

# NWIFCA Quarterly Meeting: 7<sup>th</sup> December 2023

REPORT NO.  
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## CEO QUARTERLY REPORT – 6<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER TO 24<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER 2023

**Purpose:** For information.

**Recommendations:** The report is received.

### 1. Authority Committees

The Authority's F&P Sub-Committee met over Teams on 20<sup>th</sup> September and will meet again on 1<sup>st</sup> December to decide next year's budget. The TSB Sub-Committee met at Carnforth on 7<sup>th</sup> November.

I am delighted to welcome Daniel Williams to the Authority who has filled the vacant position MMO appointee position. Daniel represents the Angling Trust.

### 2. Health, Safety and Wellbeing

The Authority's Health, Safety & Wellbeing Working Group is now back up-and-running and met on 5<sup>th</sup> October and will meet again on 29<sup>th</sup> November. There was a continued focus on reinvigorating the H&S Policy to bring it up-to-date and on establishing KPIs and CPD for staff on HS&W, as well as proceeding with new Standard Operating Procedures for specific high risk operational tasks. I am also aiming to improve our processes regarding operational assurance of health and safety policies and procedures.

### 3. Pay Review

The proposed new pay and grading structure for the Authority was agreed by F&P in September. I have subsequently developed a new Employment Contract and Employee Handbook, which were shared with the Chair, our HR consultants and UNISON for feedback. These were subsequently issued to all staff for them to consider and, if though so wish, sign. At the time of writing, we have 14 out of twenty members of staff who have signed their new contracts, and who will move over to our new terms and conditions on 1<sup>st</sup> December. I expect most of the outstanding staff to sign and move over in the coming days / weeks.

In summary, these new T&Cs including a formalised pay and grading structure with standardised pay grades and SCP ceilings. They also standardise legacy disparities around annual leave allowances, providing all staff with a 31 days annual leave allowance after five years' service<sup>1</sup>. We have also formalised our expenses policy for travel and subsistence and moved to a fair and uniform system of remunerating staff for unsocial hours worked, at a rate of time and a half.

Our new Employment Contract template, Employee Handbook and organogram are included as appendices to this report. The Handbook is a live document and will continue to be developed with further policies that we have identified need drawing up.

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<sup>1</sup> New staff start on 26 days leave, and increase by one day per year to the 31 days maximum.

#### **4. Union Recognition**

The Authority has now gained union recognition through UNISON. Our inaugural Joint Negotiation and Consultation Committee (JNCC) was held on 2<sup>nd</sup> October, where we discussed various topics around the pay review, unsocial hours remuneration, the restructure and our Employee Handbook.

#### **5. Finances**

At 1<sup>st</sup> December F&P, we will be discussing the required levy increase from our constituent councils for next year's budget. In summary, I have proposed an unprecedented 21% increase in the levy, in order to address historic undervaluing of the budget through repeated low-level (c.3%) increases. These increases have acted as year-on-year real terms budget decreases for the Authority, as we have absorbed the increased costs associated with inflation and salary increases stemming from SCP increments and the annual NJC pay award, which have been significantly above 3%. The 21% sought for 2024/25 is to allow the Authority to 'catch up' with where it should have been and return to the correct operating budget levels so that we may continue to deliver our statutory responsibilities at the same operating level as previous years. Furthermore, with inflation set to continue to fall, I anticipate that, if we agree this 21%, we will be able to ask for more modest increases of 2.5-5% in 2025/26 and 2026/27.

#### **6. Estates**

We continue to explore potential new premises for our Carnforth and Whitehaven offices. Currently, nothing suitable has been found in the local area to replace our Head Office in Carnforth, but we continue to look. For Whitehaven, a potential opportunity is being explored to move into a large premises across the road from our current office and discussions with the prospective new landlord there are ongoing. The new owner of the premises has provided an indication of his expected rent for the property, but I have not been able to further negotiations until I know the operating budget for next year.

We have brought in local solicitor Ratcliffe and Bibby to support our estates work, with the objective of providing assurances around our leasing arrangements, and to clarify the ambiguous issue of ownership relating to the Whitehaven office.

#### **7. Vessels and Vehicles**

Officers have been working hard to bring all seagoing assets back online. North Western Protector is close to being operational again, with the engines now back onboard. Whilst we had hoped to have her back on the water in the late Autumn, this has been delayed due to various issues that have needed addressing, as well as having to get four new crew members (including our new Engineer) up-to-speed with everything. Weather permitting, we are hopeful of some sea trials before Christmas, with a return to operational duties in the New Year.

Protector Gamma is now fully repaired and operational and is awaiting MCA coding.

Our oldest RIB, Protector Bravo, remains up for sale, although little interest has been generated thus far. We have reduced the price from £18,000 to £12,500 to try and generate a sale.

At the September F&P meeting, my proposal for a long-term vessel and vehicle replacement strategy was agreed. This will involve a net expenditure of up to £600,000 from our reserves to replace our ageing vessel and vehicle fleet. This will result in the replacement of all ten vans, all ten ATVs and our two active RIBs in the next three years.

Officers have already begun implementing this strategy, with two new Ford Ranger pick-up trucks and five new ATVs purchased, with replaced vehicles being traded in or sold.

