

Minutes

General Committee Meeting

- October 2025 -

Date	Monday 27 th October 2025	Time	13:00
Venue	Newbiggin Maritime Centre, Church Point, Newbiggin-by-the-Sea NE64 6DB		
NIFCA Members	Guy Renner-Thompson (GRT), Frank Armstrong (FA), Paul Dent (PD), Brian Douglas (BD), Liz Dunn (LD), Chris Proud (CP), Steve Lowe (SL), Stephen Flower (SF), Michael Nugent (MN), Brian Burdis (BB), Catherine Scott (CS), Martin Swinbank (MSw) and Geoff Cowan (GC). Online: Martin Kitching (MK)		
Officers	Mark Southerton (MS), Alex Aitken (AA), Nick Weir (NW), Emma Cosimini (online).		

3.1	Meeting Matters	Record
Apologies	Pip Moore (PM), James Wood (JW), Stu Harding (SH), Patrick Gray (PG), Karl Green (KG) and Les Bowman (LB).	
Declarations of Interest	BD: Item 3.7 - Coquet to St Marys	
Guests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stephanie Ingram (SI), Nick Brodin (NB). 	
Chair's welcome	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Welcome to all and thank you for joining. Housekeeping: there are a couple of members joining online. To speak, please raise a hand and you will be directed by the Chair. Please try to refrain from side conversations to maintain clarity for everyone. 	

3.2	Draft minutes: General Committee Meeting: 28 July 2025	Approval		
MS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Actions: Still a vacancy within the Watch and Finance Committee. This rolls over to the next QM. MMO stage 3 Consultation went out to members for feedback. 			
Proposed acceptance	SL	Seconded	BB	Approved by all

3.3	Meetings attended throughout the quarter	Information
AH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Another very busy quarter with many different levels of engagement – huge congratulations to the team for their achievements. Had a reply from Emma Foody who raised concern with Defra regarding payments to IFCAs. This contact has turned out to be very worthwhile. A lot of the highlights are mentioned on the FB page. 	

3.4	Marine Nature Partnership Presentation by Nick Brodin	Information
AH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Welcome back to NB - very pleased to confirm approval for future funding at the last Finance Committee. 	
NB	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Presentation given by NB. Recreational user guide and new video available on the website. 	
AH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The number of projects being worked on is amazing – thanks to the MNP for the representation out in the district. Please let us know if NIFCA can be of any support to upcoming projects. NB to share useful links to projects with NIFCA. 	

SL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lynemouth – coastal defence team has there been any consideration for the coast snap project to place a post at Lynemouth as the site is changing considerably from erosion. With the restoration work now completed.
----	---

3.5	Member Monthly Roundup	Information
AH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lots of information in here, received with thanks. Photography exhibition capturing fishing boats at Fish Quay is currently presenting at the Low Lights and raising money for Fishermen's Mission. There is a clear public interest in the fishing industry when presented in the right way. 	

3.6	Member Matters (oral)	Information
MS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Confirmation from the MMO of MK's reappointment to the Authority. Thanks to members who joined at the Royal Quays for Mindfully Wired filming. Inductions for new Council members have been undertaken. Thanks to members for giving additional time to the Authority this quarter, it has been greatly appreciated. Briefing session re: RSA now available on AIFCA website. 	
AH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> AIFCA meeting confirmed the new communications post has been filled – they aim to produce videos, press releases, publications etc. to support the work of IFCAs. 	

3.7	Coquet to St Mary's MCZ Management of Trawling 2026 (Members Only – to follow)	Decision
AH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DOI from BD: will stay for discussion but will not vote. This has been heavily discussed, and AA has prepared a paper. 	
AA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> For 2024, it was agreed to cap the site to 5 people and allow up to 1000 fishing hours (collectively). We received 2 applicants, and 200 hours have been used so far. 2 Technical and Scientific (T&S) meetings were held this month – members considered the available evidence but felt there was not enough information to make a decision. The T&S subcommittee has therefore recommended to continue with 2025 measures into 2026, and build in availability for additional data collection throughout the year. Natural England recommended a review of the site and its management. 	
CSc	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “To Maintain” was set at designation – this status can be updated based on how the site progresses. A maintain objective doesn't write out the need for management – if the site is degrading, it needs to be set to “Restore”. We are lacking a baseline, which makes a fair comparison hard. 	
BD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It's being suggested that the site is degrading rather than improving. Noone can say it is the fishermen that's degrading the area - weather conditions, tides etc. affect it too. If it's found that fishing isn't causing the damage, what will you do about it then? 	
FA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We don't consider the positive data. Years ago, we didn't catch scallops or prawns on the site, but we are catching prawns now – that's a positive change which should also be considered. 	
MN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is easy to blame fishers for damage to historic fishing grounds but if it's still producing, that's why people are still fishing – please be careful not to blame fishermen. 	
PD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cables being laid mean fishermen are being moved out of fishing sites. Noone is considering the impact this is having. In laying cables, they place stones down on the seabed that aren't naturally occurring and larger than reported which has damaged nets and equipment on vessels. Putting in windfarms has an impact on the grounds, but this is not being considered either – only the impact of fishers, even though there are so many different factors. 	
AH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There are so many reasons why a site may degrade and fishermen are certainly not 'to blame'. It is about making changes where we can, to ensure we have the greatest positive impact. 	
SL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Worth pointing out that some of the samples being considered were areas only which were being fished, not those where they weren't fished so felt there was an imbalance. 	
MS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We have a statutory duty to consider these things - must come to a consensus on how we manage these sites. 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Had to look at where new sample sites would be collected, so members could be more confident moving forward with management of the site.
AA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Just want to caution that we are never going to get exact comparative data – we will work with BD, other fishers and Natural England – keep in mind that there will still be a level of uncertainty after this information has been gathered.
BD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Very happy to sit down and talk to everyone about this and come up with the best information we should be looking for.
Proposed option 1: continue with current management	All members present voted in favour (online voting not permitted)

3.8	Netting Byelaw Update (oral)	Information
MS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> AA and MS met with the MMO byelaw team to discuss the byelaw and DMA submission and quality assurance. Should hear back by 9th December (45 day kpi) about progression. If it's agreed at this stage, it should be almost ready to go to Defra. 	

