

**MINUTES OF THE GENERAL COMMITTEE MEETING
HELD AT THE EAST BEDLINGTON COMMUNITY CENTRE
ON MONDAY 24TH JANUARY 2022 AT 1PM**

PRESENT: NIFCA Members:

Mr L Weller (Chair), Mr F Armstrong (FA), Mr B Burdis (BB), Mrs E Cartie (EC), Mrs L Dunn (LD), Mr B Flux (BF), Mr S Lowe (SL), Dr M Kitching (MK), Professor P Moore (PM), Mr P Rippon (PR) and Mr I Thomas (IT).

Also in attendance from NIFCA was the Chief Executive Officer Mr M H Hardy (CEO), the Chief IFCO Mr M Southerton (MS) and the Lead Environmental IFCO Ms A Aitken (AA). Minutes were taken by the NIFCA Administrative Officer, Emma Stiles (ES).

In attendance by Microsoft Team were Dr C Scott (CS) and Dr J Wood (JW).

3.1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies:

Apologies were received from: Mr G Renner-Thompson (GRT), Mrs C Seymour (CS), Mr C Hardy (CH), Mr P Gray (PG) and Mr J Stephenson (JiS).

Declarations:

There were no declarations of interest.

The Chair gave thanks to those members attending virtually and reminded them that they are unable to vote in matters requiring an Authority decision.

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

SL proposed acceptance of the minutes, which was seconded by LD.

3.3 NIFCA BUDGET 2022-23

The CEO noted that this is a matter for decision; plans were outlined in the December Budget Planning Meeting where it was recommended by members to make a 5% precept increase, allowing a modest but fair 2% COL increase for all staff and the recruitment of an additional enforcement IFCO. The CEO gave thanks to JuS for creating the papers and noted that the PV fund is the only area of concern in the budget in which it is in question whether we will reach the required amount to replace the vessel within 10-years. He confirmed that there is the potential of additional funding feeding into the PV fund from chartering, but the concern should be borne in mind as the position in 10-years time is unknown with changes in technology and focus on green policy needing to be taken into consideration.

The Chair gave thanks to predecessors whose forethought to set up this fund resulted in the timely purchase of St Aidan which is now 6-years old. The Chair explained that while a 16 year-life for the PV is not out of the question, a forecast of £2m+ for a new vessel with a potentially small return on St Aidan is likely what NIFCA faces in 10-years. IT noted that at the current rate of contribution to the fund, we may have a deficit,

with only £1.25m put away in 10-years' time.

The Chair asked for consideration of the proposed budget by members. BB proposed acceptance which was seconded by BF. All members voted unanimously to accept the budget. The Chair gave thanks to the members for their input in this process and especially to the Councillor members for attending the finance meetings which is essential. Thanks was also given to JuS.

3.4 MEETINGS ATTENDED THROUGHOUT THE QUARTER

This report was received with thanks by the meeting. The CEO confirmed that NIFCA in the person of Chief IFCO Southerton attended the Regional Fisheries Groups (RFGs) set up by Defra and the MMO, chaired by Patrick Gray. The intention of these groups is to reach out to the fishing industry to get further engagement with stakeholders. This was discussed at the meeting of IFCA Chief Officers, and it is not felt that the RFGs are working effectively yet, although everyone agreed that they will be significant for future engagement for all industries with an interest in the fishing sector and we will continue to engage.

The Chair commented that there is frustration amongst anglers about not being included in the RFGs, as it is felt that they will also be affected by future Fisheries Management Plans. MS explained that it is planned to discuss the nephrops fishery in the Farne Deeps at the next meeting which may have more attendance/industry interest.

JW explained that the groups have been set up by Defra to achieve co-management but currently it seems to be being used more as a sounding board for the industry and not beneficial discussions. JW said he is very keen to see them facilitated and managed better as some of the industry feedback is very useful and does not think the platform is functioning as well as it could right now. The Chair asked if there was any discussion regarding recreational to which JW said there was not, noting that not a lot of productive discussion came out of the latest meeting.

3.5 CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT ON THIRD QUARTER OF NIFCA 2021-22

The CEO gave his thanks to staff for battling through the difficult circumstances NIFCA has faced over the last two years. He noted that NIFCA has remained cautious but proactive throughout the pandemic and has continued to function effectively with hybrid working.

