

# NWIFCA Annual General Meeting: 5<sup>th</sup> December 2024

REPORT NO.  
4

## CEO QUARTERLY REPORT 17<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER TO 20<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER 2024

**Purpose:** For members' information.

**Recommendations:** The report is received.

### 1. Authority Committees

An Extraordinary General Meeting of the Technical, Science and Byelaw Sub-Committee (TSB) was held immediately after the last Full Authority Meeting on 26<sup>th</sup> September. This was to discuss the deferred opening of Leasowe and Pilling cockle fisheries following the previous TSB meeting on 13<sup>th</sup> August.

An Extraordinary General Meeting of the Finance and Personnel Sub-Committee (F&P) was held on 25<sup>th</sup> October. This was for me to seek approval as per our Constitution for capital expenditure in excess of £10,000 to repair one of the jet drives on North Western Protector (NWP). This work was approved and is due to go ahead in the coming weeks.

A TSB Meeting was also held on 5<sup>th</sup> November, where discussions pertained to the Pilling cockle fishery, the draft Netting Byelaw and changes to policies around our Byelaw 3 permit scheme and associated waiting list to improve prospects for young people accessing our cockle and mussel fisheries. A new Byelaw Strategy for the Authority was also agreed and adopted at this meeting, and is now publicly available on the Byelaws page on our website.

F&P met on 26<sup>th</sup> November to discuss next year's budget. An update from the F&P Chair will be provided at this meeting.

I am delighted to welcome Mark Tupper from University of Cumbria as our newest MMO appointed member. I am also delighted that Kelsey Thompson has been successful in being reappointed to the Authority after his ten-year tenure finished in November.

I reiterate my thanks and best wishes from my previous quarterly report to outgoing members Caroline Salthouse and Stephen Manning, whose ten-year tenures have now ended.

### 2. Finances

The Authority's Financial Report for Q2 of 2024/25 is provided in a separate report to this meeting and a verbal update on the aforementioned F&P meeting will be provided by the F&P Chair in relation to the budget setting for 2025/26.

We have now received our outstanding CDEL<sup>1</sup> payment of £325,000 from Defra to contribute towards the remanufacturing of NWP's engines.

At a meeting of the IFCA's Chief Officer Group (COG) on 16<sup>th</sup> October, we received informal notification from the Association of IFCA (AIFCA) that each IFCA is due to receive £140,000 in RDEL funding from Defra for the next two years. At this stage, no further information has been provided, but, based on

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<sup>1</sup> CDEL is a capital-based funding stream from Defra to support capital asset uplift for IFCA's with the advent of further responsibilities handed down from central government.

previous years' timeframes, it is not likely that we will receive 2024/25's amount until the back-end of the financial year, or even into 2025/26. In the coming months, officers will be examining the RDEL budget to-date (for monies already received) and then assessing what we might do with this additional £280,000 over the next two years. We will then bring proposals to F&P for discussion and decisions.

We recently appointed an external financial auditor, Xeinadin to conduct an audit of the Authority's finances and associated processes. The subsequent audit report has been provided to members as part of a separate agenda item for this meeting. This audit had to cover three full financial years (2021/22, 2022/23 and 2023/24) due to one having not being done since before then. Going forward, I have agreed in principle for Xeinadin to return each year to carry out an annual audit, subject to satisfactory costs and any relevant direction from members.

### **3. Estates**

I continue to explore potential new premises for our Carnforth and Whitehaven offices. No further property opportunities have presented themselves in the last three months to replace the Carnforth office but we still have 18 months to run on our current lease. Regarding Whitehaven, as per discussions at the last Authority meeting, we have sent a letter to Cumberland Council via our solicitors Ratcliffe & Bibby setting out the Authority's position on ownership of our Duncan Square property, but have still not had any form of response. Regarding the new prospective property at Marlborough Street, I had a recent meeting with the architect who has submitted the planning applications on behalf of the new owner (our would-be landlord), and they are still awaiting formal approval from Cumberland Council for the proposed changes; he informed me this is expected imminently.

Remedial works of priority issues across our estate of six premises have now commenced via our facilities management company, ARC Masterworks. We are also assessing the potential for a long overdue refit of our Liverpool office, but this is dependent on the price quoted, which we have not yet received at the time of writing.

