

**MINUTES OF THE GENERAL COMMITTEE MEETING  
HELD AT THE HUB, STONE CLOSE, SEAHOUSES, NE68 7YL  
ON MONDAY 23rd OCTOBER 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), Ms S Ingram (SI), Ms A Henderson (AH), Cllr Mr M Swinbank (MSw), Cllr C Hardy (CH), Cllr Mrs C Seymour (CS), Professor P Moore (PM), Mr S Lowe (SL), Mr P Rippon (PR), Mr I Thomas (IT) and Mr G Renner-Thompson (GRT).

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 Environmental Officer Ms V Rae (VR). Minutes were taken by Environmental Officer Ms K Smart (KS).

The meeting was also joined by S Coulthard (SC).

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

Dr M Kitching, Mr J Stephenson, Mr J Wood, Mr P Dent, Cllr Mr A Wallace, Cllr E Dunn, and Dr C Scott.

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

Introductions and housekeeping to visitors

**3.2 Draft Minutes of previous meeting held on the 24<sup>th</sup> July 2023 and matters arising**

- MS**
- No amends on previous meeting.
  - Actions have been reviewed and completed
- LW**
- Minutes were accepted

**3.3 Meetings attended throughout the quarter**

Report accepted by the meeting.

**3.4 Newcastle University/NIFCA Projects**

- PM**
- PhDs Projects: there are various PhDs projects involving kelp and seagrass, one to note is an Aberystwyth University project looking at 'Fisheries opportunities associated with offshore wind farms'. Findings have shown lobster catch rates are higher around turbines with scour protection compared to turbines without scour protection and areas outside of the turbine - could result in potential fishery opportunities.
  - Master Projects: impressed by the quality of research completed by the students this year. SC supervised a student looking at seals interacting

with the Northumberland small-scale net fishery, and a project looking at dolphins associated with wind turbines. A project looking at eDNA monitoring of invasive species in the North Sea and several undergraduate projects as listed in the papers.

- NIFCA could potentially complete fishery and/or MPA research questions using PhD case studentships. The industry taking part in the PhD has to commit to giving £1,000 a year and the rest of the funding is often provided by NERC. Could be a cost-effective way of getting research done.

*LW: Would NIFCA be able to access the data after the PhD?*

*PM: Yes, you would have access to data, and it should be publishable.*

*LW: Sounds like a good idea.*

*PM: Advised AA to speak to Devon & Severn IFCA and the Scilly's IFCA who have used this scheme.*

*SC: Could IFCA produce an annual report of research priorities and disseminate on the NIFCA website or to other universities*

*PM: this option allows one person to focus on a few questions over a few years.*

#### **ACTION: AA to produce an annual report of research priorities and disseminate**

- LW**
- We are lucky to have such a good crab and lobster dataset which has been collected alongside Newcastle University. Thanked PM for update.
- SL**
- **Declaration of Interest as Chair of Northeast Environmental Records & Information Centre**
  - ERIC would like a marine representative on the board, and I am keen to drive the marine data and for things like oil contingency planning.  
*PM: Asked SL to send an email to discuss.*

### **3.5 Fixed Engine Byelaw Update**

- MS**
- Following the last Technical & Scientific Meeting there was a steer towards Option 3. The Fixed Engine Byelaw paper provides an update of this byelaw. From an earlier call for information, a student working with netsmen also asked 4 additional fishers who are likely to work nets who all had further questions relating to the requirement to maintain a winter water depth district wide. Previously, these depths were only within conservation areas, the idea was to simplify the byelaw and remove the conservation areas but extend that provision district wide. Further engagement with fishers is needed to understand the consequences of these potential changes to the fisheries and this will hopefully be addressed through further interviews and Fisher Forums and updated at the next meeting in January.

### **3.6 V-Notching Update**

- AA**
- Following on from the previous meetings regarding the re-introduction of v-notching within the NIFCA district, the option recommended was to purchase lobsters from wholesalers to be v-notched and released in multiple locations throughout the district, funded by NIFCA in combination with donations from permit holders.
  - NIFCA will purchase lobsters caught in Northumberland to mitigate the homing effect and they'll be released in multiple locations within the district.

Size will be considered with one male lobster per 10-20 female lobsters being v-notched so there is not an abundance of larger females that could potentially become dormant with fewer larger males available to them.

- Funding for the first year is available then need to look for further funding from year two. For additional years it could potentially be funded by NIFCA in combination with donations from permit holders.