The CEO confirmed that there is so much going on at this moment in time and he does not think there has ever been a period of such change for inshore management, even during the transition from SFC to IFCAs. He confirmed that we are now looking at many areas of new legal provision including possible HPMAs, the position with FMPs and the Joint Fisheries Statement (which will require IFCA input via the Association) and also Defra's requirements for arms-length bodies who receive Defra funding to provide specified data, which could be possibly seen as moving IFCAs slightly away from being an independent body by having to feed into a national database. The CEO confirmed that the IFCAs are also still awaiting confirmation on a decision regarding the future of

New Burdens Funding. For Northumberland, the fund is less essential but for some IFCA's, its loss would be much more significant. However, throughout all of this change, the NIFCA team continues to function fantastically and is achieving some excellent outcomes.

Regarding the website, the CEO confirmed that ES is working with Urban River to make the website more supportive and user friendly; updates include also making it more contemporary, provision of an interactive MPA map, an updated members section and introduction of an online permit application/payment system.

The CEO confirmed that this is the time of year when we announce the Jon Green (JG) Award for Excellence. For those who do not know, JG was our Deputy Chief Enviro IFCO who unfortunately suffered serious ill-health and tragically died less than a year after his retirement from NIFCA and (with great sadness during the pandemic) we could not recognise his passing in the way we wanted to. The Chair suggested the award to represent JG's work with NIFCA and it has been decided this year to give the award to MS who has more than "gone the extra mile" as Chief IFCO, at an extremely difficult time. For example, working beyond his role on the iVMS project whilst also always finding the time to speak to and support his team. The Chair congratulated MS who took up the Chief IFCO position when AB retired and MS has more than risen to the challenge; the Chair gave sincere thanks from the Authority. MS thanked the Authority for the Award and said that everything that has been achieved could not have been done without everyone in the team.

The Chair noted that this is our first meeting of 2022 and many things seem to be up in the air including the Spending Review, New Burdens Fund, FMPs, HPMA's etc. There is so much happening and also a huge amount of pressure on Northumberland particularly and the surrounding area with people coming into the district for tourism.

3.6 INSHORE FISHERIES AND CLIMATE CHANGE

The CEO noted that this meeting provided an opportunity to put climate change onto NIFCA's agenda. He confirmed that the environmental team really appreciated the input from members on this and while we have not created a way forward yet, the main thoughts are two-fold: firstly, an inward facing review of NIFCA's climate impact as an organisation and secondly, an outward facing review of the impacts felt on the fishery, on behalf of stakeholders. This is very much on the national agenda of course and the Joint Fisheries Statement is likely to include climate change considerations. Moving forward, NIFCA will need to remain conscious of this issue and we will also refer to this in our Annual and Research Plans. Consideration regarding a working strategy such as hybrid working, NIFCA vessels, Authority travel etc. will be given and we will seek contribution from members about this to build on our previous discussion. NIFCA will also need to create a Carbon Reduction Plan and we have researched some precedents to begin this process, including the Central Government's guidance on producing one. The CEO said that NIFCA is conscious that we do not raise expectations about this too high with so much activity in our core remit, but it can be considered amongst other workstreams moving forward.

The Chair said the notes from the previous discussion were very interesting and he

was impressed by the questions and contributions which emerged. Comments made by MS that we should try and reduce our carbon footprint were particularly noted and the aim to build this into Annual Planning should be achievable. There is no doubt that we can make small and achievable changes. SL commented that the most important element of this is to put this onto our legitimacy list so we can discuss it alongside any topic.

3.7 BYELAW UPDATE INCLUDING REVIEW OF BYELAW 2 DREDGING AND BYELAW 4 UPDATE

The CEO referred members to page 56 of the papers and the two recently completed byelaw changes. Regarding byelaw 2 dredging, he confirmed that we have undertaken the statutory consultation and had feedback from a couple of fishers who felt that the dredge fishery should not come to an end in Northumberland. Officers have put together a package which will go to Defra including the initial consultation, Impact Assessments, the formal consultation, industry feedback and the draft byelaw; the MMO will conduct a minimum of a 45-day consultation period before forwarding to Defra to implement the byelaw, if they see no issues with it. This could potentially see the byelaw brought in by the summer, although there is no guarantee for progress to remain on schedule.

