






ANNUAL PLAN 2025-2026

 Northumberland IFCA

 @N_IFCA

 northumberland-ifca

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IFCA VISION

“Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities will lead, champion and manage a sustainable marine environment and inshore fisheries, by successfully securing the right balance between social, environmental and economic benefits to ensure healthy seas, sustainable fisheries and a viable industry”

NIFCA DISTRICT & CONTENTS

Introduction	Page 1
Staffing	Page 4
Members	Page 6
Budget & Reserves	Page 8
NIFCA office, vessels & vehicles	Page 10
Risk Management	Page 11
Success Criteria	Page 12
NIFCA Workstreams for the Year Ahead	Page 16
Conclusion	Page 27



Securing Sustainable Inshore and Small-Scale Fisheries



WE NEED TO **ACT NOW**
to **SAVE** OUR
INSHORE FISHERIES

NO FISH
NO FISHERS
NO FISHERIES
NO FISHING CULTURE



INTRODUCTION

On behalf of the Chair Amelia Henderson and the Chief Officer Mark Southerton (both pictured left), we would like to welcome you to our Annual Plan for 2025 to 2026.

This plan sets out our priorities and objectives for the coming year, reflecting our ongoing commitment to the sustainable management of our inshore marine environment and the fisheries it supports. The Northumberland coast is a place of rich natural heritage, cultural identity, and economic importance. As the lead Statutory Regulator in the inshore zone, it is our duty to ensure that the marine ecosystems and coastal communities that depend on them are safeguarded for future generations.

As an Authority, we continue to work closely with all our commercial and recreational stakeholders, coastal communities, environmental organisations, and partner agencies to balance environmental protection with the needs of a sustainable inshore fishing industry. Through evidence-based decision-making, proportionate regulation, and active community engagement, we aim to promote responsible fishing practices, protect marine biodiversity, and contribute to the wider goals of the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 and the Fisheries Act 2020.

This Annual Plan outlines how we will deliver our statutory duties, looks at our local priorities ahead which are further supported within our success criteria, to further our mission of achieving healthy seas, sustainable fisheries, and thriving coastal communities.

We wish to thank the Authority members for their continued support over the last twelve months and look forward to working alongside them in this new year. Thank you for your interest in our work. We look forward to continuing our collaboration with all stakeholders as we strive to protect and enhance our unique marine environment.

Mark Southerton

NIFCA STRUCTURE & RESOURCE

ABOUT STRUCTURE & RESOURCE

To support the delivery of its statutory duties and strategic aims, NIFCA relies on a well-defined organisational structure and the effective use of its resources. This section outlines the key components that enable the Authority to operate efficiently and responsively, including its staffing structure, member governance, budget management, and risk oversight.

Together, these elements form the operational backbone of the Authority - ensuring it has the leadership, personnel, and financial resilience needed to deliver a high standard of service. Clear structures and responsible resource allocation underpin NIFCA's ability to adapt to emerging challenges, meet national expectations, and serve the specific needs of the Northumberland district.

On the following pages, you will find details about our team, an overview of the Authority's membership, a breakdown of our financial planning, and a summary of the measures we take to assess and mitigate risk across our operations.



STAFFING

Northumberland IFCA employs a dedicated team of 15 staff, all based at our office at Ennerdale Road in Blyth, Northumberland. The organisation is led by Chief Officer Mark Southerton, who holds overall responsibility for the management of the Authority. Mark provides strategic leadership across planning, budget control, policy implementation, public engagement, and byelaw development and review. He is supported by a management team comprising the leads of each of NIFCA's core functions: Environmental, Enforcement, Administration, and Finance.

The Environmental team is headed by Lead Environmental IFCO Alex Aitken, whose leadership ensures the consistent delivery of high-quality outputs. The team of five brings a strong foundation in marine environmental science and leads on the Authority's conservation duties. Their work includes setting research priorities, conducting MPA assessments and surveys, developing monitoring programmes, and overseeing NIFCA's responsibilities in relation to European Marine Sites (EMS), Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs), and Strategic Environmental Assessments (SEA). Three Environmental IFCOs are also warranted officers and support enforcement duties as needed.

Enforcement is led by Lead Enforcement IFCO Nick Weir, who manages a team of five IFCOs. This team plays a vital role in gathering intelligence, enabling the Authority to proactively address compliance challenges. The team prioritises education and engagement, operating with professionalism and a preventative approach. However, where necessary, the Authority will use the full range of enforcement tools to uphold regulations and ensure sustainable practices.

Emma Cosimini leads the Administrative team, supported by two part-time administrators. This team manages the day-to-day office operations, oversees permit allocation and renewals, maintains essential systems, and delivers NIFCA's HR function. They also manage the Authority's digital communications, including website and social media platforms.

The Finance function is led by Finance Officer Julian Sutton, a qualified accountant who ensures effective financial oversight across payroll, investment, and budget management. Julian plays a key role in maintaining financial integrity and works closely with Northumberland County Council, who conduct an annual audit to ensure the Authority operates with transparency and accountability.

