

# NWIFCA Annual General Meeting: 26<sup>th</sup> September 2024

REPORT NO.  
4

## CEO QUARTERLY REPORT 17<sup>TH</sup> JUNE TO 16<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER 2024

**Purpose:** For members' information.

**Recommendations:** The report is received.

### 1. Authority Committees

The Authority's General Purposes & Standards Sub-Committee (GPS) met over Teams on 9<sup>th</sup> August to discuss the previous full Authority meeting on 27<sup>th</sup> June wherein the meeting was not quorate and therefore no business could be transacted. This led to the inability to appoint a Chair and Vice-Chair of the Authority or any new members to the Technical, Scientific and Byelaws Sub-Committee (TSB). GPS members agreed that, as per Section 3.1 of our Constitution, Phil Capper could remain as Chair and we would be able to operate without a Vice-Chair until the next full Authority meeting on 26<sup>th</sup> September. Regarding TSB members, GPS members decided their sub-committee did not have the authority to appoint any temporary TSB members and therefore no new members could be appointed until 26<sup>th</sup> September.

TSB met at Carnforth on 13<sup>th</sup> August to discuss, amongst other things, the opening of our cockle beds across the district.

I am delighted to welcome three new members to the Authority. Cllr. Peter Norris joins us as the representative for Liverpool City Council, filling the vacant position we have had for several years now. Cllr. Carol Richards joins us as the representative for Sefton Council, replacing Cllr. Steve McGinnity. Also, Georgia de Jong Cleyndert joins us as an MMO-appointed member; she is the Head of Marine for the North West Wildlife Trusts. We are now carrying one MMO appointee vacancy; the MMO have informed us that they are interviewing candidates for the position at the end of September.

However, this meeting of the full Authority will be the last for three current MMO-appointed members whose ten-year tenures come to an end in November. My thanks go to Kelsey Thompson, Caroline Salthouse and Stephen Manning for their support of, and contributions to, the Authority over their ten years. All three have attended Authority meetings on a regular basis and have helped NWIFCA progress and develop its fisheries and conservation work over this time. As a former member myself and in the last 18 months as CEO, I have worked with Kelsey, Caroline and Stephen and have always appreciated their input and advice, based on their extensive experience in their respective fields. On behalf of Authority, I wish them all the best in their future endeavours.

### 2. Finances

The Authority's Financial Report for Q1 of 2024/25 is provided in a separate report to this meeting.

We are still awaiting a CDEL<sup>1</sup> payment of £325,000 from Defra to contribute towards the remanufacturing of North Western Protector's (NWP's) engines. As predicted, this summer's general election caused a delay in receiving this payment but Defra have now paid this money to Lancashire

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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.

County Council (LCC) for onward payment to ourselves; we have been informed by LCC that we will receive the monies in October.

Upon reviewing our insurance policies at the end of 2023/24, I undertook to appoint an insurance broker to look into our cover across all our relevant insurances. We appointed a company called Brunel to do this work, who have also worked with Southern IFCA. Alison, Joe and I have met with them on several occasions now to progress this. The outcome of this work is that they advised us that we were significantly under-insured across several key areas, partly owing to the fact our cover had been amalgamated into just two distinct policies, one for NWP and one for everything else. This latter policy was deemed not fit-for-purpose, left us exposed across several areas and significantly undervalued our assets. As such, and in order to ensure we had sufficient cover for 2024/25 and beyond, we have split our insurances across several policies and several providers. This has meant that we are now suitably covered across all areas of our business and operations, but at the same time, has resulted in an increase in our annual premiums from c.£45,000 to c.£65,000 per year. This will be an ongoing operating cost for the Authority and will be factored into 2025/26's budgeting and all future years'.

### **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, 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.

Remedial works of priority issues across our estate of six premises will commence in the coming weeks via our new 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**

NWP 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 NWP fully operational, and Joe and our Senior Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Officer (SIFCO) (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. Since the beginning of this financial year, we have spent £32,000 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.

### **5. Staffing**

One of our Science Officers (SOs), Matthew Carroll, left the Authority in June. Matt moved 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.