*LW: It would be great to run alongside the industry.*

*AH: How many lobsters could be bought for the scheme?*

*AA: Last time the project ran it was approximately 1000 lobsters per year so may be slightly lower number of lobsters because the cost of lobsters has increased.*

*MSw: Are there any other IFCA's running similar projects and if so, how are they funded?*

*LW: Not at present since the berried hen SI was introduced no one was actively v-notching because they couldn't pay for both. There are some fishers in the district that still voluntary v-notch.*

*CS: What year did the previous scheme run that cost £8,000-£11,000?*

*AA: The last scheme was between 2000-2017. This is a benchmark figure for the scheme.*

*CS: What would be put in the budget for that?*

*LW: We do not know yet, but it will be funded by RDEL in the first year. I would rather say we will put in a set number of lobsters at X cost.*

*MS: We would buy them at the height of the summer when the lobster wholesale cost is at its lowest. NIFCA were previously approached by a windfarm company who were looking to offset some of the work they were doing and support the NIFCA work with v-notching.*

*LW: The funding was a conflict of interest but now the landscape is different and feel it could be received from local industry without compromising NIFCA's impartiality.*

*SL: May be better to pursue money instead of it waiting for it to come to you.*

*SC: There was a lot of interest in the v-notching scheme during the engagement research (with fishers). If you fund the first year the fishers may say, why can't it be continued.*

*LW: We could match fund for the v-notching project?*

*AA: I think it would be better made voluntarily.*

*PM: Agreed. If you set out paying all then it sets a precedent for future years.*

*AH: Recommended spending some PR on the project. It would be beneficial to market this project with images of skippers, and brand it to supermarkets or could get local schools involved with school children sponsoring a lobster each.*

*SC: There is some concern about having to return berried hens as well as v-notched for fishers. Would have to get the message out that the lobsters would have already been landed and removed from the fishery and so shouldn't be there in the first place.*

### **3.7 Fisheries Management Plans Update**

- AA**
- Paper is an update of FMP progress of tranche 1 and 2 consultation (now

closed) and information about the AIFCA Poole workshop we attended along with Michael Nugent, LW and SC. Now waiting for the outcome of and the implementation stage of those FMPs and the development of the short, medium, and long-term objectives.

- Tranche 3 FMPs have now started as well and are ongoing, they are not as important to NIFCA in terms of the fisheries they are looking at, but we will still be involved with some engagement of them. MMO have been in touch to start early engagement with NIFCA, which is great. The paper shows a list of all 43 FMPs with the ones relevant to NIFCA being highlighted.
- LW**
- The FMP workshop we attended in Poole was very good and informative and great that we could take a fisherman from the district as his feedback was very positive. It was great presenting work prepared by AA and SC and provide feedback on minimum landing size. If the 90mm min size does come in NIFCA will probably have to make an emergency byelaw similar to when the berried hen restrictions were introduced. NIFCA is also at an advantage with so much crab and lobster data available thanks to AA and her team, management over the years and the members. Defra mentioned a potential pilot project in the northeast area regarding crab and lobster data with Eastern IFCA acting as a buffer zone.
- MS**
- Thank you to members for their contributions to the draft FMP responses and for SC's report which all fed into the NIFCA response. The situation in the northeast has been reflected here and in the AIFCA responses.
- LW**
- The AIFCA response highlighted the Northumberland response and is reflected nationally.
- SC**
- It will be good to think about a contingency plan and evidencing the economic impacts of increasing the lobster MCRS because 80% of commercial fishers catch is within 87mm and 90mm. Also looking at contributing factor for size differences, could it be from the temperature change? Or habitat changes and has heard anecdotal evidence from fishers in the south of the district explain the ground in the south is unsuitable to hold larger animals, while grounds further north contain more reef which are able to hold larger animals.
- AA**
- The 80% of catch between 87mm and 90mm is not reflected in the data collected by NIFCA. We estimate the proportion of the catch between 87 and 90mm to be around 30%. This varies throughout the year and by port.
- LW**
- We have discussed what will happen if the change is made, with the main concern being the Scottish border. The difference in size growth from 87mm to 90mm is roughly a year.
- MSw**
- Are we advocating for an increase in MCRS?  
*LW: We are arguing for a pilot project that can be scaled up to the 90mm over a period of time, then we have a period of time to manage the change.*
- MS**
- The frontrunner FMP plans will be released in December

### **3.8 Risk Matrix (oral)**

- MS**
- The biannual review of the risk matrix was completed and updated. The risks relate to governance, regulation, financial and operational. No significant risks were identified for the document, which will be updated onto the website.