### **4. Vessels and Vehicles**

Further operational issues have been experienced with NWP in the past few months, culminating in a significant period offline and an impending period of time in dry dock; Joe will provide a more detailed update in his Head of Enforcement Report. Since the beginning of this financial year, we have spent over £70,000 on repairs to NWP and this level of expenditure is not sustainable. With my support, Joe will be developing a long-term vessel replacement strategy for members to consider and ultimately decide on a future direction of travel with regards to NWP and our two smaller vessels, the ridged inflatable boats (RIBs) Protector Gamma and Bay Protector.

Our Admin Team continue to implement our new Capital Asset Replacement Strategy which aims to replace all our ageing vehicles (pick-up trucks, vans and quadbikes) by 2027. We are well ahead of schedule with this and our main priority now is ensuring that procurement is spread out somewhat so that we are not having to replace a multitude of vehicles at the same time three or five years from now<sup>2</sup>.

### **5. Staffing**

No updates on staffing further to what was reported at the last meeting.

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<sup>2</sup> Our vehicle replacement policy is every three years for quadbikes and every five years for pick-ups and vans.

## **6. Communications and Engagement**

Communications in this reporting period have been focussed on keeping stakeholders abreast of developments with our cockle fisheries, in terms of the decisions by TSB to open Flookburgh, Pilling and Leasowe but keep all other beds closed, and with the subsequent alterations to Pilling and Leasowe. We have also been using the website and our social media platforms to engage with stakeholders on our shrimp fisheries within the district, as part of a project being carried out by the Science Team to assess the state of the fisheries.

We were planning to hold two Byelaw 3 stakeholder events in November, one on the Wirral and one in the Barrow area. Indeed, we had booked venues for 18<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> November in Wallasey and Grange-over-Sands respectively and advertised these. However, we then had to cancel these at short notice due to the impending opening of the Leasowe cockle fishery on the back of the Food Standards Agency's approval, which meant all relevant stakeholders who might have otherwise attended these events would be actively fishing the beds at Leasowe. We will be looking to rearranged these for early in the new year.

A Defra Cockle FMP consultation event was held at Truckhaven on 31<sup>st</sup> October. The event was not well attended due to it clashing with the open tide for the cockle fishery at Flookburgh (one fisher attended, plus representatives from Defra, AIFCA and the Authority). I only found out about the event a fortnight beforehand by stumbling across details for it on Defra's FMP blog website. I have provided feedback to Defra on how they might maximise attendance and their consultation outputs in future by liaising with officers first.

## **7. IT**

Officers from all three teams continue to support the implementation of our new permit database. Staff have been working extremely hard over the last couple of years to get this platform to a place where it is effective for both them and our permit holders. We are now rolling this out to industry for statutory returns and staff are supporting those who need assistance, including members of the Admin Team attending our fishery at Flookburgh to support fishers with their returns submissions. Whilst not all our fisheries stakeholders are in agreement of the need for such a database, I have received positive feedback from individuals on the support provided to them by officers.

## **8. HR**

As updated at the last meeting, Alison led on the procurement of an externally-ran staff survey, using a company called WeThrive. The survey was completed over the first few weeks of September and the Senior Management Team (SMT) then meet on 23<sup>rd</sup> September to view and discuss the results, with support from WeThrive themselves. We then presented results to all staff at a full staff face-to-face meeting in Barrow on 27<sup>th</sup> September, where themes and potential actions were discussed. All line managers then met on 7<sup>th</sup> November for a detailed session on actions to take from the staff survey results. These have included:

- An in-house training calendar, with regular refresher training on key issues
- An email suggestion mailbox
- More SMT visibility outside of Carnforth
- Improved recognition of individuals' and teams' achievements via the website and Annual Report

We continue to implement and iterate our new Performance Management regime for staff, with the undertaking of mid-year appraisals for all staff by the end of October. This has provided an opportunity for line managers to provide recognition to officers on exceptional performance, as well as constructive feedback on areas for improvement or development. It has also been useful for augmenting feedback

from the recent staff survey. We will continue with this new Performance Management regime for the remainder of 2024/25, and will then be looking to adopt the next stage of this process with the inclusion of the reporting systems provided by WeThrive, which will add further standardisation, utility and benefits to staff and their managers.

On 25<sup>th</sup> September, I delivered an all-day in-house training session for officers on fisheries, covering common species, methods of capture and an overview of national and international management legislation. The session was well attended and well received and sparked discussion about more regular training of this type (see staff survey outputs above).