3.9	Newcastle University Projects Update (oral)	Approval
AH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Carried forward in PM absence. 	

3.10	Risk Matrix (oral)	Approval
MS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This document is reviewed twice yearly to consider all risks by the SMT Last reviewed in September with a couple of new risks related to staff safety added and potential funding changes under Fair Funding Review. Will be added to the website by the end of November. 	

3.11	Annual Report (oral)	Approval		
AH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Really pleased with this, it is so accessible and easy to understand – thanks to Emma and the team for getting this put together. 			
MS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Welcome any feedback from members – if agreed, NIFCAs will submit this Annual Report to Defra - it is used to feed into the 4 yearly IFCA conduct and ops review. 			
LD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Think it's brilliant. 			
Proposed acceptance	LD	Seconded	BB	Approved by all

3.12	Summary Reports of Finance and Watch Committees (oral)	Information
MS	<p>Finance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The MMO are now in a position to progress with the IFCA funded training post. Correspondence from RQ Marina regarding fuel issues and assurances. Received financial papers with thanks. Update received on Defra grant funding and considered continued funding request for MNP - members agreed upon annual contribution of £5k. Considered the update on Financial Regulations regarding clarity on need for 3 quotes for spend over £10k – ie. using a broker for marine insurance. Considered 24-month extension of an RDEL funded Enviro post, which was approved. <p>Watch:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Received all reports and noted the increased workload around static gear compliance. Considered infringement items: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A: Berried/v-notch lobster haul – agreed to dispose of with FAP. 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ B: Keep boxes with over 200 undersized lobsters – agreed to move to prosecution ○ C: Single v-notched lobster – history of offences – agreed to dispose of with FAP. ○ D: static gear – no markers, and escape gaps obstructed – heard about means of individual and decided to dispose of by WW. • Heard about the operational status and additional requirements for St Aidan and Robert Arkless MBE to ensure coding and crewing requirements can be maintained. • Confirmed that the new shipping container has been purchased. • Return of an officer after back injury. • Updates from the AIFCA AGM and the recruitment of a Communications Manager for the AIFCA.
--	---

3.13	IFCO Reports	Information
3.13.1 - Chief Officer's Report		
MS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responded to MMO stage 3 consultation and noted increased spatial squeeze in offshore management. • Defra introduced compensatory measures for offshore wind, how this impacts MPAs and how it should be offset – this includes consideration of additional site designation, but none proposed for inshore. • Ministerial changes with appointment of new Minister • New advice for cod and mackerel as the southern stock is not doing particularly well – those stocks mix and bring additional complications. Challenges for fishing opportunities for 2026 with a need to manage the stock but maintain a fishery. • Great British Inshore Fleet Survey results shows 25% decline of small <10m vessels. • Had first ever staff away day which was a great success. Will be looking to do the same again next year. 	
BD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Everywhere seems to be seeing bad landing of cod. 	
SF	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why are we seeing a reduction of cod stocks? • Defra gives large amount of money to IFCA – if they cut their funding, are we prepared? 	
MS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assumption cod is moving further north; therefore, other sub stocks are suffering. Could be a number of reasons for this. • Defra have confirmed that they will be continuing with their funding – fair funding review (NIFCA gets £154,000 of New Burdens funding). That's never increased with inflation. 	
3.13.2 - Enforcement Report		
NW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Received with thanks. • Overseen an increase in patrols through the summer months and continue on with a number of ongoing prosecutions. 	
3.13.3 - Environmental Report		
AA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The team have v-notched over 1,217 lobsters over the summer. • Spoke with NCC regarding bait digging in Boulmer who have said they need to look further into the byelaw and signage, although it is low priority – a revocation may be considered. NIFCA will continue our monitoring of the area over the winter. • Carried out nephrop burrow surveys over the summer. Planning to do this annually. AB/SR joined Scottish Marine to join their prawn burrow count on the survey boat. • AB has been asked to join the ICES nephrop survey working group. Thanks to AB for agreeing. • Responded to the MMO stage 3 MPA management – focused on Farnes Deep and recommendation to close to bottom towed gears. 	
SL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thought the response was really balanced – well done. 	

AH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The breadth of work being carried out is impressive.
3.13.4 - Maintenance Report	
MS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Vessels are functioning as they should be, with a few areas of preventative maintenance to be carried out as well as an issue identified with the vessels A frame

3.14	Acronyms Table	Information
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accepted. 	

3.15	Any Other Business	Information
AH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Next year is the IFCA 15th birthday. Nice opportunity to look back and some engagement work can be done here. 	

The meeting was closed by the Chair at 15:00

Actions for Next Meeting

Item	Action	Who
3.10	Risk Assessment Matrix to be added to the website by the end of November.	ES
3.11	Annual Report to be submitted to Defra.	MS
3.12	To continue with £5,000 annual contribution to the MNP.	MS