

**MINUTES OF THE GENERAL COMMITTEE MEETING**  
**HELD AT THE NIFCA OFFICE, 8 ENNERDALE ROAD, BLYTH, NE24 4RT**  
**ON MONDAY 24<sup>th</sup> JULY 2023 AT 1PM**

**Actions arising from minutes are highlighted in blue and collated in the actions table at the end of the document.**

**PRESENT: NIFCA Members:**

Mr L Weller (Chair/LW), Mr F Armstrong (FA), Mr Brian Burdis (BB), Mr P Dent (PD), Mr P Gray (PG), Ms A Henderson (AH), Mr M Nugent (MN), Professor P Moore (PM), Mr P Rippon (PR), Dr C Scott (CS), Mr J Stephenson (JS), Mr M Swinbank (MSw), Mr I Thomas (IT), Mr A Wallace (AW) and Dr J Wood (JW).

Also in attendance from NIFCA was the Chief Officer Mr M Southerton (MS) and the Lead Environmental Officer, Ms A Aitken (AA), Lead Enforcement Officer Mr N Weir (NW) and Senior Environmental Officer Mr A Boon (AB). Minutes were taken by A Boon (AB).

The meeting was also joined by Mr J Batey (JB) from East Bedlington Parish Council, Ms S Ingram (SI) from the MMO and Ms C Smith (CSm), a member of the public.

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

Apologies for absence were received from:

- Liz Dunn
- Colin Hardy
- Martin Kitching
- Steve Lowe

No declarations of interests were received at this point in the meeting.

- LW**
- Introductions and housekeeping to visitors

**3.2 Draft Minutes of previous meeting held on the 24<sup>th</sup> April 2023**

- MS**
- Addition to 3.1 – AH gave apologies for that meeting
  - Actions have been reviewed and completed
- LW**
- Just to note that the FMPs have been launched by Defra and consultation ongoing
  - This will be covered more later
  
  - Minutes were accepted.

**3.3 Meetings attended throughout the quarter**

- Report accepted by the meeting.

**3.4 FMP's Fisher Interviews Report NIFCA/Newcastle University**

- MS**
- Any feedback on the report would be welcomed to either Sarah Coulthard or MS and would welcome input from members.

- LW**
  - Leads nicely into following v-notching discussion and would welcome input from fishers in attendance on their views.
  - Gave background to v-notching project and the success of the previous work.
- MS**
  - Sarah's report highlights that v-notching for stock enhancement was fully supported by those interviewed, which is why it was a key recommendation.

### 3.5 V Notching Program

- MS**
  - Discussion paper for members to discuss how we fund this going forward
- LW**
  - Can either be left to be organised to the T and S committee or set up a new committee.
  - EDF previously offered money for v-notching scheme that was rejected by the Authority. The big question is finding funding schemes for this.
  - Previously some fishermen contributed to the scheme on a voluntary basis.
  - We would look at buying larger female lobsters in the absence of berried lobsters being available from wholesalers.
  - Question of fairness of the use of public money to make it balanced for all stakeholders.
  - Sarah Coulthard has done the groundwork on this since her involvement in the HPMA process and recent project. AIFCA is now using Sarah for engagement nationally after the success of the local projects in Northumberland.
- JS**
  - Suspect we would all be in favour of v-notching but welcome member input.
  - Fishermen wouldn't want to throw away berried hens and v-notched lobsters too.
- MN**
  - Would prefer to go back to what it was before the berried hen ban.
  - Could be possible to do the v-notching in partnership with the offshore surveys by the Environmental Team, so lobsters could be returned immediately and in the same place they are from.
- PD**
  - They would be weighed at sea and fishers would get the fair market price.
  - Agree with MN on how this could be done. Cefas pay £50 per day for their observers to go to sea on fishing vessels.
  - People are scrubbing berried hens and there is evidence about this. Would it not be easier for fishermen to land berried lobsters at certain times of the year and for them to be v-notched and released.
  - Not sure whether this could be done with the current NIFCA byelaws.
  - Windfarms are taking but not giving back to the industry, making people move gear for their work to be carried out. Could the windfarm sector finance this?
- MS**
  - It would be logistically difficult to coordinate people to land berried lobsters at certain times and resourcing would be difficult for facilitating the release.
  - To reply to JS – all v-notched lobsters would have already been landed and purchased from wholesaler, and therefore have already been removed from the fishery. NIFCA can better emphasise this and inform industry.
- LW**
  - These are lobsters that have already been landed
  - Fishers would land lobsters as normal and then NIFCA would purchase from wholesaler.
  - This would not stop people v-notching voluntarily, as some currently do, and would not stop people scrubbing but would make it harder if lobsters are v-notched, as it is illegal to land a v-notched lobster.
  - Significant conviction in Cornwall in Fishing News for £28,000 for berried hens recently.
  - There is a chemical test for detecting scrubbing but has not yet become case law.
- PM**
  - Test is only good for 6 hours after lobsters are scrubbed and is time critical.
- LW**
  - Goes back to educating the clerks of courts for future convictions, which is what NIFCA is currently looking at.

