

NWIFCA Quarterly Meeting: 27th June 2024

REPORT NO.
4

CEO QUARTERLY REPORT 7TH MARCH TO 17TH JUNE 2024

Purpose: For members' information.

Recommendations: The report is received.

1. Authority Committees

The Authority's F&P Sub-Committee met over Teams on 10th May to discuss the Whitehaven Office ownership situation and prospective move; a separate agenda item and report on this matter is included as part of this meeting. The TSB Sub-Committee met at Carnforth on 24th May to discuss, amongst other things, the draft netting byelaw and results of our early surveys of the Morecambe Bay cockle beds.

I was very sad to hear of the resignation of Dr. Jim Andrews from the Authority, who has been a key member of this Authority over the past several years. As the former Chief Officer of the SFC, Jim's experience and knowledge of all things fisheries and the North West coast has been an enormous asset to the Authority and his input as a member and Vice Chair will be sorely missed. I wish him all the best in his future endeavours. The Chair and I remain in close contact with MMO regarding recruitment of new members to fill outstanding vacancies that we have and that are coming up later in the year.

2. Health, Safety and Wellbeing

As per direction from members at the last full Authority meeting, a separate HS&W Report has been produced as part of this meeting (see Report Number 6).

3. Finances

The Authority's end-of-year Financial Report for 2023/24 is provided in a separate report to this meeting.

After sending formal notification to all nine councils of their 2024/25 levy, we have now received levy payments from each one of them.

We have received all our outstanding RDEL payments from Defra to support our work across FMPs, marine spatial prioritisation, MPAs and the Allonby Bay HPMA. This totalled £216,250 for 2023/24 and will be ring-fenced within our reserves to continue to fund our three fixed-term positions within the Authority. We are still awaiting one RDEL payment via AIFCA for £10,000 for work relating to aquaculture and sea angling.

We are still awaiting a CDEL payment of £325,000 from Defra to contribute towards the remanufacturing of North Western Protector's engines. There is a distinct possibility that, with the forthcoming general election, we may see a delay in receiving this payment until sometime after the

election. We will continue to liaise with Defra on the progress of this and update members accordingly.

4. Estates

I continue to explore potential new premises for our Carnforth and Whitehaven offices. A couple of options for moving from Carnforth presented themselves in the last few weeks but the Senior Management Team (SMT) and I deemed them not to be suitable. For Whitehaven, there is a separate agenda item and report for members to consider our next steps, both in terms of ownership of Duncan Square and the prospective move to Marlborough Street.

We have now employed a Facilities Manager, ARC Masterworks Ltd., to undertake all necessary remedial and maintenance works across our properties. During the reporting period, they undertook surveys of all six of our properties and produced individual reports on their findings. Alison and I then met with them to discuss potential works, and they will now be producing a final report of priority remedial works required across our estate, along with a project proposal and quote for long overdue improvements required to our Liverpool office.

5. Vessels and Vehicles

North Western Protector has continued to operate following her return to service at the back end of 2023, albeit with some further operational issues; Joe will provide a more detailed update in his Head of Enforcement Report. As per this year's Annual Plan, my aspiration for the coming financial year is to demonstrate the necessity for keeping North Western Protector fully operational, and Joe and our Senior IFCO (Master) Hugh Thinnesen will be working closely to develop operational plans for the vessel for the coming months in order to demonstrate to me, members, our funding councils and wider stakeholders that the vessel presents value-for-money and has long-term viability.

Our oldest RIB, Protector Bravo, was sold in March for £10,000.

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 ATVs) over the next three years. In terms of our two active RIBs, Protector Gamma and Bay Protector, Joe and I have agreed to use 2024/25 as an opportunity to review their operational capability and our future requirements, with a view to then developing a strategy later in the year for their potential future replacement.

6. Staffing

Our Senior Operational Support Officer Cath Dobson, retired at the end of March after over 34 years of dedicated service with the Authority and its predecessor organisation Cumbria Sea Fisheries Committee. Cath has been a wonderful servant to the Authority and has made an enormous impact on our work over all her years. We will all miss her experience, knowledge, and professionalism, and moreover, we will miss her as a colleague. I wish her all the best in the next chapter of her life and hope she has a well-deserved relaxing and fulfilling retirement. We celebrated Cath's longstanding service and said our goodbyes at a retirement party for her at Whitehaven Golf Club on 28th March.

