

Minutes General Committee Meeting - January 2026 -

Date	Monday 26 th January 2026	Time	13:00
Venue	Newbiggin Maritime Centre, Church Point, Newbiggin-by-the-Sea NE64 6DB		
NIFCA Members	Amelia Henderson (AH), Guy Renner-Thompson (GRT), Frank Armstrong (FA), Les Bowman (LB), Geoff Cowan (GC), Paul Dent (PD), Liz Dunn (LD), Stephen Flower (SF), Martin Kitching (MK), Steve Lowe (SL), Michael Nugent (MN), Martin Swinbank (MSw), James Wood (JW).		
Officers	Mark Southerton (MS), Emma Cosimini (EC).		

3.1	Meeting Matters	Record
Apologies	Karl Green (KG), Patrick Gray (PG), Chris Proud (CP), Steph Ingram (SI), Stu Harding (SH), Catherine Scott (CSc), Pip Moore (PM), Brian Burdis (BB) Brian Douglas (BD)	
Declarations of Interest	None	
Guests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wayne Smailes – Commercial fisherman • David Armstrong – Commercial fisherman • Peter Morgan – Angling Trust • Joe Watson – Environment Agency 	
Chair's welcome	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome to everyone. Pleased to be joined by a number of guests today. 	

3.2	Draft minutes: General Committee Meeting: 27 October 2025	Approval
AH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Received with thanks. • All actions complete. • 3.9 – Newcastle University project will be carried forward in PM absence. 	
LD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will seek Coastal Defence update from NW on his return. 	
Proposed acceptance		Approved by all
	SL	LD

3.3	Meetings attended throughout the quarter	Information
AH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Another very busy quarter for the team. • Port of Blyth oil spillage training: can make enquiries about whether the Standing Environment Group for oil spillages still exists. • Nice to see joint training with the MMO and RNLI. 	
MS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attended numerous Coastal Growth webinars. • Had a website development meeting – it is progressing nicely and hopefully the launch will tie in with our 15-year celebration in the Spring. • Held a number of successful Fisher Forums at the end of the year. 	

3.4	NIFCA Budget 2026-27	Decision
AH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • JuS has done a fantastic job of presenting a very clear budget. There have been a couple of changes throughout the year, resulting in this final deficit figure, including repairs to St Aidan and higher than anticipated court costs. • Instead of the predicted surplus, we're looking at £8.5k deficit. 	

AH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Members proposed a 3% precept increase at the Budget Planning meeting, which is below the inflation rate. 2.5% cost of living and incremental rise for those employees due. Hopefully contributing to NCC cost saving with going below inflation. Pension contributions to be lowered (doesn't impact staff) as pension pot was strong. Will be repairs for PV which will come from the PV replacement fund. Management costs will increase which includes £10k contingency fund. Anticipate surplus at the end of 2026-27 year of c£6,800.
SL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shows good financial initiative having the Asset Replacement Fund in anticipation of future requirements.
Members were asked to vote on the proposed budget	All members voted in favour of accepting the budget. The 2026/27 budget was approved.

3.5	Member Matters	Information
MS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Email sent to members asking for interest in subcommittees – please take a look and respond with any changes ahead of the April QM. NSHC: we tried to recruit from our membership but was unsuccessful. Spoke to Harbour Commission Chair about recruiting from the public around Seahouses – will update members once we've had a response. AIFCA Community Voice films: videographers visited Northumberland and interviewed staff and members. Thanks to AH, GC and SH who feature. These will be launched by AIFCA at Coastal Futures. Members Roundup isn't included in this quarter's papers, but copies have been sent to members at the end of each month. 	
AH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Congratulations to SH whose wife had a baby over the holidays. 	

3.6	FMP Update	Information
MS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> MMO published guidance on recreational bass fishing - new increase will be for 3 fish per day for recreational fishing. This is an international agreement which applies in the EU and UK for this shared stock/fishery. Scotland launched consultation on demersal fisheries. Lobster MCRS increases to take place, increasing 1mm annually until 90mm. Will keep abreast of other updates on FMPs includes Skates and ray etc. 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Options being discussed re. Defra Crab and Lobster FMP draft effort management paper: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Consideration of pot limitations in other areas of the country inshore and offshore focus Catch limitations with focus on inshore / offshore Limit on fishing days at sea Vessel size limits and capacity 	
GRT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Frustrating that FMPs are launched as a blanket decision for England when Northumberland has a healthy stock. 	
LB	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Any chance of a lobster hatchery in the NE? 	
AH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have one in Amble but it's more of an educational tool – very expensive and underfunded. Increase of electric costs and equipment (especially post 2022) has been very costly and resulted in its reduction. AA will be attending the meeting: feel free to provide comments for her to feedback. 	