- It does seem that this is definitely something that fishers are in support of.
  - Would we like to set up new committee or make decision now?
- PM**
- Yes fishers like v-notch scheme, but what are fishers' opinion about a v-notch scheme running alongside berried?
- MS**
- Less favourable to run alongside a ban on berried hens.
- MN**
- Berried ban is immaterial, as that is just the rules now, it's like having an issue with minimum sizes. Need to just accept it.
- PG**
- There would be a difficulty with coordinating dispensations for people to land berried hens.
  - Could this become an industry-led initiative, where NIFCA provides v-notching equipment.
- LW**
- V-notching is voluntary at present, and it is NIFCA being proactive.
  - MN point is valid, and it may be that fishers in Sarah's report likely do not know mechanics of legislation.
- MN**
- Are there not rumours of possibly getting rid of berried ban in FMP?
- AH**
- Looking at funding in previous reports, it was £8-11,000 previously, could this not be windfarm money? It would be a drop in the ocean for them.
  - What could NIFCA fund themselves?
  - Public support is for conservation initiatives, but we would not like to place additional pressure on fishers or wholesalers.
- LW**
- Previously the discussions with EDF were difficult given NIFCA's position responding to marine licenses.
  - JW may be able to contribute.
- JW**
- Previously run some of the largest schemes with windfarms
  - EON - £120,000 given over 5 years using onboard surveys, where lobsters were weighed at sea and purchased for market price and released.
  - Another approach was buying larger lobsters from wholesalers. That was okay, but release areas were monitored by local vessels and heavily fished when lobsters had been released.
  - EON approached NEIFCA previously because of difficulties with compensation agreements between industry and developers. It came through the IFCA as a donation to run a v-notching scheme.
  - Surveyor scheme works much better. This then also stops fishermen being overrun with v-notch lobsters in one area.
  - Is it possible to approach developers and ask for money?
- AA**
- For JW and MN, would you get the same quantities through offshore surveys as buying from wholesalers?
- JW**
- We had a budget per day, and it is up to fishermen about how many to v-notch per day.
- AA**
- Would it be possible to do a hybrid of both offshore v-notching, as well as v-notching from the wholesalers?
- LW**
- **Requested that AA prepare a report for the next Technical and Scientific meeting and liaise with JW.**
  - NIFCA needs to be seen to accelerate this and it appears that previous ethical questions are now being answered.
- AA**
- Agreed to provide report at next quarterly meeting
- AW**
- SSE is the next big developer, not EDF, as they have a cable set to come ashore at Cambois.
  - How do we get our name into these discussions for funding?
- JW**
- Funding in the past was previously through Section 106 agreements with NEIFCA.
  - There are community funding pots available. Recently Whitby Lobster Hatchery given £95,000 for pipelines coming into Redcar.
- LW**
- We have our own lobster hatchery locally that we have contributed to in the past. This is very underfunded and could be supported by these funding pots.