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

## **FINANCE**

- MS**
  - The minutes of the last finance meeting were approved by members, copies of the budgets including estimates and actuals in movements of reserves were also approved by members. Members received an oral report on the latest position of the lease renewal for Ennerdale Road, and the plans for repairs and decoration for the operational space, with an action to chase up the current position with the landlord. Members were updated on the latest news relating to RDEL funding and that there will be another RDEL payment for the FMPs that will be paid imminently. Agreed on the annual budget setting meeting date to be held at the Blyth office on the 7<sup>th</sup> December prior or post to the Technical and Scientific Meeting. The Berwickshire & Northumberland Marine Nature Partnership (MNP) funding was discussed, and it was agreed that they bring clear benefits to the Authority, and it was agreed to continue support this financial year. That is a matter of decision today with the only caveat being that the membership wished more feedback with the link up between the terrestrial and the marine especially looking at invasive species.
- LW**
  - Budget details not sure RDEL should be included and where money is going etc. We have more money coming this financial year and it is expected that this will be budget neutral. AA provided a fantastic summary of our link with the MNP and Nick Brodin will attend the January meeting to provide an update of MNP work.
- AA**
  - The main benefit of working with MNP is that it is a partnership that brings together lots of organisations that work with MPAs. They provide MPA information on their website that we link to from the NIFCA's MPA page. They published a Wild Recreation Guide for the public visiting the coast that includes rock pooling, recreational fishing and recreational potting. They are looking at data collection for eider ducks, the feature of our Berwick to St Mary's MCZ, and we will be able to use that data for the MPA assessments. They are developing a Marine Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS) Strategy that will be useful for NIFCA to link to and means we don't have to produce our own.
- LW**
  - Propose we increase the annual funding from £4,000 to £5,000 with a suggestion to develop information on marine invasive species.  
Agreed by members
- MS**
  - AOB In the coming weeks I will be working with Julian to present members with a draft budget in December. From a meeting with the Chair and Vice Chair we talked about one budget being presented at that meeting that all members can discuss, rather than three options to discuss, as this was additional work for Julian and can be confusing.  
Agreed

## **WATCH**

- MS**
  - The minutes of the last watch meeting were agreed by members. The Vessel and Enforcement Report including seasonal trends, intelligence outputs, sanctions and two reports were considered for byelaw gear offences relating to commercial fishers. Members heard about magistrate court updates. Members received and agreed the Vessel, Vehicles and Equipment Report and the Health and Safety Report. Noted SI will be the new statutory member for the MMO replacing PG. Thanks to PG for his time as a member. Updates were provided on the North Sunderland Harbour Commission to which this Authority appoints three members, and an interim harbour master and chair are now in post, fishermen's elections have now been confirmed with an additional three commissioners appointed.
- LW**
  - Like to reiterate this Authority's thanks to PG and wish him well in his new position. Also, thanks to NW and his team for all the enforcement work they have done this year.

## **3.10 IFCO REPORTS**

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

- MS**
- Very busy period due to the number of national consultations including FMPs. Thanks again to members and staff. The Environmental Team has increased capacity with Vicky and Kate joining.
  - Mitch completed his 6-month probation and accepted the skipper role which he is enjoying.
  - NIFCA now have a full membership of 21 members.
  - National work includes the Defra 4 yearly Conduct and Operation Report that involved SC interviewing fishers quayside. Awaiting updates from Defra.
  - Outreach work has been fairly busy with presentation at the Seafish Commercial Fishing Course in Amble, officers attended Cullercoats Harbour Day with the cabin RIB and wildlife events at St Mary's Lighthouse and Visitor Centre. The Environmental Team have completed work with Dove Marine for the Splashdown and Marine Pathways. Work experience student Eleanor Baker joined the team for 6 weeks over the summer.
  - We have been focusing on communications and had a number of published articles in local papers and industry papers.
  - Recreational sea angling work continues with around 60 individuals registered and submitting for the Species Challenge
  - No Fisher Forum meetings held this quarter but numerous Defra Future Fisheries meetings on the quayside which NIFCA attended and had discussions with fishers at those opportunities. We also had quayside discussions with the fishers for the FMPs.
  - The iVMS project previously on hold has resumed and the MMO grant has increase to £1,000 but funding is only until the 30<sup>th</sup> November. We will promote this with social media to ensure everyone is aware of it in our area and can hopefully get a device ordered. Also, a question whether the under 6 will be included in this project has not yet been made but expected imminently
- SI**
- If the fishers have everything in place and agreed with the supplier, the equipment does not have to be installed by that day. They are in discussion re. under 6's

