

**MINUTES OF THE GENERAL COMMITTEE MEETING**  
**HELD AT DEFRA, LION HOUSE, ALNWICK ON MONDAY 26<sup>TH</sup>**  
**JULY 2021 AT 2PM**

**PRESENT: NIFCA Members:**

Mr L Weller (Chair), Mr F Armstrong (FA), Mrs E Cartie (EC), Mr P Gray (PG), Mr C Hardy (CH) and Mr G Renner-Thompson (GRT).

Also in attendance from NIFCA was the Chief Executive Officer Mr M H Hardy (CEO). Minutes were taken by the NIFCA Administrative Officer, Emma Stiles (ES).

**3.1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Apologies:

Apologies were received from: Mr B Burdis (BB), Mrs L Dunn (LD), Mr B Flux (BF), Dr M Kitching (MK), Mr S Lowe (SL), Professor P Moore (PM), Mr P Rippon (PR), Mr S Ritchie (SR), Dr C Scott (CSc), Mrs C Seymour (CSe), Mr J Stephenson (JiS), Mr I Thomas (IT) and Dr J Wood (JW).

Declarations:

No declarations of interest were given.

Welcome:

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and commented that (although in reduced numbers because of the continued effects of the COVID pandemic and to allow for social distancing), it is nice to be meeting Members in person for the first time since the start of the pandemic. The Chair said that there were a couple of things for Members to reflect on during this meeting; he first gave his thanks to the CEO and all Officers and staff for their continued hard work during the pandemic, which has not been easy and for maintaining the important work of NIFCA. He also noted the sad passing of two notable members of the fisheries sector; David Muirhead, former Chair of Cornwall IFCA and the Association of Sea Fisheries Committees and Dave Linkie, Journalist for the Fishing News who was a local man and covered our part of the country in his reporting. Thoughts and best wishes go to the families of these two gentlemen.

**3.2 DRAFT MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS QUARTERLY MEETING HELD ON 26 APRIL 2021 AND MATTERS ARISING THEREFROM**

The CEO confirmed that there are a couple of corrections to be made to the minutes. Firstly, on page 2 regarding the presentation from EHO it should read "IFCA Evaluation" instead of "IFCA Review" and also on page 2, regarding '3.3 Meetings Attended', it should read "SAGB Crustacea Committee Meeting" instead of "SAGB meeting". The Chair proposed acceptance of these amendments, which was seconded by GRT, and the amendments to the minutes were approved.

These minutes were accepted by the meeting.

**3.3 MEETINGS ATTENDED THROUGHOUT THE QUARTER**

This report was accepted by the meeting. GRT asked about the presentation to Long Horsley WI to which the CEO said that it went well and is part of a bigger initiative to

get the word about NIFCA out into the district. Altogether, about ten presentations have been given to local WI's over the last few years and while there is no longer the capacity to do future talks to a similar extent, those done have been very successful.

### **3.4 CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT ON SECOND QUARTER OF NIFCA 2021-22**

The CEO confirmed that he would like to suggest one change to his report on page 1 regarding Regional Fisheries Group, it should in fact read "...Fishermen (including anglers) and regulators". The Chair asked if PG had attended any RFG's to which PG said that he had not done so personally but other members of the MMO team have. He noted that the first was poorly attended due a spell of great weather creating perfect fishing conditions, although those who did manage to attend said it was worthwhile.

The Chair referred at this point to the Animals (Recognition Sentience) Bill currently in Parliament (Epitome of Correspondence item 16d) and the debate regarding Crustacea and Cephalopods to decide whether they are sentient beings; this could have a knock-on effect into the industry if it is decided that they are. GRT suggested that the CEO and Chair raise this issue with Ian Levy, MP when he attends the office in August.

The Chair noted the planned updates for the NIFCA website which includes the ability to apply and pay for permits online which will make the process easier for the public and Admin team. He noted that an interactive map is also an interesting idea and will be a good tool for NIFCA to have.

### **3.5 HPMAS**

The Chair confirmed that the evaluation of HPMAs is ongoing, and in the initial pilot it is looking likely to be only two inshore. He noted that it is being considered whether or not buffer zones should be included in HPMAs and this will affect how they are managed and it is hoped that a decision about where the HPMAs will be located will be made by the end of the year.

