

Minutes
General Committee Meeting
- APRIL 2025 -

Date	Monday 28 th April 2025	Time	13:00
Venue	Newbiggin Maritime Centre, Church Point, Newbiggin-by-the-Sea NE64 6DB		
NIFCA Members	Amelia Henderson (Chair), Frank Armstrong (FA), Paul Dent (PD), Brian Douglas (BD), Geoff Cowan (GC), Liz Dunn (LD), Patrick Gray (PG), Steph Ingram (SI), Catherine Scott (CS), Martin Swinbank (MS), Ian Thomas (IT), Alex Wallace (AW) and James Wood (JW).		
Officers	Mark Southerton (MS), Alex Aitken (AA), Nick Weir (NW), Emma Stiles (ES)		

3.1	Meeting Matters	Decision
Apologies	Catherine Seymour, Colin Hardy, Michael Nugent, Pip Moore, Tommy Mulvenna, Guy Renner-Thompson, Martin Kitching, Steve Lowe	
Declarations of Interest	None Given	
Guests	Sarah Coulthard (SC) - Newcastle University. Craig Thompson (CT) and Ian Clough (IC) – RSA/ members of the public.	
Chair’s welcome	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Thanks to GRT for chairing last meeting. Thanks to Councillor members for attending at this busy time and all the best for the local elections on Thursday. 	
Election of Chair & Vice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Received nominations prior to the meeting for AH to continue as Chair and GRT to continue as Vice Chair. 	
Members voted on electing Amelia Henderson as Chair for the next IFCA year, 2025-2026		All members voted in favour Amelia Henderson elected as Chair
Members voted on electing Guy Renner-Thompson as Vice Chair for the next IFCA year, 2025-2026		All members voted in favour Guy Renner-Thompson elected as Vice Chair
Appointment to Subcommittees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is currently one vacancy on all subcommittees. Anyone wishing to step down or join a subcommittee, please contact MS. An email about this will follow to all members. 	

3.2	Draft minutes: General Committee Meeting: 27 January 2025	Approval
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A letter of support regarding Cullercoats Harbour was sent to NTC – a response to this letter is in the Chief Officers Quarterly Report. 	
Proposed acceptance	IT	Seconded JW Approved by all

3.3	Meetings attended throughout the quarter	Information
AH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> North Shields 800: lots of events taking place throughout the year including Blessing of the Fleet on 20th June. NIFCA hosted Defra on St Aidan who were interested in the work done on Coquet to St Marys – IFCOs have now been invited to Defra’s remote monitoring meeting. 	

3.4	Sarah Coulthard Presentation: Conversations with IFCAs	Information
Sarah Coulthard gave a presentation to all members regarding the “Conversations with the IFCAs” report which was received with thanks.		

3.5	Member Matters	Information
AH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A very fond farewell to a member who has given so much time, knowledge and expertise over the last 13 years. IT has been a very involved member giving expertise in specialised areas throughout his time at NIFCA and will be very missed. IT was presented with a print from a local artist with sincere thanks. 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Welcome to newly appointed member Stu Harding, a local recreational angler. 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reminder to all members for bios and photos for the website. 	

3.8	Bait Digging, Boulmer	Information
AH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Welcome to local anglers CT and IC, who join the meeting. Raised concern with Cllr Pattison regarding bait digging in the local area. 	
IC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There was a byelaw brought in by Alnwick Council allowing bait digging on one side of a boundary of rocks – either this no longer exists or it's being misused. People are taking huge amounts of worms. Arriving in minibuses, digging for 4 hours, then it shows up on Facebook for sale. Happening at nighttime – this is the only time to catch them. 	
MS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There are three issues: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Concern that bait is being collected and used commercially Unsustainable collection and damage to the worms Byelaw restricting where it can be collected and some people misusing it NIFCA is limited on what it can do: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No jurisdiction to enforce the Alnwick Council Byelaw (regardless of legal status). Commercial vs recreational digging - no precedent for defining it and NIFCA does not have powers to deal with selling. NIFCA can: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prepare a set of papers on the work done to date and how it's been discussed If there is new information to support additional pressure/activity, members can decide to make this a priority piece of work. 	
AA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We have previously contacted NCC to determine the legal status of the byelaw, but it was hard to decipher its status and whether it could be enforced. The byelaw was initially brought in as a health and safety issue for accessing boats rather than exploitation, so unsure whether it is still in place. NIFCA does not currently have data on the worm stocks – studies from 2016-17 showed declines and slow recovery rate. Suggests digging has a long-term impact. 	
AW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In 2009, the land was transferred to NCC – they should create new signage. NIFCA should speak to Steven Gerard at NCC and get a response. 	
AH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When it's seen on Facebook for sale, can be reported to HMRC. 	
AA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To control the bait digging, there would have to be a multi-agency approach as NIFCA has no jurisdiction for sale. NIFCA could look at the impact the digging has on worms. 	
JW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NIFCA to research recent NE Lincolnshire Council recreational permit which prevents commercial digging. 	
IC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Think permits should be by radius allowing local access only. 	
AH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Will bring this back to the General/T&S with a more rounded consideration. Thank you for coming and raising it. Welcome to come back to the next meeting. 	