One of our Science Officers, Matthew Carroll, tendered his resignation at the beginning of June. Matt is moving back to Wyre Rivers Trust from where he joined us. We all wish him the best in his future career and thank him for his service over the past three years. This means we have one current vacancy within the Authority. Anna and I decided to run an internal recruitment exercise initially to see if we could fill the Science Officer vacancy internally before going out to full external recruitment; we will update members at the next full Authority meeting.

7. Communications

Communications in this reporting period have been focussed on the continued netting byelaw consultation and keeping stakeholders abreast of developments with our cockle fisheries, both in terms of the Authority's decision to have a trial early opening season and the subsequent Spring surveys across Morecambe Bay.

Joe has done some sterling work running the consultation on the netting byelaw, using some of the lessons learnt and best practice implemented by the Science Team for the cockle season consultation that they led on a month or so earlier. Results of the byelaw consultation were presented to members of the TSB and a subsequent vote on a final draft of the byelaw was carried out via email prior to this meeting (see update from TSB Chair Brian Leigh as part of this meeting).

At the end of May, the SMT along with our current and previous Communications Officer, reviewed our website's content, provision and overall layout. We made some significant changes and updates to it, as per one of our organisational objectives within this year's Annual Plan. This means the website is now better reflective of the work we do and what stakeholders and the general public might want to get from visiting it. The website will be receiving an upgrade from our website hosts in the coming weeks and so this work was done to pre-empt that.

8. IT

I have renewed our IT contract with Lake District National Park (LDNP), who will continue to provide our IT support for the next three years. Discussions were held with Lancaster City Council about their potentially providing our IT support, but ultimately I decided LDNP offered the best value for money and continuity, particularly as we were able to revise the wording of the contract from the previous one to require more hands-on and timely support along with their support in hardware and software procurement. Our IFCO (Intel) Anthony Graham (who previously fulfilled an IT support role within the Authority) has been of great help to me in renegotiating this contract with LDNP.

9. HR

Having implemented our inaugural Employee Handbook at the end of 2023, Alison and I have continued to develop and review our HR policies, with support from our UNISON staff representative Anthony Graham. Due to statutory changes coming in in April and others slated for later in the year, we have made the requisite changes to our Maternity, Paternity, Parental and Carers' Leave policies, with advice from our HR consultants Stephensons and UNISON. We have also added a Working From Home policy, a provision for the Authority to reimburse staff for eyesight tests and glasses (under certain circumstances) and made amendments to our Expenses policy to match the requirements within the NJC Green Book for mileage rate payments. This has led to the implementation of the required Essential User allowance for staff who are routinely required to use their personal vehicles for work purposes; this allowance is £1,239 per annum and will be paid to myself and Joe as the two essential users within the Authority. Furthermore, we have amended our mileage rates paid to staff (from the set 45p/mile currently) to align with the Green Book; these rates vary depending on whether the employee is an Essential User or Casual User and depending on the engine type / size of their vehicle, and are:

	451-999cc / EV	1,000-1,199cc	>1,200cc
Essential Users	36.9p	40.9p	50.5p
Casual Users	46.9p	52.2p	65.0p

For the majority of staff, these changes are irrelevant, as they always use Authority vehicles for work travel. However, some staff do use their own vehicles from time-to-time and so, going forward, they will submit their mileage claims at the applicable rate.

We have now implemented the first stage of our new Performance Management regime for staff, with training delivered to line managers and communication with all other staff on setting of individual

performance objectives for 2024/25, following the SMART¹ objectives principle. Subsequently, all line managers met individually with each of their direct reports to discuss their objectives for the year ahead, which were then agreed and captured on our online HR system. Everyone's objectives were then quality assured by me and Joe, and I have shared my own with the Chair. I am confident that by having staff working towards a distinct set of performance and development objectives for this year and all future years, we will be better placed to deliver our organisational objectives whilst at the same time support staff in their development, recognise outstanding performance and address unsatisfactory performance as necessary. The next stage of this process is for me and Alison to develop a clear appraisal process for line managers and staff to understand how we expect mid-year and end-of-year appraisals to be conducted and recorded.