3.7	Crustacea and Molluscs Permitting and Pot Limitation - MCRS	Decision
MS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lobster MCRS, 3mm increase will be staggered over 3 years: 1st March 2026 will increase to 88mm, then 1mm annually until 90mm. This is a national decision being brought in by Defra (not NIFCA led). The increase to 90mm was an objective of the Crab and Lobster FMP. Defra spoke to fishers in Northumberland and Whitby: NIFCA fed-back that there would 	

	<p>be a 34% economic impact on the fishers if they brought it in immediately. They therefore agreed to do it over 3 years to reduce/spread the immediate impact.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is unknown when it is expected that fishermen will see the improvement from the increase to 90mm (more lobsters on the ground). • NIFCA now needs to decide whether to make a permit condition because we can't enforce this change until the SI comes out (this could take a long time). We would not be able to act if we found someone doing things illegally. • It will be introduced by Defra initially through vessel licencing condition from 1st March then once created, the Statutory Instrument will become the primary mechanism. It is unknown how long they will need to make the SI. • It also creates a cross-border issue (this was highlighted to Defra) with Scottish fishers able to transport 87mm lobsters in English waters, where English vessels cannot. • NIFCA can include the 88mm restriction into our permit condition which would allow us to enforce it and prevent Scottish vessels carrying/retaining lobster with carapace length below 88mm in England. • Unfortunately, a permit condition would not work for recreational fishers. Some fishers work with pots and require a permit, others don't (cleeking and hand gathering). Creating a permit condition for recreational would create a tandem size limitation within the same stakeholder group. We will need to wait for the SI to capture everyone. • We will be giving free gauges out to all our commercial permit holders. • Now need to decide if we want to include a permit condition within our byelaw re. the Lobster MCRS change?
GRT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is something which has been imposed on us, not something we want to do. • Making it fairer for all commercial fishers seems to be sensible.
SF	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to emphasise it widely that this is Defra not NIFCA.
<p>Members asked to vote on whether to introduce a permit condition to manage MCRS All members in favour of permit condition.</p>	

3.8	Netting Byelaw Update (oral)	Information
MS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The byelaw and de DMA have now been sent to Defra (following agreement from MMO). • Just awaiting progression through Defra teams. 	

3.9	Byelaw Review Procedure	Decision
MS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This paper sets out the proposed procedure. • Officers would consider scientific and survey data, advice from Defra, ask a series of questions: ask if it's still required, doing what it needs to, is it regulatory etc. • This would be approved by the T&S meeting, then full Authority. • Improved transparency was a key output from the C&O report. • Reviews will be 3-yearly (as per wording of the byelaw). • A new byelaw/change of byelaw takes a minimum of 18 months, so needs to be a longer span than annually but if a need arises, can do it sooner. 	
SL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Useful if they're spread over the year so not all due at the same time. 	
MK	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are 3 T&S meetings this year, so perhaps we can consider one each meeting. 	
<p>Members were asked to vote on this proposed procedure of byelaw review.</p>		All Members voted to accept.