Officers, including myself, received training from our website hosts on how to edit the website under its new hosting platform and get the most out of the functions therein.

## **9. Fisheries**

Our new Byelaw Strategy was adopted at the last TSB meeting on 5<sup>th</sup> November. This sets out a clear strategic direction for new byelaws the Authority will look to develop over the next five years, which will include revocation of legacy byelaws. This will provide a more consistent, streamlined regulatory regime for officers, members and stakeholders to understand and work to. It also sets out a clearly defined process (with associated timeframes) by which officers and the wider Authority should work towards ensuring timely development of new byelaws, so as to try and avoid the two- to three-year timescales the Authority has been in previously.

As mentioned in section 1, proposals for improving access to our cockle and mussel fisheries were discussed at the last TSB meeting on 5<sup>th</sup> November. This culminated in a resolution for officers to progress development of policies relating to the following:

- ‘Use it or lose it’ for existing Byelaw 3 permit holders, with clear definition of specific minimum thresholds of activity in any given year and a formal appeals process
- Fast-tracking or prioritising of young people on the Byelaw 3 Waiting List, subject to legal advice
- Implementation of a Handover Scheme for permit holders giving up their permits and being able to nominate a young person to whom they are related to take on their permit, again, subject to legal advice.

Joe and I will be looking to commence work on these policies in the run-up to Christmas and into the new year, with a view to bringing a paper covering the finer detail of how such policies could work in practice back to TSB for further consideration.

## **10. External Engagement / Other CEO Work**

I attended the IFCA's monthly COG Meetings on 18<sup>th</sup> September, 16<sup>th</sup> October (both online) and face-to-face in York 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> November. Discussions have been focussed on producing a new long-term strategic vision for the IFCA's and how AIFCA might utilise additional RDEL funding it is due to receive from Defra. The York meeting also included an incredibly beneficial session with MMO and Defra colleagues on the IFCA byelaw making process, and we were able to agree some useful new initiatives to help improve and speed up this process going forward.

On Friday 20<sup>th</sup> September, I joined Science Officers for a survey out on Foulney mussel bed.

We have held two meetings with our colleagues at Natural Resources Wales (NRW) to progress work on the new Dee Estuary Cockle Regulating Order (RO). This included an online meeting on 8<sup>th</sup> October followed by a face-to-face meeting on 31<sup>st</sup> October, where we agreed the key principles upon which we would pursue and develop the new RO. We have agreed for NWIFCA officers to lead on the development of the new RO text, whilst NRW will lead on the development of the associated Impact Assessment, whilst we then jointly develop the new FMP for the fishery. Recent discussions between Joe and his

counterpart at Kent & Essex IFCA (KEIFCA) have highlighted uncertainties around the role Defra and Welsh Government (WG) should be playing in the drafting of the new RO itself; we will be arranging further meetings with KEIFCA and then Defra and WG accordingly to clarify who needs to be doing what in this area.

I attended a briefing on 15<sup>th</sup> October from Cefas and Defra colleagues on the scientific advice from the International Council for the Exploration of the Seas (ICES) on total allowable catches (TACs) for the Irish Sea in 2025.

I held a meeting with Orsted's North West Fisheries Liaison Officer, Gary Owen on 17<sup>th</sup> October to give him a better overview of inshore fisheries within our district and get some updates on future offshore windfarm development work in the Eastern Irish Sea.

21<sup>st</sup>-22<sup>nd</sup> October, I attended a Small-Scale Fisheries Workshop in Whitby. This event was hosted by Newcastle University and the Blue Marine Foundation, with support from the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and was incredibly well attended by fishers and fisheries managers alike. On the back of this workshop, along with one held in Poole, the organisers will be producing a report to take to Defra to highlight what key interventions the new government could take to help support commercial inshore fishing in England. I was pleased to see a large number of fishers from the North West in attendance at the event, including one of our members, Gary Pidduck.

On 18<sup>th</sup> November, I attended the opening day of the Leasowe cockle fishery and had the opportunity to learn more about how the fishery operates, support officers in their work and liaise with industry out on the beds and at the 'tonning up' site.

And finally, I would like to wish all members a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year and I look forward to continuing to work with you all for the furtherment of the Authority in 2025.

*Mark Taylor, North Western IFCA CEO, 20<sup>th</sup> November 2024.*