Regarding the byelaw 4 permit condition amendment to ensure people were not using the incorrect vessel to fish pots, this has been confirmed with the industry for feedback and we received just two queries asking for clarification about the change, from which no concerns were raised. The CEO confirmed that we will now contact those permit holders affected to explain that the conditions have been changed. The CEO noted that byelaws are constantly under review by NIFCA, and permit conditions can be changed internally through consultation. The next consideration of the Authority will be the Fixed Engine byelaw. MS confirmed that we will have to consult on this with the EA due to elements of the netting fishery which can impact on migratory fish. PR confirmed that the Net Limitation Order is also due for review and a formal consultation will follow in February/March, led by Jonathan Shelley. PR confirmed that there will be a cross-over to this NIFCA byelaw as mentioned by MS and the EA can consult on this with NIFCA. SL asked if this would go through the Technical and Scientific Meeting which MH confirmed that it will. In response to a question the CEO confirmed the position regarding keeping IFCA byelaws under review.

3.8 RISK MATRIX

The CEO confirmed that this is a standing agenda item to forecast and manage risk. The document which used to run to 6 pages now runs to 16 and the system in which we ascertain the risk, monitor and then consider further action to be taken works extremely well. The review is carried out by MH, MS, EC, JuS and AA with the next review due in March; the review also looks at our COVID plans. The CEO confirmed that the team has adapted well during the pandemic and maintained close to business as usual, fulfilling our remit. The approach we have adopted as a team and the understanding everyone has shown has been exemplary. Since that additional risk came into the matrix in Spring 2020, there are no additional risks which have been added and the CEO feels we have a comprehensive matrix which considers a full range

of risks from staff illness to finance risk and stock collapse. The CEO noted that our financial books balance very well and the only major concern we have moving forward is the PV fund. It was confirmed that the current risk matrix can be seen on the members section of the website and in the Annual Report.

3.9 CORRESPONDENCE

The Chair gave thanks for this report which he considers to be very useful. He noted that the Scottish Government had plans to consider a similar system of management to IFCA's and if the potential 3-mile rule in Scotland came in, we could have more fishers coming across the border. The Chair asked where we are with Lynemouth, to which SL noted that he will try to get a response on this as part of National Rivers Trust.

Regarding crab, the Chair noted that the scientific research to say they are mesmerised by cables is interesting and perhaps in the future NIFCA should give feedback that we do not think underwater cables are a good idea due to this evidence.

Regarding Animal Protection Legislation for cephalopods, crustaceans etc. IT asked how will this affect the industry? AA explained that the industry will not be affected by it yet, but it may affect the prices for shellfish in the future, but we are unsure how or when.

3.10 SUMMARY REPORTS OF WATCH & FINANCE COMMITTEES BY CEO

Finance:

The CEO confirmed that the minutes were approved with no Matters arising and discussion regarding the Risk assessment and consideration of accounts of year 2021-22 took place. Considerable discussion regarding the reserves/PV fund was held and it is generally felt that we need to consider the future thoroughly and continue to build the PV fund as much as we can in case of future issues. The CEO noted that there was mention of the Authority Annual Audit, something which is undertaken voluntarily by NIFCA and led by the NCC Auditing Officer, working in conjunction with JuS. We have recently had reports of almost flawless finance processes from the audit team who offer a very reasonable fee for their services. The Audit Terms of Reference were considered and approved by the Finance Committee and which were now being brought before this meeting for consideration and approval.

EC proposed acceptance of the Terms of Reference, which was seconded by SL and voted in favour unanimously by the meeting.

Watch:

The CEO confirmed that the minutes were approved and reports discussed, with thanks to MS. All items were accepted and the main item to mention was that one of our Officers was assaulted a few months ago with a solid object being thrown at him from a disgruntled person. The Authority took this to the Police and a case is now ready for a date in Court where the individual will face 2 counts: one of common assault and one for breach of the peace. We are currently awaiting a hearing date. The CEO has prepared a victim statement saying why the Officers are working out on the coast and

should not be assaulted or obstructed in the line of duty. This was sent to the Police who passed it onto the Crown Prosecution Service. The assaulted Officer is fine, but Officers should not have to experience this type of activity towards them, and it is important for CPS to get across to the Court that the act was carried out against someone who was acting in the line of public duty and we hope it is treated seriously by the Court.