The creation of this SO vacancy has led to some movements within the Authority's staff. Anna and I decided to run an internal recruitment exercise to see if we could fill Matt's vacancy. This led to the

appointment of Lucy Loud, our RDEL<sup>2</sup>-funded temporary SO, to take up Matt's SO post on a permanent basis. Then, our RDEL-funded temporary Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Officer (IFCO) based in Barrow, Robin Love, agreed to move to the Science Team in Carnforth to take up a temporary SO position there, effectively replacing Lucy. This left us with an IFCO vacancy in Barrow which we then agreed with Chris Taylor (permanent IFCO, Whitehaven) he would take up. These staff moves have resulted in us ending up with one less staff member, as we have reduced our RDEL-funded posts from three to two<sup>3</sup>. I felt that it would not be worthwhile trying to recruit a new, temporary IFCO to Whitehaven to replace Chris on a short, one year contract as we would struggle to attract suitable candidates on this basis. Instead, I decided to use some of the RDEL surplus created by Lucy's change from temporary to permanent SO to offer Robin a one-year extension to *his* temporary RDEL contract; we are therefore now able to retain Robin until mid-2026. All this means we are now projected to have a higher surplus within our RDEL budget, and we can use this to support specific project work related to the functions for which Defra provided the funding in the first place (*i.e.* Fisheries Management Plans [FMPs], Marine Protected Areas [MPAs], Allonby Bay Highly Protected Marine Area [HPMA] and marine spatial prioritisation).

## 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 summer surveys, consultations on open and closed tides, and the subsequent decision by TSB to open Flookburgh, Pilling and Leasowe but keep all other beds closed.

IFCOs Anthony Graham and Grace Edwards attended a Catchwise at Blackpool Sea Life on 18<sup>th</sup> June to show NWIFCA's support for the initiative and liaise with our angling stakeholders.

We are planning to hold two Byelaw 3 stakeholder events in late October / early November, one on the Wirral and one in the Barrow area. Once venues have been finalised, we will be communicating these to stakeholders.

We have been working with a professional photographer Tessa Bunney to capture some images of our officers at work to support our comms, publicity and stakeholder engagement work. In July she spent three days out on the coast with our IFCOs and SOs and we now have a more substantial and better-quality library of images to support our comms work.

Following a comprehensive website review back in May, we have updated our website to include a 'Meet the Team' page with profiles of all our staff and our organogram to help stakeholders and the wider public better understand how the Authority's executive is set up and operates. We have also made updates to our 'Assets' and 'Gallery' pages as well as several of our Fisheries- and Conservation-related pages.

## 7. IT

We have now implemented our new intelligence database, Clue, which is hosted and supported by the Marine Management Organisation (MMO) and has been taken up by all IFCA's. Initial feedback on this system is that it is an improvement on the previous platform and will provide a more holistic approach to our recording and analyses of intelligence, along with any subsequent enforcement / investigative activities.

We are also now in the process of implementing 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

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<sup>2</sup> RDEL is a revenue-based funding stream from Defra to support resource uplift for IFCA's with the advent of further responsibilities handed down from central government.

<sup>3</sup> We now have 22 staff; 20 permanent (no change) and two temporary staff (reduced by one).

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.

## **8. HR**

Having now implemented the first stage of our new Performance Management regime for staff, with the introduction of Performance Plans for 2024/25, Alison and I have also now developed 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. Mid-year appraisals for all staff will be conducted by their line managers in October.

We held a day's Equality and Diversity training in Carnforth for all staff on 18<sup>th</sup> June. This was well received by staff and has led to a number of new positive initiatives being explored in order to continue to improve our equality and diversity culture within the Authority.

Alison has 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) are meeting on 23<sup>rd</sup> September to view and discuss the results; a verbal update will be provided to members at this meeting, with further written updates regarding any corresponding actions at future meetings as necessary.

We held a full team meeting of all staff in our Carnforth office on 17<sup>th</sup> July and are holding our next one the day after this meeting on 27<sup>th</sup> September in Barrow<sup>4</sup>.

At the request of the Science Team, I have developed some introductory fisheries training during this reporting period, to deliver to staff. This will be delivered to staff from across all three teams in the Carnforth office on 25<sup>th</sup> September to give them a better understanding of commercial fishing practices, fish identification and the basis of fisheries management legislation.