A Joint Negotiating and Consultation Committee (JNCC) meeting was held with UNISON in April where policy development was discussed, along with a proposal to change our medical procedures for operational staff (see separate HS&W Report).

10. External Engagement

Since the last full Authority meeting, I have been appointed Vice Chair of the IFCA Chief Officers' Group (COG). I attended a meeting of the COG on 18th April and chaired a subsequent one on 8th May where time was given over to FMP implementation and agreeing IFCA leads for individual plans; I will be acting as the IFCA lead for the national Cockle FMP currently in development and the future Mussel FMP, due to the significance of these fisheries within our district. At these meetings and also a separate meeting of the Marine and Fisheries Chief Officers group (MAFCO), which I could not attend, there was some in-depth discussion with Defra regarding their proposals for identifying compensation sites for habitat or species improvement when offshore windfarms are approved for development within existing MPAs. Broadly speaking, IFCA's are opposed to such proposals due to the potential for further spatial squeeze and displacement of activity for the fishing industry.

I met with Natural Resources Wales (NRW) and the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) in Cheshire on 14th March to discuss the MSC accreditation for the Dee cockle fishery and whether we could pursue accreditation for our cockle fisheries across the rest of the district, in particular within Morecambe Bay. As verbally updated to members at the last full Authority meeting, I will look to research this further with a view to then consulting with stakeholders and members on if and how we should proceed with this potential initiative.

I accompanied Science Officers on their survey of Flookburgh cockle bed on 24th April in order to further my understanding of this fishery and the processes we follow to assess the state of the beds.

The inaugural National Fishing Remembrance Day was held on Sunday 12th May. I attended a remembrance service in Fleetwood whilst our SIFCO (Master) Hugh Thinnesen and IFCO (Engineer) Leon Webber attended the service in Maryport on the same day.

On 15th May, I travelled to London for the MMO's 'Spring Event' for stakeholders. This was a useful networking event where I met with representatives from various other stakeholder groups and we discussed current marine environment and fisheries issues and potential future partnerships.

I attended an Estuarine and Coastal Sciences Association (ECSA) conference at the University of Cumbria in Carlisle on 21st and 22nd May, where I presented on the work of NWIFCA. It was interesting to hear about other marine and coastal initiatives going on in the North West and I was able to sound out some potential future members of the Authority too.

I have made two commission returns to Defra on NWIFCA's performance and activities during the period 2018-2022, as they require this for their IFCA Conduct and Operations Report covering these four years. It was very difficult to provide a lot of the information they were after, particularly in relation to our financial situation during this period, due to lack of records, accountability and oversight during this time. Furthermore, records of our operational activities were primarily limited to

¹ Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound.

those found within our Annual Reports for the four years in question (indeed, in one of these years, 2021/22, no Annual Report was even produced), and so, again, I was not able to provide everything they were after. I have had to apologise to Defra on behalf of the Authority for not being able to provide all of the information they required for their commissions, but have noted the information requested and have put in place measures to ensure we will be able to provide everything they ask for when they come to produce their next Conduct and Operations Report four years from now.

11. Dee Estuary Cockle Management

Following on from members' vote at the last meeting to pursue a joint Regulating Order with NRW to replace the existing one which expires in 2028, I have since had two meetings with NRW to commence work on the development of the Regulating Order and setting out a plan for consultation with affected stakeholders. We have now formed a Working Group which will meet on a monthly basis to progress the necessary work, and have also made connections with Defra and Welsh Government, through each of whom the Order will need to be separately made. We will be meeting with our NRW colleagues in early July to assess the current Regulating Order and associated Management Plan and agree the broad principles upon which we will develop the new ones.

Joe and I also attended the annual Dee Estuary Cockle Fishery Advisory Group (DECFAG) meeting in North Wales on 1st May. It was interesting to observe how the fishery is currently managed, hear results from NRW's recent surveys and hear the varying views of fishers as to whether the Dee beds should be opened this year. We have since heard that the Dee cockle beds will be opened this summer, contrary to many fishers' views that they should stay closed.

Mark Taylor, North Western IFCA CEO, 17th June 2024.