CEO

Finance:

The CEO confirmed that the minutes were approved by the meeting and all reports were received with thanks. The budget summary was approved by the meeting and an update regarding COVID was received. He explained that social distancing in the office remains essential and in the district Officers plan to restart boardings next month. Regarding new equipment, the CEO confirmed that there are a number of new items the Authority intends to purchase including getting the RIB, "TT St Aidan" coded. The CEO confirmed that all annual appraisals have been conducted satisfactorily and it follows that incremental rises will be given to those still eligible.

Watch:

The CEO confirmed that all minutes were approved, noting that the Technical and Scientific minutes from 7th April are to follow. All reports were received with thanks by the meeting and the CEO confirmed that new members have been welcomed to the Authority and noted also that there is a need for more proactivity from the MMO regarding the recruitment of future members. It was confirmed that Rob Clark is doing an excellent job as the new CEO of the Association of IFCA's and he also explained that the Watch Committee had some productive debate about the Terms of Reference of the Technical and Scientific committee, with a redraft to be completed and submitted to the members for approval. The CEO also confirmed that 2 infringements were discussed; the first was a successful court case relating to recreational gathering of 17 undersized lobsters, resulting in overall financial penalty of around £650 and the second is a case likely to result in a FAP.

3.11 IFCO REPORTS

3.11.1 Chief IFCO Report on activities for quarter ending 31 March 2021

MS explained that this has been a turbulent quarter for the industry with a lot of price fluctuations for fish and particularly poor prices for nephrops. PG commented that this is the picture which the MMO are also seeing with high prices for fish with people buying local and rock bottom prices for nephrops; MS added that the price of lobster is now higher than it was pre-COVID.

The Chair asked for an update regarding iVMS to which MS said that this was paused last year although trialling of some technology has continued throughout the year, including onboard St Aidan. The Chair noted that the report makes reference to salmon boats on page 67 and corrected that this should be sea trout. He asked if the net limitation is up for review next year which PR confirmed that it is and MS said that there has been an increase in gill netting recently, although landings were not good so it is unlikely this will continue.

3.11.2. Environmental IFCOs Report for quarter ending 31 March 2021

This report was received by the meeting with thanks. The Chair asked when the Sea Spyder report is likely to be completed to which AA confirmed that data analysis is currently underway with results for the first part of the project due in the next couple of months. The project has been extended to include analysis of areas fished prior to the mobile gear closure, results of this part of the project are expected by September next year. AA confirmed that she attended the national oyster nursery steering group which is an exciting new project. The Chair asked if the oysters are likely to come into conflict with the non-native oysters in Berwick to which AA said this is an interesting question to put to the group; SL commented that this is unlikely due to the coastal tidal drift although interactions between oysters and mussels could be interesting.

3.11.3. Maintenance Report and Engineering Log for quarter ending 31 March 2021 and Cabin RIB Report

MS confirmed that the issue with the oil pressure has now been resolved following the installation of a new oil pump and noted that the PV is currently out of the water.

All of the reports were received by the meeting.

At this point, SL left the meeting.

3.12 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There being no further business, the Chair closed the meeting at 15:42