3.10	Summary Reports	Approval
	<p>Finance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All reports received and approved. • Heard and accepted slight changes to expected budget closing figure. • Received the 26/7 budget. • Updated on staffing matters – KS reduced to 4 days per week. 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agreed on annual audit at same costs through NCC. • Considered St Aidan engine report and agreed inspection on both engines. Discussed WB3 and alterations to RAMBE. Agreed to additional work on sponsors. • Updated on website and clarified financial regs which are exclusive of VAT.
	<p>Watch:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All reports received and approved. • Heard reports of FAPs, warnings and discussed sanctions. • Members updated on recent court cases: Dentons guilty of fishing without permit and joint prosecution with MMO adjourned. • Brigham and Ward – guilty following trial having failed to comply with NIFCA byelaws. Sentences adjourned. • Seizure of 175 pots and equipment – fishing without tags and gear marking. Agreed to proceed to prosecution on this. • Discussed St Aidan engine trouble, diagnostics and solutions. • Not determined if this is due to bad fuel. Cummins report doesn't say it was an outcome of that, but likely a contributing factor. Members agreed to carry out analysis on the other engine. • Still in discussion with the Marina. • Will be guided by Cummins about rebuild vs. new engine.
MN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Could consider going to someone else to rebuild rather than Cummins.
MS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have used Roystons before but weren't reliable towards the end. • Could be out the water for a couple of months but unknown yet.
JA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With only 3,500 hours there's a problem somewhere – other reputable builders out there than Roystons, so could consider an alternative.

3.11	IFCO Reports	Information
3.11.1 - Chief Officer's Report		
MS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Important quarter with national negotiations for 2026 fishing opportunities. • Seem some challenging ICES advice for key species including for mackerel, Northern shelf cod. Increase in nephrop TAC for Farne Deep area, blue fin tuna: TAC increase to 230tn and increase in recreational permits. • Spatial squeeze and offshore management – DEFRA working on wind projects and where in MPAs, they will be designating (or extending) MPAs. • Looked at long list of sites and it's not anticipated any would be in in/offshore areas of the NIFCA district. Consultation in 2026 and designation will be in 2027. • Regarding staff matters, WM was awarded JG award. • Defra have commissioned the new C&O report starting April 2026 and will be an evaluation and developing theory of change, likely to change our SC and Vision. • We have had a number of our press releases printed and will be featuring in the next North Tyneside magazine – will speak to GRT regarding Northumberland. • AIFCA newsletter now on their website. • Fishermen's Mission North Shields base has closed. 	
FA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In relation to Defra MPA compensation work, If an offshore cable came through an MPA, would Defra introduce or extend cMPA? 	
MS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That is correct, Defra looking to offset any offshore wind activity that impacts an MPA to either extending or even introducing a new MPA to offset any impact 	
AH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NIFCA could offer Peter Dade the use of our office should he need it. • This was agreed by PD. 	
3.11.2 - Enforcement Report		

MS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Alterations have been made to the vessel for hauling gear improvement. Joint work with NE IFCA and MMO has taken place. 2025 reported as a good year for lobster catches in Northumberland but lower prices. Mobile fishing: we have seen fewer visiting vessels in the past year. Recreational fishing: done a lot of work promoting the bass scale project. Officers attended the Amble Open.
3.11.3 - Environmental Report	
MS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coquet to St Marys trawl management plan stipulates up to 1000 hours annually and only 331 hours fished last year. Semi-pelagic otter board trial: seeing if we can reduce fishing footprint to seabed to protected feature. Depth sensors attached to all equipment - the trawl stayed in contact with the seabed and the doors lift from the seabed periodically. Catch composition, didn't manage to get 3 consecutive days, so couldn't get a clear comparison. Will aim to do 3 consecutive days in the coming few months. Over 4000 lobster and 2500 crabs were measured this year from quayside and offshore surveys. Fisher Forums have been carried out - VR working on report on this. MMO RFG team and SC joined for some of this.
AH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Marine Licencing: the shields ferry landing dredging - we objected this. Are these public consultations? It appears to have been offered funding and if it gets challenged, is it written somewhere that NIFCA objected?
SL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is recorded and would be held by MMO. Periwinkle surveys: great we're doing this. Could be involved in citizen science to give us better data, save us money. Can we also be vigilant for invasive species? Orange tip sea squirt keeps cropping up.
MS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Concern is tasking people to do these things and the health and safety involved.
SL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offer training or task it through a partner who does this ie. Dove Marine or MNP.
3.11.4 - Maintenance Report	
AH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NTD

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

3.13	Any Other Business	Information
AH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Next QM will be the 15-year anniversary and we hope to have more of a celebration. 	

The meeting was closed by the Chair at 3.20pm

Actions for Next Meeting

Item	Action	Who
3.3	Oil spillage training: make enquiries about whether the Standing Environment Group for oil spillages still exists.	MS
3.11	Offer Peter Dade the use of NIFCA office space, should he need it.	MS