Chief Officer

Environmental

Enforcement

Office Team



Mark Southerton

Chief Officer



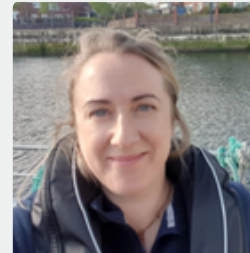
Alex Aitken

Lead Enviro Officer



Andrew Boon

Senior Enviro Officer



Katy Smart

Environmental Officer



Vicky Rae

Environmental Officer



Sarah Richardson

Environmental Officer



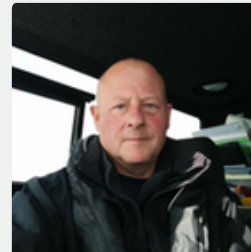
Nick Weir

Lead Enforce't Officer



Wayne Mitchell

Engineer/ Skipper



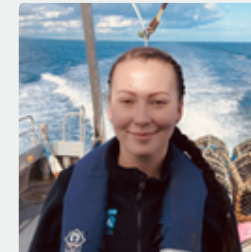
Rick Willis

Enforcement Officer



Mark Lynn

Enforcement Officer



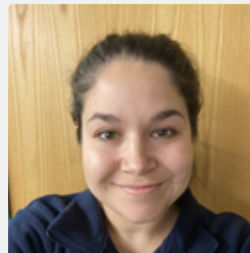
Emily O'Regan

Enforcement Officer



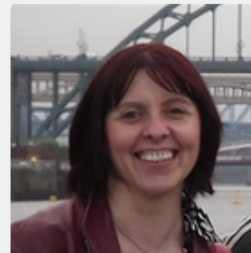
Julian Sutton

Finance Officer



Emma Cosimini

Admin Officer



Debbie Carr

Admin Assistant



Debra Scott

Admin Assistant



MEMBERS

Members remain central to the effective functioning of IFCA's, playing a vital role in shaping policy, supporting governance, and contributing their knowledge and insight to the Authority's work. As we look ahead to 2025–26, NIFCA continues to benefit from the leadership of Amelia Henderson, who has now completed her first year as Chair. Amelia has brought energy, experience, and a collaborative approach to the role, and her continued leadership will help guide the Authority through the coming year.

This year also brings the potential for change within the Authority's membership, with local elections taking place at Northumberland County Council in May 2025. While the composition of Councillor Members may evolve, we remain committed to ensuring a strong and balanced membership, and to supporting all members in fulfilling their responsibilities effectively. Should any new appointments arise, the Authority will be ready to provide comprehensive induction and ongoing training to ensure a smooth transition.

Training will continue to be a key focus in 2025–26. New members will be offered tailored onboarding, delivered jointly by the Chair and Chief Officer. In addition, all members will be encouraged to access development opportunities throughout the year, including presentations at meetings, briefings from officers, and participation in survey work where appropriate. These activities support knowledge-sharing, transparency, and informed decision-making.

We extend our sincere thanks to our General Members, who voluntarily contribute their time, skills, and expertise to the work of the Authority. Their ongoing support is fundamental to achieving NIFCA's vision of a balanced and sustainable marine environment. We also wish to thank our Councillor Members for their dedication and active engagement, particularly in light of their many commitments as elected representatives, and our members representing our partner agencies, for their continued expertise and collaboration.

General Members (MMO Appointed)

- ★ R Ms Amelia Henderson
- R Mr Ian Thomas
- R Mr Geoff Cowan
- C Mr Paul Dent
- C Mr Michael Nugent
- C Mr Brian Douglas
- C Mr Frank Armstrong
- 🌿 Dr Martin Kitching
- 🌿 Mr Steve Lowe
- 🌿 Prof Pip Moore
- 🌿 Dr James Wood

Elected County Councillors

- |||| Mr Guy Renner-Thompson
- |||| Mrs Elizabeth Dunn
- |||| Mrs Catherine Seymour
- |||| Mr Alex Wallace
- |||| Mr Colin Hardy
- |||| Mr Martin Swinbank
- 👑 Mr Tommy Mulvenna

Statutory Body Representatives

-  Dr Catherine Scott
-  Mr Patrick Gray
- MMO Mr Christian Proud



NIFCA Chair



Recreational fisher



Northumberland County Council



Natural England



NIFCA Vice Chair



Commercial fisher



North Tyneside Council



Environment Agency



Environmental background



Marine Management Org



NIFCA BUDGET

In January 2025, Authority members approved a 2% increase in the local authority precept for 2025–26, totalling £801,500 (excluding “New Burdens” funding). This rise reflects inflationary pressures and increased Employer National Insurance contributions, which added around £13,000 to staffing costs. With no increase the previous year, the adjustment was necessary. A small surplus of £3,800 is forecast after transfers to the Renewals Fund, to be added to General Reserves at year end.

Defra will continue “New Burdens” funding at previous levels, providing just under £155,000 via the precept. In early 2025, NIFCA also received £140,000 in R-DEL funding - marking the final year of the SR21 period - to support delivery of Fisheries Management Plans, Marine Protected Area management, and broader sustainability goals.

R-DEL continues to fund the salaries of two Environmental IFCOs (one full-time, one part-time) working on these priorities. As this funding is budget-neutral, any surplus will be carried forward as deferred grant income.

The Authority’s budget will be reviewed quarterly, with a focus on cost control, income generation (including grants and vessel chartering) and maintaining strong reserves while continuing to grow the Renewals Fund for future vessel replacements.