### 3.6 FMP Consultation

- MS**
- On 17<sup>th</sup> July, consultations for 6 frontrunner FMPs opened until 1<sup>st</sup> October. These are the first of 43 FMPs in total.
  - The main one affecting NIFCA will be the Crab and Lobster FMP, but we will look to respond to the Bass and Whelk plans as well.
  - At the last Technical and Scientific meeting, it was decided that officers would draft the consultation response and bring this back to the Authority for comments.
  - These consultations are open to everyone and would encourage everyone to respond if possible.
  - There is an in-person event scheduled for 10<sup>th</sup> August at North Shields, which would be good to have fishers to attend. The venue is not finalised, but NIFCA will share details when possible.
  - There are also a number of other consultations running at the same time as the FMPs, so there is a significant amount of work up and coming for officers.
- LW**
- NIFCA should look at the Southern North Sea and Eastern Channel mixed flatfish FMP, as this will affect recreational anglers, as well as pot bait for commercial fishers.
- JW**
- Southern North Sea only extends from Flamborough Head southward.
- AA**
- For the FMP, the scope extends to ICES area 4b, which includes the NIFCA district.
- MSw**
- How will these plans be implemented? Will it just be dumped upon us?
- LW**
- Regionally as an IFCA we can do our bit and respond accordingly, it is whether we are listened to that is the question.
  - It is up to Defra as to how they include feedback from the consultations.
- MS**
- Main thing is for fishers to respond themselves, as well as the IFCA response from the Authority.
- MN**
- Do FMPs just undermine IFCAs and their regionality?
- MS**
- All changes affect English waters and therefore the border differences will be an issue for us in Northumberland.
- LW**
- Defra don't want to talk to each IFCA so are going through the AIFCA for a collective voice. It is important to keep the voice of regional management.
- LW**
- When Defra came up and attended a fisher forum, they were surprised by feedback from local stakeholders.
- AA**
- The difficulty is that this is a national plan coming from Defra, but it is hoped that we are listened to on our feedback.
  - Defra have attended fisher forums after initial feedback to the plans and following this, the released draft plan has now removed harmonisation from proposals possibly from NIFCA response and feedback from fishers. It does appear that they are open to feedback.
- MS**
- Good example by AA. Andy Burn from Defra said the challenges raised by NIFCA and fishers at the fisher forum were not raised elsewhere so has helped with insight into this.

### 3.7 Fixed Engine Byelaw Update

- MS**
- Byelaw is currently in review and work is ongoing.
  - Officers are making progress and essentially looking at it as a general netting byelaw and to bring netting under permit scheme.
  - The review is looking into the seasonality and water depth restrictions.
  - Legal advice has been sought from Andrew Oliver about restrictions outside of NIFCA district. Any sections beyond NIFCA boundary should have been removed from the byelaw when it was initially brought in.
  - Will share written advice with PR from EA.

- PR
  - Need to know the ramifications of this on the management of salmonids and ensure same level of protection is offered from this review.
- PD
  - It should be noted that a jack-up rig is set to arrive in Cambois Bay for ongoing marine survey work for the proposed cable making landfall at Cambois.
  - Will this affect the Wansbeck and Blyth and have an impact on salmonids?
- LW
  - Have we received a licence for this?
- AB
  - This is part of the nearshore geophysical survey for this project. No licence needed for drilling, only for backfilling of the holes created.
- AW
  - Recent work has been carried out at Wansbeck as a result of exposed cables on the shore.
- LW
  - Communication is key between all bodies involved in these developments. The marine environment very important to Northumberland.
  - The proposed byelaw seems fairly simple, but the important thing is what the EA and Tweed Commission think of this.

### 3.8 **Final Accounts for the year ending 2022/23 (for approval)**

- LW
  - Matter for decision for members.
  - Recommended for approval at this morning's finance meeting.
  - Accepted unanimously by members – IT/BB

### 3.9 **NIFCA Audit Report (for approval)**

- LW
  - NIFCA does not legally have to be audited but we choose to be. After a very thorough job from Northumberland County Council, the only recommendation is to have backup processes in place for finance officer during periods of absence.
  - Senior management team to work through this and plan for the future and train up.
  - Matter for decision for members.
  - Accepted unanimously by members – BB/IT
  - IT left the meeting at this point.