### **3.6 BYELAW UPDATE INCLUDING MAKING NEW NIFCA BYELAW 1 RE: TRAWLING AND REVIEW OF BYELAW 2 DREDGING**

The CEO confirmed that we are now awaiting confirmation from Defra that amendments to Byelaw 1 have been accepted, after which we will then be able to undertake the notification to stakeholders of the change. In response to a query by the Chair, the CEO said that to the best of his recollection the process for amending this byelaw started in 2017/18 and while it has gone through fairly smoothly, it has taken a number of years. The CEO said he would check the position and confirm with members. The CEO said for the benefit particularly of our new Member CH, the process is that NIFCA makes the byelaw which then goes through public consultation. The MMO then check the byelaw and respond to us with queries and suggestions (which in this case were very minimal suggestions regarding wording), following which upon acceptance by the MMO it is sent to Defra for a final check before being sent for Ministerial sign off; the Chair said that this is an excellent example of the length of time it takes to make a byelaw.

Regarding dredging, the CEO confirmed that this will be discussed at the Technical and Scientific meeting in September to hopefully make a decision. He confirmed that the Environmental team, along with himself and MS met with the Chair and IT to discuss the way forward. The suggestions from this meeting are to either retain the present byelaw, bring about a complete prohibition or an option in between the two; all

of these options will be discussed in September and hopefully a final recommendation can then be sent to the Quarterly Meeting in October.

### **3.7 RECREATIONAL ACTIVITY**

The Chair gave thanks to MS. He confirmed that this report relates to April through to June and noted that the district will very likely see an increase in activity over the summer months.

### **3.8 RISK MATRIX**

The CEO confirmed that NIFCA has a Risk Assessment Matrix which can be found in the Annual Plan. This document is reviewed twice a year, in March and September, and reported to the quarterly meeting, including the Finance Committee. He explained that the team continues to monitor risk on a daily basis, but no risk has arisen to require any amendment since the last review; the document will be reviewed again in September by the CEO, MS, ES, JuS and AA.

### **3.9 CORRESPONDENCE**

The Chair thanked the CEO for this really useful document. He also gave thanks to ES for NIFCA's excellent 10-year celebratory newsletter which has been shared with and commended by the Association CEO. The CEO noted that there is likely to be thousands of people along the coastline this year due to COVID who would otherwise have gone abroad on holiday; this will put extra pressure on the district with the potential for increased levels of particularly recreational activity.

The Chair noted that another sea cable is set to be brought through the district (item 15 in the Epitome). In response to a query from the Chair, PG explained that generally speaking, these cables are meant to be buried deep enough so that they do not come into contact with fishing gear, but there was recently a cable which underwent some negative interaction with fishing gear. The Chair commented that this issue may need to be considered alongside our own byelaw development.

### **3.10 SUMMARY REPORTS OF WATCH & FINANCE COMMITTEES BY CEO (ORAL)**

#### Finance:

The CEO confirmed that the minutes were approved with some minor amendments and the Risk Assessment Matrix was also reported on. The finance papers were approved and JuS was thanked for his work on them, clearly showing the good financial position NIFCA is currently in. The CEO confirmed that the COVID report was received by the meeting, noting that the office remains closed to public, but we are still able to interact safely with visitors, where required. He explained that Hybrid working continues with everyone working in the office and district where necessary and from home wherever possible; boardings are continuing on a basis of necessity and where there is considered to be a need, with extra precaution being taken, given the rising numbers of COVID cases in the area. It was confirmed that Precepts were signed by the CEO, Chair and Vice Chair and will be sent to the Councils following the meeting. The Expenditure Report was received by the meeting and the CEO explained that we will not be proceeding with Hy-pack equipment as it is not required for our fisheries; the main capital expenditure in the next quarter is anticipated to be the updating of the website, as explained in the addendum to the CEO report.

Watch:

The CEO confirmed that the minutes were approved, including those from the April Technical and Scientific meeting which were not able to be finalised in time for the April quarterly meeting. He confirmed that the meeting heard reports from MS on Sea Activity and Enforcement, including the report of a total financial penalty of circa £1,700 to an individual in a court case regarding obstructing officers and fishing without a recreational permit. Regarding NIFCA Vessels, MS reported that St Aidan has been out of action for short amount of time due to engine trouble; she is now undergoing repairs from our Engineer and hopes to be back at sea in the next couple of days. The CEO reported that NIFCA is also looking to get dash cams for the vehicles and noted the Chair's suggestion to get one for the back/roof of vehicles which will be passed on to MS.