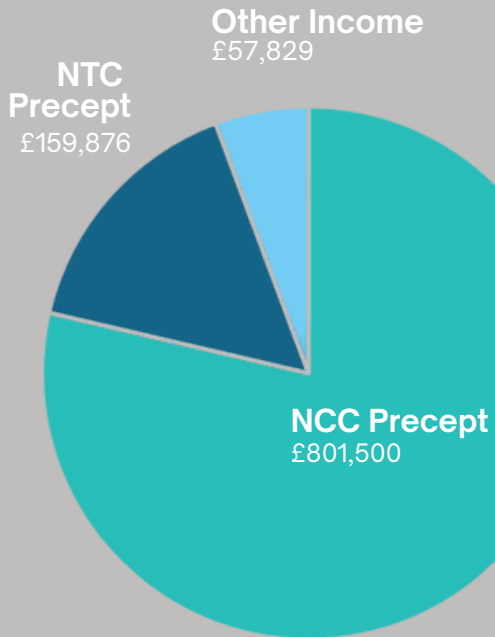
GENERAL RESERVES

General Reserves are expected to stand at £262,730 in April 2025, following a projected net surplus of £30,735 and capital expenditure of £14,210 in 2024–25. This includes £11,500 for office improvements and £2,700 for new officer drysuits. A further £15,000 is expected to be drawn in 2025–26 for converting garage space into offices, updating IT equipment, and enhancing the website. After accounting for a projected surplus of £3,800, reserves are forecast to decrease by £11,200 to £251,530 by March 2026.

The Renewals Fund, reserved for future vessel replacements, is forecast to be £847,730 by April 2025. This includes a £50,000 transfer from revenue, £69,000 from vessel charter income, and £35,400 in bank interest. By March 2026, the fund is expected to grow by a further £85,000, reaching £932,730.

BUDGET FORECAST FOR 2025/26

INCOME



EXPENDITURE

Employee Expenses	£652,450
Patrol Vessel Expenses	£54,600
Leased vehicles/RIB expenses	£42,850
Capital expenditure	£15,000
Other operating expenses	£28,700
8 Ennerdale Road expenses	£58,000
Conference & training expenses	£27,000
Other management expenses	£56,800
Contingencies	£10,000
Total Expenditure	£945,400

RENEWALS FUND



Annual contribution to renewals fund:
£50,000



Other transfers to renewals fund:
£35,000



Capital expenditure from General Reserves
£15,000



NIFCA OFFICE

The Authority has operated from its current premises at 8 Ennerdale Road, Blyth since September 2013. In 2024, a new 10-year lease with a 5-year break clause was agreed with the landlord, FES Ltd, with an anticipated rent increase from £27,500 to £30,000 from August 2025. The site includes office and meeting spaces, a large garage for storing the 5.3m trailered RIB, Zodiac, and other survey equipment, as well as a fenced car park and a shipping container for additional storage.

Refurbishment and remedial works were completed in March and April 2024 at a cost of £36,500 to enhance the utility of the building. Further improvements are planned for 2025, including the conversion of a spare garage room into additional office space.

VESSELS & VEHICLES

NIFCA has three vessels: the main patrol and research vessel, St Aidan, is a 16m GRP catamaran based at Royal Quays Marina in North Shields. Built in 2015 and funded entirely from Authority reserves, St Aidan provides offshore enforcement, monitoring, and survey capacity across the district. It is powered by twin 600hp Cummins engines and equipped with our second vessel, a 5.3m RIB, TT St Aidan, which can operate independently and be deployed from onshore locations. The Authority also operates the Robert Arckless MBE, a 9m cabin RIB brought into service in 2019 and based at Amble Marina. Funded in part by an EMFF grant, this vessel is well-suited for inshore patrols and survey work. A smaller 3.4m Zodiac inflatable, acquired in 2013, supports estuarine survey activity.

To support shore-based operations, the Authority uses a fleet of vehicles. This includes two leased pool vehicles (a Ford Ranger 4x4 and a Ford Connect minivan) acquired in 2020 through service level agreements with Northumberland County Council. Both vehicles are expected to remain in service until at least summer 2026. In March 2024, the Authority also purchased a second-hand Citroen Berlingo minivan to supplement its fleet. These vehicles are used for shore patrols, survey work, and other operational duties across the district.

OPERATIONAL RISK ASSESSMENTS

As part of NIFCA’s health and safety framework, all Authority activities are subject to regular risk assessments, with particular focus on operations aboard St Aidan, the Robert Arckless MBE, and during survey work both ashore and at sea. These assessments address hazards such as vessel navigation, stability, manual handling, and exposure to marine environments. Intertidal and offshore surveys are assessed for environmental risks, lone working, and public interaction. Officers are equipped with PPE, body-worn cameras, communication devices, and first aid kits, and operate within a structured safety reporting system.

All sea-going officers complete mandatory STCW-accredited training, supported by additional qualifications such as ML5 medicals, IOSH, and NEBOSH where applicable. Safety is reinforced through regular refresher courses, onboard drills, and a scheduled maintenance programme for the vessel fleet. Insurance cover supports service continuity in the event of incidents. A new safety policy is also being developed to ensure consistent standards for non-employees operating from NIFCA vessels, with clear definitions of “working” status and at-sea responsibilities.

RISK ASSESSMENT MATRIX

NIFCA adopts a comprehensive and proactive approach to risk management, guided by its bi-annual Risk Assessment Matrix, available on the Authority’s website. This matrix supports strategic decision-making across all areas of work, evaluating risks by likelihood and impact and categorising them from “Acceptable” to “Very Severe.” It aligns with the Marine & Coastal Access Act 2009 and national frameworks, ensuring that mitigation actions are clearly defined and proportionate to the level of risk.