The CEO said that we are now awaiting confirmation of two new members and undergoing a further recruitment campaign which is hoped to result in us having 21 members again for the first time since Claire Hedley left. The Chair will also be initiating our light touch MMO General member appraisals which are due to take place in March; the Chair has no concerns about any members. There will be an induction of our new members and IT has volunteered to come along to that; it is hoped we will be able to do this in the office and have other members there to give the new members the best possible idea of what it is to be a member of the Authority. It will also be confirmed that individuals are not there to represent their sector, but to bring their expertise to the table.

The CEO confirmed that the AIFCA was also discussed, noting that Rob Clark continues to do an excellent job on the national stage and an ability to engage with people at a high level in Defra. A good example of this at the moment is regarding finance; we are still awaiting confirmation of NBF and it is hoped we will get a decision on that soon.

Regarding staff matters, the meeting discussed COVID, reviewing the position of reopening the office and the continued hybrid working of the team. Discussion regarding recruitment also took place and it was agreed for a subcommittee meeting to take place as soon as possible. It was also confirmed by the CEO that the IFCO Engineer has given his notice. He will serve a 6-month notice, working 3 months f/t and the following 3 months p/t. The aim will be to recruit someone, allowing a 6-week handover period. The Chair noted that he would like to thank PR for his service to NIFCA; he has been an outstanding Engineer.

At this point BF left the meeting.

3.11 IFCO REPORTS

3.11.1. Chief IFCO Report on activities for quarter ending 31 December 2021

MS confirmed that huge impacts have been felt by the industry from recent storms with one permit holder reporting the loss of all of his gear and deciding not to renew his permit. Conditions have been awful with high reports of wildlife killed, but there was a buoyant ending to the year regarding fish prices and stocks remaining strong. There has been strong demand for shellfish and fish which has been good for the trawl fisheries and 25-30 vessels have been reporting good fisheries in the Farne Deeps.

MS noted that recreational activity continues to be supported by KS who attended one of the Bedlington Fishing Competitions and spoke with a lot of

anglers. Sadly, there was report of the loss of life of a diver in the early part of the quarter highlighting the dangers surrounding this activity.

There was an unexpected sighting of a walrus in the district and the iVMS project continues to progress with the tranche one roll out expected in the early part of this year. SL referred to Facebook comments listed on page 73 of the papers regarding sales and commerce Facebook have changed policies and this should be tighter. Sale of live animals and animal products should now be banned and needs to be reported by people if it is seen taking place on the website.

3.11.2. Environmental IFCOs Report for quarter ending 31 December 2021

AA gave an update on fisheries monitoring, including relating to the periwinkle fishery and also NIFCA's work with Newcastle University. The Environmental Team are currently developing the Authority Research Plan and welcome any thoughts from members. The Chair noted that we always focus on Coquet to St Mary's but the AIn Estuary needs to be looked at and wondered if there will be an opportunity to look at this busy estuary in the summer. AA explained that fishery Impact Assessment on the area have been completed and will be happy to share this with Members, although there is one outstanding assessment on crab/tiles.

The Chair asked if anyone at the EA has been looking at the anti-foul being scraped off into the foreshore to which PR said he is not sure but can check.

At this point PM and BF left the meeting.

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

The Chair gave thanks to PR for this report noting that the vessels are going well. He confirmed that NIFCA has a new trailer coming from Holland and TT St Aidan can be taken from the vessel when it has been received. IT noted the use of Engine Oil over the quarter is nil which shows the good condition of the engines.

3.12 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

PR confirmed that he will now be working as the Fisheries Tech Specialist within the EA and will act in a Senior Advisors role in the English Channel, looking at stress on salmon. PR will be involved in policy change/recommendation and given how the job interacts with fisheries, he has requested to stay on the NIFCA committee which has been accepted. That was welcomed by the Chair.

- a) Date of next meeting 25 April 2022 at venue TBC

There being no further business, the Chair closed the meeting at 14:50.