

Minutes General Committee Meeting - January 2025 -

Date	Monday 27 th January 2025	Time	13:00
Venue	Committee Room 1, Northumberland County Council, County Hall, Morpeth, NE61 2EF		
NIFCA Members	Guy Renner-Thompson (Chair), Frank Armstrong (FA), Christian Proud (CP), Geoff Cowan (GC), Colin Hardy (CH), Steve Lowe (SL), Pip Moore (PM), Michael Nugent (MN), Catherine Seymour (CSe), Catherine Scott (CSc), Ian Thomas (IT) and James Wood (JW).		
Officers/ Staff	Mark Southerton (MS), Nick Weir (NW), Alex Aitken (AA), Emma Stiles (ES).		

3.1	Meeting Matters	Record
Apologies	Amelia Henderson (AH), Paul Dent (PD), Liz Dunn (LD), Brian Douglas (BD), Patrick Gray (PG), Steph Ingram (SI), Martin Kitching (MK), Tommy Mulvenna (TM).	
Declarations of Interest	None given at this point in the meeting.	
Chair's welcome	<p>In the absence of the Authority Chair, Vice Chair Guy Renner-Thompson acted as Chair for this meeting.</p> <p>Welcome to Christian Proud from the MMO who is attending in the absence of SI – he will be taking over as representative for the MMO.</p>	

3.2	Draft minutes: General Committee Meeting: 28 October 2024	Approval
	Accepted as an accurate record.	
Proposed acceptance	JW	Seconded SL Approved by all

3.3	Meetings attended throughout the quarter	Information
	Received with thanks.	

3.4	2025-26 Budget	Decision
MS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Members are asked to make a decision on the proposed budget. Two scenarios were presented to members in December 2024 who felt Budget B was the one to be presented at this meeting. This option increases budget by 2% and includes 3% COL increase to all staff. Additional costs have been included for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> TT St Aidan Remedial work for office and increase in office rent. Employee Assistance Programme to promote wellbeing and provide advice. New IT equipment (current PCs don't support Windows 11). New website Increase in Employer NI contributions This works as a balanced budget. 	

CSe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Felt the 2% would cover everything. Even with the reserves, not felt we have enough in 10 years to replace PV. Would agree with this increase. 			
Proposed acceptance	CSe	Seconded	JW	All members voted in favour of the proposed budget

3.5	Sarah Coulthard Presentation	Information
SC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Presentation by SC capturing information on the difficulties faced by fishing communities which are feeding into the reduction in fishing practices in the UK. Pride of Seas: this is on show throughout UK over next 6 months – at Coastal Futures, London this week. The decline in the fleet is not the same as the national decline in the fishing. So, we are catching the same amount, with fewer boats (we have fewer, larger boats). What we're trying to do: - having the social interactions and impact of small, local fishers and including fair distribution of fishing i.e. including rural communities The main message: - not advocating that we only want small scale, but that we want equal distribution. 	
CP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The positive reaction received regarding seeing/interacting with small scale fisheries, would be interesting to see the same for super trawlers – would this all become a negative if they became super trawlers. 	
JW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social licence to operate – really interesting piece on this and includes acceptability in communities. Cornwall did work a few years ago where they mapped out supply chain and economics – able to show 1 job at sea is worth 15 on the shore. Key concern: difference between stakeholder and opinion holder. Strong powerful voices are able to influence policy that no fisherman can – have to lobby to get a fishery reopened whereas someone with money backing them with no interest in the fishery can have the greatest impact on decision makers. There are barriers stopping under 10m vessels in licence and permits. 	
SC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There will be an event in Newcastle in early summer – starting with this data and opening it up to anyone/everyone having a say in making change happen. 	
MS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Thanks to SC – been a great driving force to getting people in the room to discuss these important issues. 	

At this point, SC left the meeting.

3.9	Coquet to St Marys MCZ	Information
To ensure there was enough time, item 3.9 was discussed ahead of 3.6.		
MS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Thanks to AA for her work in getting us to this point. 	
AA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> T&S met in December and agreed on a management plan to be recommended to the General meeting today. Proposed management: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To be granted an exemption by NIFCA within the area you will need to have a NIFCA Trawl permit, have a track record of fishing the area in 2022 (by way of return or iVMS) and must have a tracking system fitted within the vessel. The tracking will include sensors on the doors to calculate the actual time spent fishing within the site. 	
MN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Going forward, will it become a closed fishery? 	
AA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The proposal is to do it for one year and then review, essentially running it as a trial to find out does the gear work, does having a track record work etc. 	

GC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The sensors: bit of reverse logic – if you lose the signal when they go in the water, wouldn't it suggest they're working when they're not? 			
MS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Without having a sensor on the gear, it'll be based on vessel speed. If just using a speed as a factor of fishing, it doesn't work. Spoke to ReWire who provide trackers in other IFCAs and countries. Battery time of 3 years. Important to fit sensor and tracker close to one another. When it breaks, can be calculated as fishing time only. If any technical issues with tracker or sensor, requirement to submit permit return, so if there is a failure, we'll still get the written version. 			
GRT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Happy to approve as long as it is reviewed annually, and there is still the chance of it being reopened as a fishery in the future Do not want it to be permanently closed. 			
Proposed acceptance	SL	Seconded	JW	All members voted. All but ONE member was in favour of accepting the proposal. Proposal agreed by majority vote.