The Authority’s risk planning covers a broad range of operational areas, including health and safety, enforcement, governance, financial resilience, and business continuity. Financial risks are carefully managed through strong budget controls, regular reporting, and coordination with key partners such as Northumberland County Council and Defra. A safe and effective working environment is maintained through comprehensive policies, regular staff training, and structured oversight across all departments.

Environmental risks remain a priority, particularly regarding the impact of fishing and development on marine habitats and species. These are addressed through byelaws, monitoring plans, and close collaboration with partners such as Natural England and the MMO. Climate-related risks are also being incorporated into planning, with a growing focus on sustainability, reducing the Authority’s carbon footprint, and embedding climate resilience into operations. In the year ahead, NIFCA will continue to prioritise staff development, stakeholder engagement, key byelaw progression, and further development of its climate change policy to support the delivery of its statutory duties.

IFCA SUCCESS CRITERIA



ABOUT SUCCESS CRITERIA

The IFCA's operate under a shared Vision: "to lead, champion and manage a sustainable marine environment and inshore fisheries." To support the delivery of this Vision, all ten IFCA's across England follow a unified framework of Success Criteria (next page) and High-Level Objectives, developed by Defra and designed to ensure consistent, effective, and accountable service delivery across the network.

This collective framework aligns the strategic aims and operational priorities of all IFCA's, shaping how each Authority plans, delivers, and evaluates its work. It acts as both a performance benchmark and a guiding structure, helping IFCA's respond to national policy, regional priorities, and local needs.

The criteria inform the development of NIFCA's annual workstreams and reporting, providing a clear structure for our enforcement, research, stakeholder engagement, and internal governance. On the following pages, you will find icons accompanying each of our planned workstreams, showing how they contribute to one or more of the five Success Criteria.



IFCA SUCCESS CRITERIA 1

IFCAs are recognised & heard, balancing the economic needs of the fishery whilst working in partnership and engaging with stakeholders

Definition

IFCAs will be a visible, respected and trusted regulator within coastal communities and will maintain and deliver a strategy to communicate their vision and duties effectively. IFCAs will engage with policy makers, industry, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), recreational and commercial users; and other regulators. They will work jointly and collaboratively with partner organisations across boundaries; will participate and contribute to the development and implementation of regional and national marine policy, including the marine planning regime; will take long-term strategic decisions and manage risks effectively. IFCAs may maintain a national body to co-ordinate the activities of authorities that are party to arrangements.

Outcomes

The IFCA will:

- maintain & implement an effective communication strategy.
- maintain its website, ensuring public access to current fisheries and conservation information for the District, including management requirements and byelaws. Non-reserved IFCA Committee papers will be published.
- Contribute to coordinated activity at a national level.
- With its principal partners, have a clear understanding of roles and responsibilities. Memoranda of Understanding with MMO, Natural England, Environment Agency and Cefas will be maintained. Opportunities for greater efficiencies, effective joint working and collaboration will be explored and implemented when feasible

Indicators

- **SC1A:** maintain a database of stakeholder contacts - reviewed & updated by 31 March annually.
- **SC1B:** complete a review of its Communication Strategy & Implementation Plan by 31 March each year.
- **SC1C:** review its website by last working day per month
- **SC1D:** review its website & meets the objectives of its communication strategy; 31 March annually.
- **SC1E:** review all of its Memoranda of Understanding by 31 March annually. There will be a clear plan in place to update MoUs where necessary, to an agreed timescale.
- **SC1F:** By 31 March each year, the IFCA will have participated appropriately, proportionately and at the right level of delegation, in regional and national fisheries and conservation activity identified in the Annual Plan.



IFCA SUCCESS CRITERIA 2

IFCAs implement a fair, effective and proportionate enforcement regime

Definition

The IFCA enforcement regime is risk-based, makes appropriate use of intelligence, meets legislative standards & complies with the Regulators Code. It should make effective use of the resources available to regulators; complement & align, if possible, with the regimes in adjacent IFCA Districts & management by other organisations including the MMO & Environment Agency. Consistency & fairness are important. Regulatory compliance is promoted. Enforcement action is carried out by trained, professional officers working to clear standards of conduct.

Outcomes

The IFCA will:

- Publish its Enforcement Risk Register & Strategy, clearly setting out its approach to achieving regulatory compliance & potential sanctions that may be applied for infringements &/or offences.
- Have developed consistency in regulations (byelaws) with other organisations.
- Manage operational activity (e.g. through a Tasking & Coordination Group) & capture, record, evaluate & disseminate intelligence that is compatible with partner organisations. It is engaged in joint working with partner organisations.
- Ensure warranted IFCOs are trained & accredited to nationally agreed standards. They will maintain professionalism & make appropriate interventions to deliver efficient, effective enforcement activity.

Indicators

- **SC2A:** Ensure its Enforcement Risk Register & Strategy are published & available on its website from 1 April annually.
- **SC2B:** Demonstrate in its Annual Report how it has worked with other regulators to achieve consistent quality, application & enforcement of management measures.
- **SC2C:** Compile records of enforcement activity; provide them to the National Inshore Marine Enforcement Group (NIMEG) & publish them on its website.
- **SC2D:** Adopt the national Code of Conduct for IFCOs, review it annually & publish on its website by 1 April.
- **SC2E:** Ensure the Code of Conduct for IFCOs is reflected in work objectives & annual appraisals.
- **SC2F:** Warranted Officers attain accreditation & undertake Continuing Professional Development.