### 3.10 **Summary Reports of Watch & Finance Committees by Chief Officer**

- MS
  - **Finance Committee:** Summary provided of the status of possible building work for the office. NIFCA has received 3 quotes and is currently reviewing them.
  - For staffing, Emma has started her maternity leave. Wayne Mitchell will soon finish his 6-month probation and begin his role of Engineer/Skipper. Approval was also given for the appointment of an additional Environmental Officer on a 2-year contract.
  - Approval was also given for the purchase of hi-pack software.
  - Options were discussed for the procurement of a 3<sup>rd</sup> NIFCA vehicle. It was agreed to purchase a vehicle of up to £15,000.
- MSw
  - Have there been any consideration of environmentally friendly additions to the office?
- LW
  - Environmental team have looked and are looking into this. There was no availability for an electric vehicle from the council to lease.
  - NIFCA is also limited to what it can do to the office given the lease agreement.
- MS
  - Will look at replacing and upgrading things when required. NIFCA has already replaced the lighting in the office and is always looking at getting better environmental credentials.
- LW
  - Always an appetite to update things and look at how things can be more environmentally friendly.
- MS
  - **Watch Committee:** Minutes of the last meeting were presented and approved by members.

- The minutes from the Technical and Scientific Meeting on 8<sup>th</sup> June were presented and approved by members.
- Patrol Vessel and Enforcement report received and accepted by members.
- Health and Safety report received and accepted by members.
- Members received updates from AIFCA relating to the SR21 funding, cockle FMP and theory of change project.
- All reports approved by members

### **3.11 IFCO REPORTS**

#### **3.11.1 Chief Officer's Report (Members only)**

- LW** • Since Mike has left, things have changed slightly and encourage members to look on the members section of the website for member roundup.
- MS** • Anything members want added can be put on the website.
- MSw** • Not specific to this, but is there any work looking into sea surface temperature?
- MS** • NIFCA recently purchased a number of temperature dataloggers and is looking to work with fishers to attach these to pots for long-term at-depth sea temperature data.
- PM** • Between the Tyne and the Tweed, the inshore area has been average for this time of year. Further off has been affected greatly.
- LW** • RSA species challenge is a good example of how we are looking to collect more data and track key species such as bass and smoothounds to indicate warmer waters.
- PM** • Currently work in areas relating to impacts of marine heatwaves, which can have devastating effects on fisheries.
- NERC Urgency Money is only fund for marine heatwaves. There is just no flexibility in this country to look at the impacts of marine heatwaves, which can have significant effects on plankton and their associated foodwebs.
- MN** • Is this a spike in temperature or a longer-term constant increase?
- PM** • It was a spike that has since dissipated. It was around 4°C degrees above average for about 2 weeks, but it does look like it will be a marine heatwave until September.
- LW** • Have there been any further updates on bird flu in the area?
- MS** • There have been new reports of additional deaths due to bird flu, particularly terns at Beadnell, which have been hit badly.
- Last June was a larger number of guillemots and razorbills affected.
- JS** • A wagon comes every morning to Seahouses for dead birds that have been collected from the Farne Islands and the local area.

#### **3.11.2 Enforcement Report**

- Received with thanks.

- NW • Successful quarter for team
- LW • Good report and thank you to the Enforcement team.
- Recreational permits are seasonally average, are they inspected on big tides?
- NW • Yes they are
- LW • Well done and thank you to the staff for responding and assisting the RNLI with a mayday call recently.
- Very successful period for prosecutions which has been well-documented locally and nationally

### 3.11.3 Environmental Report

- AA • Set out what happened throughout the quarter.
- Overview of fisher forums held at Holy Island, Eyemouth and Amble and aim to host the remainder after main lobster season has ended.
- New addition to the report with the dispensations section.
- NIFCA also hosted 3 placements last quarter, Year 10 student Katie Green, and 2<sup>nd</sup> Year university students Annabel Duckett and Molly Claassen.
- LW • Would like a copy for the FMP independent evaluation survey.  
**AA to send.**
- Considerable discussion about marine licensing recently and a very busy quarter for applications.
- Noted that the Howdon Yard Quay Redevelopment application was rejected by the MMO.
- AB • Confirmed this was the case following concerns by NIFCA and others about elevated levels of contaminants.
- LW • This has not been the case for other licenses exceeding thresholds.
- AB • Distinction between legal levels and recommended Cefas action levels. This has now been raised nationally and there is ongoing discussion in MMO about how to address this going forward.