It was confirmed that an Officer suffered back discomfort after lifting something during operations, but it was noted by the CEO that all Officers are trained in manual handling and he has since been assured that the Officer is fine and without any after effects. Membership was discussed at the Watch Committee, confirming that the two new members have been successfully inducted and the IFCAs are currently in the midst of the best MMO member recruitment campaign seen in the CEO's time with NIFCA; 3 new members are required in Northumberland. The CEO gave an update on the Association of IFCAs which is going incredibly well with an excellent Chair, Vice and CEO in place who are fully engaged in big national discussions.

In other business, the CEO confirmed that there were 3 matters for decision of the Watch Committee. Firstly, the CEO has undertaken a review of the grading structure, noting that there have been developments in the role of the Finance Officer, with the current position holder undertaking qualifications to enable needs to be met. It was **therefore voted on and approved** by the Watch Committee that this post should be moved from Grade E to D. It was also **approved** by the Committee to make reference in the Constitution to the CEO being appraised by the Vice Chair. Regarding the Standing Orders, it was agreed by the meeting to leave in the provision regarding virtual attendance at meetings (although it is agreed that this cannot currently be used), and this will be reviewed at each meeting, going forward. Finally, it **was approved by members** to update the Technical and Scientific Subcommittee Terms of Reference to state that there will be 6 general members on the subcommittee, plus the 3 Statutory Members, and the Chair and Vice Chair; other members will be permitted to join, where appropriate. This should enable the discussion to be more focussed. All updates to Constitutional documentation will be sent out to all members for their information.

The CEO requested approval of this report and acceptance of the matter for decision. The Chair proposed approval and acceptance, which was seconded by GRT, and confirmed by the meeting.

Regarding Fisheries Management Plans, the Chair requested that a paper is created about this for members, including the potential impact on IFCAs. He explained that the Association is taking this very seriously, anticipating that this will be a huge part of our work and important work streams are being developed by the Association to assist all IFCAs. The CEO confirmed that NIFCA already have Fisheries Management Plans in place for lobster and crab, but noted that the Administrations of each country in the UK will need to structure their own management of this, and we may see a shift of management to a more regional approach; he noted however that we are only at a very early stage of discussion right now.

### **3.11 IFCO REPORTS**

#### **3.11.1. Chief IFCO Report on activities for quarter ending 30 June 2021**

This report was received with thanks to MS.

#### **3.11.2. Environmental IFCOs Report for quarter ending 30 June 2021**

This report was received with thanks to AA; the meetings report gives an excellent indication of the workload of the team.

#### **3.11.3. Maintenance Report and Engineering Log for quarter ending 30 June 2021 and Cabin RIB Report**

This report was received with thanks to Paul Ridley. The Chair commented that it is good to see that St Aidan continues to work well.

### **3.12 ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

#### **a. Projects with Newcastle University**

The CEO gave thanks to PM for supporting AA with this report; it is always useful to look at which projects are being undertaken at the University.

#### **b. Marine Nature Partnership Report**

The CEO gave thanks to Nick Brodin for providing an update on the MNP to the meeting. He confirmed that it is felt by the Chair that this report is an important source of information which feeds into the decision-making process at the start of the financial year regarding the donation of £4,000 per year by NIFCA towards the partnership. Nick reports to us on an annual basis and was planning to attend this meeting but of course could not, in all of the circumstances. The Chair commented that the MNP remains an important part of marine management in this area, as does the AONB and the latest AONB report was disappointing, as there had been no mention of NIFCA who had previously played an important part in the AONB.

The CEO said that the MNP remains a very worthy partnership and as we do review our donation annually, we should continue to get this report to justify our spending. He also confirmed that BH is featured on the MNP website discussing Eider ducks which is an excellent contribution.

#### **c. Date of next meeting 25 October 2021 at venue TBC**

The CEO confirmed that the venue is still to be decided upon and will be dependent on restrictions at the time. He confirmed that the Council Chamber is now available and hopefully will be available for use at a future meeting, if agreed by the meeting. The membership confirmed that the CEO should enquire about this meeting venue for the next quarterly meeting, and it was agreed that if it is only available for use in the morning, this should be accepted.

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