IFCA SUCCESS CRITERIA 3

IFCAs use evidence based & appropriate measures to manage the sustainable exploitation of sea fisheries resources & deliver marine environmental protection within their districts.

Definition

The IFCAs were created as statutory inshore regulators by the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009. They are relevant authorities for implementing international environmental commitments including the Birds, Habitats, Water & Marine Strategy Framework Directives & make an important contribution to securing a network of well managed marine protected areas. Fisheries Management Plans identify local management measures which should be based on evidence; be timely; subject to appropriate consultation & in step with national initiatives & priorities. An IFCA should balance the social & economic benefits of exploiting sea fisheries resources with the need to protect the environment. Make a contribution to sustainable development.

Outcomes

- Identify issues likely to affect sustainable management of the marine environment in the IFC District; undertake risk assessment & gap analysis; review appropriateness of existing measures; evaluate management options & develop & implement proportionate marine management solutions.
- Support implementation of a well-managed network of Marine Protected Areas by: developing a range of criteria-based management options; implementing management measures to ensure that inshore fisheries activities comply with the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 & the revised approach to managing commercial fisheries in Marine Protected Areas; local management contributes to delivery of targets for the Marine Strategy Framework Directive, Water Framework Directive & Marine Plans.
- The IFCA will develop Fisheries Management Plans for priority species where appropriate. Shared objectives will be developed with identified partners; actions identified & best practice reflected so that management makes a contribution to sustainable development.

Indicators

- **SC3A:** Record site-specific management considerations for Marine Protected Areas & report progress to the Authority.
- **SC3B:** Publish data analysis & evidence supporting new management measures, on its website.
- **SC3C:** Provide management information (e.g. sampling &/or survey results) which will be collected periodically after new management measures have been implemented, to demonstrate the extent of effectiveness of the intervention.
- **SC3D:** Have developed a range of criteria-based management options that are explained to stakeholders through the IFCA website & reviewed by 31 March annually.
- **SC3E:** New IFCA management measures selected for development and implementation are delivered within agreed timescales.
- **SC3F:** The IFCA will include shared agreed objectives and actions from Fisheries Management Plans in its own Annual Plan, which will be published by 31 March each year.
- **SC3G:** Progress made in relevant Fisheries Management Plan areas, including Maximum Sustainable Yield commitments, will be noted in the IFCA's Annual Report.



IFCA SUCCESS CRITERIA 4

IFCAs have appropriate governance in place & staff are trained & professional

Definition

IFCAs are statutory authorities & sit within the local government family. Authority members may be either general members or local councillors. They comply with Codes of Conduct & the Standing Orders that apply to meetings of local government committees. General members are appointed on merit, through open competition & for a term. They are subject to an annual performance appraisal. An IFCA is funded by levy, charged to its member councils. Funding originates in local taxation. An IFCA is accountable for its use of public resources & should ensure that a proper auditing regime provides confidence in its commitment & spend of public money. It should make effective use of its resources, including staff & assets. An IFCA has a statutory obligation to prepare & publish Annual Plans & Annual Reports.

Outcomes

- Demonstrate its long-term strategic approach to sustainable marine management by having appropriate plan-making, review, update & amendment procedures in place. The IFCA will record its performance against corporate outcomes & indicators as soon as practically possible following the end of the financial year.
- Have staff performance management system in place that link to the IFCA success criteria. There will be an induction procedure for new joiners. Staff training & development needs will be identified. Performance will be managed &, where necessary, improvement procedures will be followed.
- The IFCA Committee will be supported by an organised, efficient & effective secretariat. New members will receive an induction pack & briefing from the Authority. There will be a rolling twelve month schedule of quarterly Authority meetings. Notices of meetings & documentation will be made available in line with Standing Orders.
- IFCA Committee meetings will be held in public unless material is either confidential, or exempt within the meaning of the LG Act 1972.

Indicators

- **SC4A:** Publish a Plan on its website by 31 March, setting out the main objectives & priorities for the next financial year. A copy will be sent to the Secretary of State.
- **SC4B:** After the end of each financial year, publish a Report on its website describing its activities, performance & a summary of audited financial information in that year, by 30 November. A copy will be sent to the Secretary of State.
- **SC4C:** IFCA staff will have annual performance management plans in place. Annual appraisals for all staff will have been completed by 31 March each year.
- **SC4D:** An efficient secretariat of IFCA staff support IFCA Authority meetings which are held quarterly & are quorate. Meeting documentation will meet Standing Orders.
- **SC4E:** Demonstrate in its Annual Report, how marine, land & water management mechanisms in the IFCA District have worked responsively & effectively together.



IFCA SUCCESS CRITERIA 5

IFCAs make the best use of evidence to deliver their objectives

Definition

IFCAs are statutory regulators for their Inshore Fisheries and Conservation District. Decision-making should be based on evidence. All IFCAs are supported by officers who pool their expertise and share best practice as a Technical Advisory Group (TAG). A programme of research activity and monitoring is planned, developed and updated in consultation with partners. The programme informs management decisions and supports justification for additional research and evidence gathering.