3.6	FMP Update	Information
AA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Crab and lobster: - increase in MCRS 87-90mm announcement is imminent but implementation plan and impact on existing byelaws (stating 87mm) is uncertain. Regional management pilots are in development in North East and South West. 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NIFCA have been invited to join implementation group (led by Defra) so we can represent the local fishing industry.
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3.7	Management Coquet to St Marys MCZ	Information
AA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The number of exemptions to trawl within the MCZ is now capped - track record and monitoring system with tracking device/sensors (at NIFCA's expense) is required. Two exemptions issued, two pending. Management review due in 2026 – 4 steps (outlined in the paper) for further consideration at the T&S meeting/General committees. 	
BD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Concern that this is detrimental to new fishers entering the industry - this must be a serious consideration at the next review. NIFCA is limiting trawling in an active area – there's huge areas of sea which are untouched, but NIFCA is targeting the small area where we fish for prawns. Don't believe we do enough damage to the seabed to restrict access - it is currently a sustainable food source. Do praise the IFCA – Defra wants bottom towed gear gone altogether and NIFCA is working to keep it open. 	
PD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Concern that this is the start of another fishery being lost. Fishers lost the scalloping because it was destructive to the seabed (that was understood) and lost the salmon fishery years ago. Once something is gone, it never comes back. It feels to fishers that when you give a little, the taking is much greater. The 'track record' prevents new fishers entering the industry. Trawlers without shellfish licence could lose businesses due to lack of diversification. No clear evidence that bottom towed gear damages the seabed. We find the more an area is fished, the more fish are produced. 	
GC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There's been so much gear towed up and down the Tyne, yet we still have a good prawn fishery. Does make you wonder what damage it really does. 	
AA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All points are fair and noted. Must remember it is an MCZ with statutory requirement to assess and act. We assessed using prior studies, drop cameras, impacts to the communities within the mud etc. Did not want to close it entirely - this was the compromise to keep it open. Going forward we need to consider if we can update the management plan to consider new entrants. This is an evolving management measure. 	
MS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> One possibility is to allow more fishers in the MCZ but keep the accumulative time limit of 1000 hours. Higher cost to NIFCA for equipment if we continue to use sensors. Unable to access the iVMS data until the system goes live. 	

3.9	Summary Reports of Watch and Finance Committee	Information
MS	<p>Finance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Approved minutes and budget papers – discussed asset replacement fund and reserves. Reports on RDel fund and expenditure under the three funding streams accepted. Update on Spending Review received – IFCA's unlikely to receive further RDel/CDel funding. Members updated on recruitment process replacing TN (left in Feb). Consideration of office space being created in garage and upgrade of outdoor lighting. 	
	<p>Watch:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Approved previous Watch minutes and T&S (subject to one change) and accepted PV report. Considered an infringement regarding undersized landings and agreed to prosecute. Discussed fuel contamination issue with RQM. Received H&S report and AIFCA updated. 	

3.10	IFCO Reports	Information
3.10.1 - Chief Officer's Report		
MS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • KS is now on maternity leave. • TN left for an exciting job offer – currently recruiting for Second Engineer/IFCO. • IT retiring after 12 years on Authority. Leaving with best wishes and sincere thanks. • Stu Harding starting in May. • Potential for some changes following local elections in May. • Received Conduct and Ops report – now considering how to implement change. • Received response from NTC re. Cullercoats boatyard which was shared with Paul. 	
3.10.2 - Enforcement Report		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accepted. 	
3.10.3 - Environmental Report		
AA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intertidal mussel numbers are so low that samples could not be taken. • Has been significant decline over the years – NE hope to receive funding to research reasons for the decline, to protect future stocks. 	
GC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of mussels at Royal Quays pontoon are incredible and they're very healthy. 	
PD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Something happened with mussels in 80s & 90s in the wash and Defra asked fishermen to collect them. Might be worth researching this and whether it had the impact they wanted and if it can help now. 	
AH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thanks to AA for work on the pilot Enviro course – great to see it's happened. 	
3.10.4 - Maintenance Report		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Received with thanks. 	

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

3.12	Any Other Business	Information
PD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fishers need to know when the surveys are happening - people are losing gear. 	
MS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There were three survey boats over the weekend, but NIFCA received no notice to mariners about them – Andrew took a call and tried to get information about it from the MMO but received no response. • Fishers can contact Simon Lauder at Subcom for compensation. 	

The meeting was closed by the Chair at 15:30.

Actions for Next Meeting

Item	Action	Who
3.8	Speak to Steven Gerard at NCC and get a response regarding the bait digging byelaw.	AA
3.8	Research recent NE Lincolnshire Council rec. permit preventing commercial digging.	AA
3.8	To raise bait digging in the T&S subcommittee for consideration of potential action.	AA