## **8. Staffing**

During this reporting period, Leon Webber has joined us as our new IFCO (Engineer) and Chris Taylor as our third and final IFCO (Crew); both will be based out of the Whitehaven office. Robin Love has also joined us as an additional IFCO based in Barrow. He is contracted in a two-year fixed-term appointment, using the Defra RDEL that we have received for increased responsibilities around our MPA, FMP and marine spatial prioritisation work.

We have also completed the recruitment process for one of our other RDEL-funded posts, a Science Officer. We are now just awaiting the acceptance of our two-year fixed-term offer to our preferred candidate.

Recruitment for two Admin Officers to join our newly formed Admin Team will be completed by Christmas, and we hope to have these two new starters in early in the New Year. As a reminder to members, one of these officers is a permanent replacement for our Senior Operational Support Officer Cath Dobson, who retires next March, and one is our third and final two-year fixed-term appointment using the RDEL funding.

I am pleased to say our two previously outstanding staff grievances relating to pay have been withdrawn with the implementation of the Pay Review.

## **9. Communications**

At the time of writing, we have held two of our three planned November stakeholder engagement meetings across the District. Unfortunately, we did not have anyone attend either of these meetings, in Whitehaven and Wallasey. We do have one more meeting planned at Rampside, near Barrow, on 30<sup>th</sup> November; I will verbally update members on the outcome of this meeting. I am not deterred by the apparent lack of interest in these meetings and recognise that we might have given ourselves more time to publicise the meetings, which may then have generated more interest and at least some attendance. I will be sitting down with our Comms Officer and senior managers in January to plan in our stakeholder events for Spring / Summer 2024, with the intention of booking venues well ahead of time, to give ourselves ample opportunity to publicise them and allow stakeholders to feedback to us on what they wish to discuss / hear about at these events.

We have been proactive in communicating the renewal of permits as part of Byelaw 3 and most permit holders have renewed as a result. Permits from those few who did not renew have been allocated to new individuals at the top of the waiting list. Officers plan to conduct a review of the Byelaw 3 Permit Waiting List in the coming months with a view to removing anyone who does not confirm with us their wish to remain on it.

## **10. Byelaws**

We have now reinvigorated the Byelaw Working Group with a small cadre of members; our first meeting was on 16<sup>th</sup> October, where we had some constructive discussions around our existing suite of byelaws, the netting byelaw which is currently in development, and how we might optimise the ability of local and young fishers to access our cockle and mussel fisheries through the Byelaw 3 permit regime. On the last point, we have undertaken to explore some options around permit holders who are leaving the fishery being able to nominate their replacement, and a “use it or lose it” policy of some form, which could enable the Authority to remove a permit from an inactive fisher and provide it to the next individual on the waiting list. Any such options have their advantages and disadvantages and need to be carefully considered before bringing to TSB or full Authority committee for any form of resolution.

Byelaw 1 (MCRS) has now been signed off by Defra and is therefore now in force. There have been some minor amendments required, which are currently being resolved by Defra, after which, we will be proactively communicating the implementation of this new byelaw to stakeholders.

## **11. AIFCA**

I have attended one AIFCA Chief Officer Group (COG) meeting during this reporting period and a meeting of the Marine and Fisheries Chief Officers (MAFCO) between the IFCA's and Defra. Discussions have been centred on future funding streams and IFCA's roles in FMP development.

## **12. Dee Estuary Cockle Management**

Joe, Anna and I attended a meeting with Natural Resources Wales (NRW) in Wales on 10<sup>th</sup> October to discuss the future of the Dee Estuary cockle fishery's management. NRW currently hold responsibility for managing the cockle fishery within the Dee Estuary, on both the Welsh *and* English sides, via a Regulating Order. This Regulating Order is due to lapse in 2028 and NRW are keen to explore future management and regulatory options for the fishery. There appear to be three distinct options for the management of the fishery beyond 2028:

1. NRW reapply for a Regulating Order and continue to manage.
2. NWIFCA apply for a Regulating Order and take on management.
3. The Regulating Order is allowed to lapse, and management reverts to the default, devolved approach, with NWIFCA managing the English side and Welsh Government managing the Welsh side.

I have indicated to NRW that we would *consider* applying for a Regulating Order to take over the management of the entire fishery but would need to ensure we are sufficiently resourced and funded and had members' backing to do so. I have another meeting with NRW in the New Year, as well as any internal meeting with officers to discuss some of the practical considerations around the aforementioned options. Thereafter, I will look to bring an options paper to members to discuss which preferred option the Authority wishes officers to pursue.

## **13. Dave Dobson's Passing**

Members will be aware that our former Enforcement Director, and the former Cumbria SFC Chief Fisheries Officer, Dave Dobson, passed away in October. The impact of Dave's passing is magnified by the fact he is the husband of our colleague Cath, and stepfather to our Operational Support Officer Kate Richardson.

Whilst I only met Dave once (just a few months prior to his passing, when he popped into the Whitehaven office and we had a good chat), it is abundantly clear to me what a well-liked and highly respected man he was. At Dave's funeral in November, officers from the Whitehaven office were able to represent the Authority, and show support to Cath. Unfortunately, Joe and I were unable to attend due to extenuating circumstances beyond our control. My condolences continue to go to Cath and all Dave's family.

*Mark Taylor, North Western IFCA CEO, 24<sup>th</sup> November 2023.*