Outcomes

- A strategic research plan that contributes to greater understanding of the marine environment and delivery of cost-effective management of sea fisheries resources.
- Standard Operating Procedures describe how data is captured and shared with principal partners.
- A list of research databases held by the IFCA and the frequency of their review.
- Non-confidential meta-data collected through the IFCA research programme should be recorded in a database available to the marine research community

Indicators

- **SC5A:** Demonstrate progress that has been made towards identifying its evidence needs by publishing a research plan each year.
- **SC5B:** Publish a research report annually that demonstrates how evidence has supported decision making.
- **SC5C:** The IFCA's contribution to TAG and progress that has been made towards a national evidence needs programme will be recorded in the IFCA's Annual Report.



NIFCA WORK STREAMS FOR THE YEAR AHEAD

ABOUT WORKSTREAMS

This section sets out NIFCA's planned workstreams for the coming year, focusing on our core areas of activity: Science and Research, Partnership Working, Enforcement and Compliance, and Governance and Development. These workstreams reflect our strategic priorities and are informed by evidence, risk assessments, legislative requirements, and ongoing engagement with stakeholders. They provide a clear roadmap for how we will continue to deliver our statutory duties while adapting to emerging challenges and opportunities in the marine environment.

Each workstream is aligned with one or more of the five national IFCA Success Criteria, which are indicated using icons throughout this section. These markers highlight how our work contributes to shared goals across all IFCAs, including sustainable fisheries, environmental protection, and strong governance. By delivering these focused workstreams, NIFCA aims to maintain effective, responsive, and collaborative management of inshore fisheries across our District.



GOVERNANCE

NIFCA is principally governed through quarterly meetings of its members, held in January, April (our Annual Meeting), July, and October. Our governance is underpinned by the Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Order 2010, along with our Constitution, Standing Orders, and Code of Conduct. These documents, alongside member and staff handbooks and a suite of operational policies, are kept under regular review.

Two standing committees (Watch and Finance) convene ahead of each quarterly meeting to focus on enforcement, staffing, and financial oversight. Additional subcommittees are established as needed, such as for bylaw review.

Governance processes are reviewed by the Chief Officer in consultation with the Senior Management Team and members, with input from staff and stakeholders as appropriate and in the following year, we will be undertaking a robust internal policy review and staff satisfaction survey to support our continued development.

As part of our ongoing commitment to strong governance and effective stakeholder engagement, NIFCA is taking forward key themes from the national Conduct and Operations recommendations issued to all IFCAs. These focus on transparency in decision-making, clarity around the prioritisation of marine conservation, and continuous improvement in how we communicate with and involve stakeholders.

In the year ahead, we will conduct a self-assessment against these recommendations to identify areas for improvement and good practice. A particular focus will be on enhancing how we communicate the rationale behind management decisions, especially where Marine Protected Area (MPA) conservation must take precedence over other fisheries objectives. These decisions are often complex, and clear communication is essential to build understanding and trust.

We also recognise the need for transparency around external constraints that influence management outcomes. Building on our current engagement practices, we will continue to explore ways to support member development, introduce feedback mechanisms, and strengthen communication with stakeholders to ensure the Authority remains inclusive and accountable.



STAFF & TRAINING

The continued professional development and training of all NIFCA officers and staff remains a core part of the Authority's 2025–2026 work plan. Training needs will be regularly reviewed and integrated into operational planning to ensure staff are equipped with the skills and knowledge needed to carry out their duties effectively.

NIFCA will maintain and review staffing policies and continue regular planning meetings involving the Senior Management Team and both enforcement and environmental IFCOs. These ensure a coordinated approach to operational priorities and enable timely responses to routine and emerging challenges. With support from additional Defra funding, the Authority now employs two full-time Environmental IFCOs. Their work includes supporting the Environment team, responding to Marine Licence applications, and finalising MPA obligations assessments. All IFCO activities are subject to ongoing review through structured and ad hoc meetings led by the Chief Officer.

The staff appraisal system, originally established by the Northumberland Sea Fisheries Committee and further developed by NIFCA, continues to provide a structured process for performance review, identifying learning needs, and supporting career development through constructive feedback and staff input.

To enhance operational capacity, a second engineer will be recruited by mid-2025 to support the Skipper/Engineer in maintaining vessels and equipment, and to assist with enforcement and survey tasks. Training will also support increased use of unmanned aerial vehicles in enforcement and research. NIFCA remains committed to high-quality training for staff and Authority members, balancing this with a cost-conscious approach to ensure standards are upheld within available resources.

The Authority will continue to participate in national-level training through the Competent Officer programme for enforcement and environmental officers. Delivered via Kent and Essex IFCA and supported by officers from across the network, this programme will see three NIFCA officers attend in early 2026.

NIFCA also engages with national forums such as the Technical Advisory Group (TAG), which supports IFCA's scientific and environmental work, and the National Inshore Marine Enforcement Group (NIMEG), which focuses on developing and coordinating enforcement practices.

Planned Training for 2025–2026:

- Conflict management
- 4x4 driving and trailer handling for all operational staff
- STCW refresher courses for relevant team members





SUPPORTING GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES

In line with its statutory role, NIFCA contributes significantly to delivering key national priorities around marine conservation, fisheries management, and sustainable development. The Authority aligns its ongoing and future work with these priorities to ensure effective support and implementation of government policy. For further details on all workstream related to government policy please see the Annual Research Plan 2025/26.