### **3.11.2 Enforcement Report**

- NW**
- Team working incredibly well with a busy quarter.
  - As reported earlier, on the 19<sup>th</sup> October prosecuted Michael William Denton for four byelaw offences, this was a joint operation with the EA enforcement team. Found guilty and fined £1,072, the request for disqualification of recreational permit holder was rejected. The other prosecution was moved back to November.

### **3.11.3 Environmental Report**

- AA**
- A very busy quarter for the reasons previously discussed in the report, and we have welcomed Kate and Vicky who have both settled in very well. Vicky will be working on dispensation and other communication work while Kate will be working on outstanding MPA assessments.
  - Monitoring work has continued as normal with crab and lobster surveys, the Aln fish survey, and we have been chartered by the Wild Oyster Project to carry out camera surveys.
- SL**
- Are you aware of water quality monitoring project at the Aln? I could provide contact details.
- AA**
- No but we would be happy to provide the data.

- Great supporting three master students and an undergraduate student.
  - Lots of consultations as detailed in the paper as well as marine applications.
  - KS attended oil spill exercise at Seahouses and Port of Tyne and is now on the Standing Environment Group.
- MSw**
- Is there any ambition to have the Wild Oyster Project in the NIFCA district?  
*AA: There were nursery areas in Blyth but the areas suitable for the oysters were protected so unsuitable, there were areas of MPA so less suitable than the site chosen.*  
*PM: Evidence states how this can help ecosystem services. There have been initial discussions with CS about the potential of putting native oysters along the Lindisfarne causeway which may help maintain the causeway.*
- LW**
- Thanks AA, for all your work this year it has been very busy.
- SL**
- If there are suitable sites for the Wild Oyster Project, how do we feed that into the process?  
*PM: The project funding has finished through the Wild Oyster Project and now Stronger Shores Project is completing monitoring.*
- SL**
- Re: One of the marine licensing for the Tyne Bridge an observation. There was a recent renovation to the bridge over the Coquet at Weldon Bridge and they shotblasted the bridge with no kind of protection to the water underneath. I would have some concerns that this could be the same process.  
*PR: That has been brought up and discussed.*

#### **3.1.4 Maintenance Report**

- LW**
- Awaiting results of oil sample analysis
- MS**
- The coolant samples will also be checked at the same time as oil sample analysis service by Finnings.
- LW**
- Thanks to WM.

### **3.1 ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

- AA**
- American lobsters: Fishermen have been treating American lobster in the same way as European lobster and landing them to the wholesaler, we will be increasing awareness with stakeholders.  
*MS: Because our legislation is in relation to European lobster it would not be illegal to land an American lobster less than 87mm or berried. The problem arises if a hybrid animal exists.*  
*PM: You could extract DNA but they do not shed DNA as fish do.*  
*AA: It is a worry because they outcompete the European lobsters.*  
*AA: A larval stage American lobster was identified during survey work on St Aidan for an eDNA project which is the first evidence of a juvenile lobster in the UK which could suggest they are breeding.*
- SC**
- In the middle of completing AIFCA work and will be in the NIFCA office at Blyth to interview staff and members, then the findings will be presented in December with a view to try and strengthen the work the IFCSs do. Second thing is in the summer me and a colleague put together a 3 million bid for a large programme of research for 5 years to look at community resilience on the coast. We proposed two case studies: One in Northumberland and one in Cornwall. It would be great to talk with councillors

about coastal resilience and not just resilience in the fishing industry. Needs to be in by the 7<sup>th</sup> November.

*GRT: happy to take part.*

- SL**
- Need to think about there being a huge difference for the issues between North Northumberland and South East Northumberland/North Tyneside, we ran a rock pooling session and had a girl from Cramlington who had never before visited the beach

Agreed the December budget meeting will take place at 8 Ennerdale Road  
The meeting was closed by the Chair at 15:22

**ACTIONS ARISING FROM THE MEETING:**

Item	Action	Who
3.4	To produce an annual report of research priorities and disseminate	AA/Enviro