3.6	Member Matters	Information
MS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There are a number of members coming to the end of their term soon. IT will be retiring after his term. SL will seek an extension. 	
SL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have reapplied – the system is terrible. You can't save the application and had to restart the process 5 times, then received a word document which wouldn't open. Needs to be better as the application time is too long. Might need to get references yet, despite being on the Authority for 10 years. Still don't have an interview date. Never known anyone being declined an extension which would question the need for a second interview. 	

At this point IT left the meeting.

3.7	FMP Update	Information
MS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Crab and lobster is the main FMP affecting this area. Defra have recognised from consultation responses that it will be challenging to achieve harmonisation within this fishery around the country for lobster minimum size, but there seems to be agreement that incremental increases annually would be satisfactory to more people. Feedback from Amble was that 80/90% income comes from lobster – diversification to other fisheries is not possible around here so the impact will be greater felt. Pot limitation is already in place so such limits already exist, unlike in other areas. Increase in MCRS puts fishers in Northumberland at a disadvantage – they also have the Anglo/Scottish difficulty. 	
MN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The lobster MCRS seems to have no scientific basis for an additional change. IFCAs management throughout the country works, so why undermine them all and say we'll make it the same everywhere. It is sustainable in this area. Good number of lobster all year round. The little boats will be heavily hit – 30% loss across the board but the small fishers, might be more like a 70% loss and end game. 	
MS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This has been considered a quick win, something that's easily implemented which is why it's been done. Loss of £1.3mill being demonstrated. Asked at Amble if there was a data lag on Cefas assessment, taking into account the berried hen lobster ban, but its not being included. 	
AA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developing a policy brief for Defra to give an economic assessment to demonstrate what the benefits could be to show how many years it would take before we see an improvement. 	

JW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would like to ask them to do more work on this. • Would go to Mike Smith and ask him to get involved in national modelling.
CSc	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Historically we have had people from Defra come into a NIFCA meeting so we can talk to them directly – we’ve been collecting evidence from back in 2010 – we have the data – can we get someone in? We’ve still got time to get concrete feedback.
AA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defra had a very hard line that it definitely was coming in, just a question of when.
GRT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can we write to the Fisheries Minister – we’ve got to fight so writing to the right people when we have the right information. Agreed by members.
AA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whelk: Consideration to bringing in national permit to fish for whelks – haven’t defined what it would look like. • Could be open access or restricted, based on track record so concern it could be closed to fishers who haven’t fished for whelks before.
MS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NIFCA responded to North Sea and Channel Sea Ray FMP.

3.8	Byelaw Update	Information
MS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fixed Engine byelaw – Di Minimis assessment submitted. • Completed byelaw amendment and will get it back to the MMO and get it to a point of sign off by Defra. Can then revoke the netting byelaw. 	

(See 3.9 above).

3.10	Summary Reports of Watch & Finance Committees	Information
MS	Finance: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Previous mins approved. Estimates and Actuals received, showing £12k difference due to CLUE and staffing. General Reserves healthy – RDEL funding discussed and accepted. • Staff matters: KS maternity leave and temporary change in working hours for ES until Aug 2025. 	
MS	Watch: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Previous mins approved. Sea Activity report and gear/pot tag compliance. PV needed additional alterations. • Updated on Conduct and Ops Report to be published from 2018-22. 	
GRT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Situation with Cullercoats Harbour – it was felt that the General meeting should consider letter of support highlighting the need to keep boat maintenance area. • Losing only a couple of boats but that’s a whole fleet gone. • Agreed by Members. 	

3.11	IFCO Reports	Information
3.11.1 - Chief Officer's Report		
SL	Declare interest – Rivers Trust: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Page 89 – the issue with white clawed crayfish has nothing to do with invasive species – it is about a disease which has affected them.• There is a regional forum looking at crayfish.	
MS	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• This week, Arbitration hearing of sandeel fishery – hope to hear some good news.• Torquay Training Course – first year it's in Brixham and also a pilot Environmental and Enforcement course. AA will be helping to deliver this training.• Fishing lives survey – this survey rolls out on 8th January.• Andrew Boon gets the Jon Green Award this year re: v-notching and lobster data work.	
3.11.2 - Enforcement Report		

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Received with thanks.
3.11.3 - Environmental Report	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Received with thanks.
3.11.4 - Maintenance Report	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Received with thanks.

3.12	Acronyms Table	Information
AH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Received with thanks. 	

3.13	Any Other Business	Information
GRT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> QM on 28th April is a few days before local election – may lack Councillors. 	

The meeting was closed by the Chair at 14:15

Actions for Next Meeting

Item	Action	Who
3.7	Write to the Fisheries Minister regarding impact of increase to lobster MCRS.	MS
3.10.1	Write a letter of support to NTC highlighting the need to keep boat maintenance area at Cullercoats Harbour.	MS