MARINE PROTECTED AREAS (MPAS)

The UK Government has committed to creating and maintaining a well-managed network of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs). IFCA's are integral to this network, with responsibilities to monitor, manage, and where necessary, regulate fishing activity in line with the conservation objectives of MPAs. IFCA's have a statutory duty through the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 (MaCAA) and the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017.

Within the NIFCA district, there are 10 MPAs, including Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs), Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), and Special Protection Areas (SPAs). These sites are designated to protect a variety of habitats and species. NIFCA's must manage fishing activity to avoid adverse impacts from fishing activity on protected features. In 2025/26 NIFCA will complete Outstanding MPA Assessments, continue with Monitoring and Control Plans for each MPA and work under and review the Coquet to St Mary's Trawl Management Plan.

FISHERIES MANAGEMENT PLANS (FMPS)

FMPs are a central feature of the Fisheries Act 2020, which sets out how the UK manages its fisheries post-Brexit. The act mandates the creation of evidence-based, species- and region-specific management plans to restore and maintain fish stocks at sustainable levels. FMPs aim to describe clear fisheries objectives and the steps to achieve them, implement flexible, locally tailored measures, facilitate co-management by involving local fishers and stakeholders and identify and address data and evidence gaps.

NIFCA has played an active role in supporting FMP development and implementation, particularly focusing on crab and lobster as they are economically and ecologically important in the district. Key work areas include evidence gathering and data sharing, stakeholder communication, collaboration with Defra and ALBs.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The growing demand on marine space for activities such as offshore wind, aquaculture, and infrastructure highlights the need for integrated and sustainable management of marine resources. IFCA's contribute to this process through engagement in marine planning and licencing as statutory consultees. Key work areas include Marine Licencing, Marine Planning and permitting and consents.



MANAGEMENT REVIEW & DEVELOPMENT

The development of management measures for the sustainable exploitation of sea fisheries resources is central to the remit of NIFCA. As such, NIFCA are responsible for all aspects of the development of measures from the collection and collation of best available evidence, communication and consultation with stakeholders, development of options for management measures within byelaws, drafting byelaws, completion of associated impact assessments, and review and monitoring of each management measure. This year, the team will:

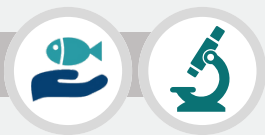
- Complete the review of netting resulting in the revocation of the current Fixed Engines byelaw which will be replaced by a Netting Permit byelaw.
- Review the Coquet to St Mary's MCZ Trawl Management Plan developed under the Trawling byelaw.

The team will also work to understand how changes in the landscape of national fisheries management through FMPs can align with future changes to NIFCA byelaws.

MONITORING OF CODES OF CONDUCT

NIFCA enforces voluntary measures through regular monitoring of activity under its codes of conduct. This includes periwinkle and bait collection activities in designated estuarine and intertidal areas. NIFCA will patrol and monitor activity levels to assess compliance with both codes of conduct.





RESEARCH

The Environmental Team conducts research and monitoring to improve understanding of the sea fisheries resources managed by NIFCA and the marine environment on which they depend. This work directly informs the decisions made by the Authority. The team has developed a programme of surveys and assessments that are carried out either continuously throughout the year, at fixed times annually, or on an ad hoc basis in response to specific evidence needs. Please see below for a list of key research programmes for 2025/26, for further information and the full research plan please see the Annual Research Plan 2025/26.

CRUSTACEAN MONITORING (LOBSTER & CRAB)

NIFCA will continue its biometric sampling of lobster and brown crab populations, as well as the v-notching programme to support the sustainability of crustacean stocks within the district. This work contributes to long-term stock monitoring and aligns with national Fisheries Management Plans (FMPs).

NEPHROPS MONITORING AND TRAWL GEAR TRIALS

To enhance understanding of Nephrops abundance and gear impact, NIFCA will conduct inshore Surveys to estimate Nephrops abundance and trial lower-impact trawling gear.

FISHING ACTIVITY MONITORING

To understand the distribution and intensity of fishing activity, NIFCA collects sighting data and aims to use vessel tracking information where available. NIFCA will explore and support integration of iVMS data (pending national implementation) to enhance monitoring.

INTERTIDAL SURVEYS

NIFCA will continue to monitor intertidal species and habitats, specifically periwinkles and mussels, to assess the local populations and impact of collection activities. This work supports MPA management and the collection of long-term data series.

RECREATIONAL SEA ANGLING (RSA) ENGAGEMENT AND STRATEGY

The Authority will maintain and develop engagement with the RSA sector through outreach, monitoring, and participation in research projects. This work helps gather data and build community involvement.



ENGAGEMENT & COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

NIFCA's Engagement and Communication Strategy benefits from both external communications expertise and the strong local knowledge of its officers. Our approach will be continuously reviewed to strengthen relationships with stakeholders and the wider public.

In 2025-26, we will continue hosting Fisher Forum events across the district's main fishing ports. These face-to-face sessions will take a tailored format - from informal quayside drop-ins to events held aboard the patrol vessel St Aidan - to encourage open dialogue and improve accessibility. This will be especially important during the review of management measures for the Coquet to St Mary's Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ).