### 3.11.4 Maintenance Report

- LW • Great report by Wayne Mitchell, who will be the official engineer/skipper going forward.
- Oil usage is a really useful indicator for the Authority for monitoring how a vessel is doing and whether new investment is needed. **Wayne Mitchell to add oil usage to the maintenance report.**
- Do we have a new trailer?
- NW • Not yet

## 3.12 ACRONYMS TABLE

- FMP – Fisheries management plan
- SSE – Scottish and Southern Energy
- RSA – Recreational Sea Angling
- NERC – Natural Environmental Research Council

### 3.13 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

- AH**           • **Litter Picking Packs:** Free litter picking packs from the Angling Trust are to be sent to local angling clubs that have registered.
- LW**           • NIFCA has joined in with litter picks in the region in the past.
- On the topic of angling, the Catchwise programme has new data collector called Adam in Blyth, responsible for Blyth to Scottish border, however this may mean there is a possible gap between Blyth and North Shields.
- CS**           • **Tyres in the Blyth:** Come hoping to make constructive link with environmental officer.
- Members of local litter group between Furness Bank and A189 bridge are struggling to get help to keep river as clean as possible.
- LW**           • Done litter pick before and would be happy to help pick litter.
- Tyres are not just dumped in the Blyth, they are set intentionally.
- CS**           • There are heaps of dumped tyres, not just the ones used for collection.
- There are also Curlews in areas of tyres, which are a declining species.
- MS**           • Lots of glass under the flyover and rubbish in general in the area around the river.
- LW**           • Port of Blyth has responsibility for areas within its jurisdiction. Recommended CS go to landowner to report tyres in the area to be removed.
- NW**           • Offered to pass on contact details for Port of Blyth.
- LW**           • We would be happy to be involved and do what we can.
- When did you hear about NIFCA?
- CS**           • About 2 weeks ago, but did not know before then,
- AW**           • A small group cannot manage the whole issue. There are wider funding applications that have been submitted to help with the issue.
- JB**           • Rivers and seas are connected and would be interested in water quality of the Blyth and the impacts on the wider environment.
- LW**           • NIFCA is charged legally to manage sea fisheries resources but wonder what the EA policy on tyres is?
- PR**           • There are rules for illegal disposal of waste and the EA measures water quality for rivers and bathing water.
- AH**           • There are lots of people around this table, can we sign joint letter to Port of Blyth on behalf of invested parties?
- LW**           • Personal view is that the tyres are not abandoned, they are fished and legal.
- The disposal of illegal waste is a crime and the responsibility for removal lies with landowner.
- The answer for removal is volunteers and possibly shaming the council into helping.
- CS**           • We do not have the capacity to remove the tyres, which is why we are asking for help.



- LW**
  - What is the quantity?
- MS**
  - Around 40?
- CS**
  - Many more than that at low water
- LW**
  - Possible criminal element to this with the illegal disposal of tyres.
  - Litter picking has turned into a volunteer-driven task and would get NIFCA support as and when we can give it, but we cannot offer monetary help.
- JB**
  - We've not just come to talk about tyres. It's a wider problem within the river.
  - We are aware of the extent of the Authority, but we did not know of the work NIFCA does.
- LW**
  - **Officer Commendation:** Recently the Enforcement Team have done some amazing work headed up by Mark and Nick.
  - After recent successes in court, the Watch Committee has decided to commend 3 officers, Nick Weir, Toby Nash and Rick Willis.
  - Commendations were issued to Nick Weir and Toby Nash at the meeting, with Nick Weir accepting the commendation on behalf of Rick Willis.

The meeting was closed by the Chair at 14:59.

**ACTIONS ARISING FROM THE MEETING:**

<b>Item</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Who</b>
3.5	Prepare a report on the proposed v-notching programme for the next Technical and Scientific Meeting.	AA/Enviro
3.11.3	Send FMP independent evaluation survey.	AA
3.11.4	Add oil usage to the maintenance report.	WM