We will maintain and build on our engagement with the recreational sector, including launching the new Bass Scale Project. Participation in community events will also continue, such as the North Shields 800 celebrations, harbour festivals, RNLI days, Trinity House educational programmes with local cadets, and ongoing liaison with Fishermen's Associations and Sea Angling Clubs.

To ensure broad and inclusive engagement, we will use a range of communication tools, including timely press releases and regular updates on our website. These channels support transparency, awareness, and understanding of NIFCA's responsibilities and decisions.

As part of our outreach, up to three stakeholder newsletters will be produced each year, offering updates on strategic priorities, regulatory developments, and operational work. Fisher Focus bulletins will continue to provide targeted updates to commercial fishers, covering both national and local regulatory issues.

Substantial improvements will be made to the Authority's website to enhance its role as a key information hub. These updates will focus on usability, accessibility, and relevant content, improving user experience and encouraging wider engagement.

Social media will remain a core part of our communication strategy. Strategic use of multiple platforms will allow us to share real-time updates, increase visibility of our work, and support both stakeholder engagement and public education on marine conservation.





ENFORCEMENT

In 2025–2026, NIFCA will continue to adopt an adaptive co-management approach to enforcement. This strategy prioritises achieving compliance through engagement, education, and the provision of clear advice. Where this approach is unsuccessful or in cases involving serious breaches of legislation, the Authority will apply formal enforcement measures as appropriate.

All enforcement activities will be intelligence- and risk-led. Identified risks will be systematically recorded, assessed, and shared as necessary using the Clue intelligence database. Enforcement priorities will be informed internally and through joint Tasking and Coordination Group (TCG) meetings with the Marine Management Organisation (MMO) and other relevant agencies.

Compliance monitoring and patrols based around the times and days of all fishing operations- both at sea and onshore - will be conducted routinely, with targeted actions implemented when specific intelligence dictates.

In 2025, NIFCA's enforcement team will:

- Prioritise enforcement of Minimum Conservation Reference Sizes (MCRS) and related conservation measures aimed at sustaining key commercial stocks.
- Increase inspections of static gear to support compliance with the Crustacea and Mollusc Permitting and Pot Limitation Byelaw.
- Ensure MPA fishing restrictions and prohibitions on gear types and activity are being observed and compatible with the management of those sites.
- Continue targeted outreach and enforcement within the recreational fishing community, promoting greater awareness and adherence to fisheries legislation.

Ahead of the confirmation of the Netting byelaw we will ensure stakeholders are informed of key changes in any additional local and national legislation that may affect their activities.





PARTNERSHIP WORKING

We are committed to maintaining strong partnerships with key agencies, including the Marine Management Organisation (MMO), Environment Agency (EA), Natural England (NE), Newcastle University, and our constituent councils (Northumberland County Council and North Tyneside Council). These relationships are a source of pride for us, as they significantly contribute to the successful delivery of our remit and benefit our partners and stakeholders alike.

NIFCA collaborates with major organisations under established Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs), including those with the MMO, NE, EA, Cefas, Newcastle University, and the Tweed Commission. We have also developed a Joint Working Arrangement (JWA) with the MMO, Environment Agency, and Natural England. This framework enables coordinated planning and clearly defined criteria to help each organisation meet its objectives within the NIFCA district. Additionally, we maintain a close working relationship with the Marine Directorate of the Scottish Government to manage a fishery that spans the English-Scottish border.

Our Environmental Team plays a central role in this collaborative approach. They work with the organisations mentioned above to carry out joint research aimed at monitoring various aspects of sea fisheries exploitation in the district. These partnerships are essential to ensuring high standards in data collection, analysis, and dissemination. The team also engages directly with the fishing industry on a range of projects, contributing vital data to ongoing monitoring efforts and strengthening our long-standing relationships within the industry. Further details of this work for 2025-26 can be found in the Annual Research Plan 2025-26.

Multi agency collaborative working has proven a key strategy for NIFCA's enforcement team over previous years with a number of successful actions undertaken which have resulted in sanctions for non-compliance with local and national legislation. This will continue throughout 2025-2026 and links with the enforcement teams from the MMO, North-Eastern IFCA and EA will be strengthened through joint training and patrolling. Regular contact will be maintained with Northumbria Polices Marine Unit, the Tweed Commission, Marine Directorate and the Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority (GLAA) and joint work initiated when appropriate. NIFCA's Enforcement Team will continue to build links with the local fisheries industry and recreational sector to better identify trends, areas of concern and to inform policy decisions.

NIFCA's unique contribution to these collaborations lies in our deep local knowledge and strong community relationships. These qualities underpin our approach to partnership working, enabling us to deliver sustainable, high-impact outcomes.



LOOKING AHEAD AT NIFCA




THIS YEAR AND BEYOND

As we look ahead to 2025–2026, NIFCA remains committed to safeguarding the marine environment and supporting sustainable inshore fisheries. This Annual Plan outlines our strategic objectives and operational priorities, reflecting our dedication to effective enforcement, collaborative research, stakeholder engagement, and prudent resource management. Our progress and achievements will be detailed in the Annual Report, scheduled for publication in October 2026.

For more information about NIFCA’s work, including updates, resources, and opportunities to engage, please visit our website at www.nifca.gov.uk. You can also subscribe to our newsletter for the latest news and developments.


We appreciate your continued interest and support as we strive to protect and enhance the marine environment for current and future generations.





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NIFCA ANNUAL PLAN 2025-26