We have recently implemented a cycle to work scheme, which has already been taken up by three members of staff.

Over the summer, I investigated the potential provision of private healthcare for staff. This came on the back of a consultation with UNISON relating to a potential change in our medical certification policy (see HS&W Report from June's Authority meeting). As part of the proposed changes, UNISON suggested looking into the Authority's potential to provide healthcare to staff, and after making enquiries with three separate providers (Bupa, Bénéden and AXA), I decided to opt for a policy with Bupa. This was then discussed and advertised with staff, after which three decided to opt out of the scheme. Therefore, we now have 19 members of staff covered by a private healthcare policy, at a cost of c.£10,000 per year. This scheme will provide a more attractive employment benefits package for staff, increasing staff retention and attracting more candidates during recruitment. It will also hopefully improve staff's physical and mental wellbeing and decrease illness- and injury-related absences and support staff in their medical certification process, the frequency of which has now been increased from every five years to every two. The scheme's appropriateness will be kept under regular review, particularly when it comes to our renewal period each summer. If premiums become too high or I feel we are not getting value for money.

The Administration Team, plus our Comms Officer Grace Edwards underwent some SharePoint training at the beginning of September to improve our organisational competencies around this aspect of our digital administration. A further session with the training provider is planned to review and improve our SharePoint setup going forward.

## **9. Fisheries**

As notified to members of our Byelaw Working Group, I have begun work on reviewing our Byelaw Strategy which was drafted a couple of years ago. With changing fisheries, conservation and wider

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<sup>4</sup> We now hold monthly staff meetings on Teams, and every quarter meet face-to-face and discuss matters in greater detail.

political circumstances, this was in need of a refresh and I will be bringing a proposed updated Byelaw Strategy to this group at our next meeting on 17<sup>th</sup> October for their consideration. This new strategy will include a suggestion for a more streamlined approach to the internal stage of our byelaw making processes, so that we can reach agreement and have byelaws made by the Authority in shorter time periods than previously. I will also be setting out a slightly different vision for the order in which we create our new byelaws and the revocation of our pre-existing legacy ones.

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

I attended two FMP meetings hosted by the MMO in June to discuss the detail that is starting to form in the draft FMPs for crab and lobster, and for whelk.

Anna and I attended a meeting with colleagues from Lancaster University's Lancaster Environment Centre (LEC) on 21<sup>st</sup> June to discuss potential future partnership working and the potential for our being located on campus there in the future. With regards the latter, there are no current opportunities for office space on campus that meet our requirements. However, this meeting has already proved fruitful as we have had two Masters students express interest in working on their dissertation projects with us this autumn and winter; Anna is liaising with them and their supervisor to develop this. Joe and I have also been able to make use of LEC's meeting facilities to have a two-day session looking at our standard operating procedures and risk assessments for NWP (see my separate HS&W Report). We also now have an informal hot desking arrangement there which means Carnforth staff (primarily myself, Joe and Anna) can work there on days where we need to focus on a particular task without interruption. I am hopeful that this nascent partnership will continue to develop and provide us with exciting opportunities to support one another over the coming years.

As per my last report, the Dee Regulating Order Working Group with Natural Resources Wales (NRW) has now be stood up and we have met three times since the Authority's decision to pursue a joint Regulating Order (RO) back in March. Progress has been slightly impeded by annual leave during the summer months but I am hopeful we will be able to further progress this over the coming months, starting with a review of the current RO and agreement between the Working Group members on the overarching provisions of any future version. At the necessary milestones, I will bring recommendations to members for their consideration.

I have attended two meetings of the IFCAs' Chief Officer Group (COG) during this reporting period, on 10<sup>th</sup> July and 16<sup>th</sup> August, the latter of which I chaired in my role as COG Vice-Chair. This second meeting focussed a great deal on a draft report produced by Newcastle University into the work of the IFCAs. Through the Association of IFCAs (AIFCA), COG is continuing to liaise with Newcastle University on the development of this report, with a view to it being published in the new year.

I attended a joint partnership meeting at Birkenhead Town Hall on 6<sup>th</sup> August to discuss the prospective Leasowe cockle fishery. This meeting was arranged and led by SIFCO Andy Brownrigg and was very productive in terms of revisiting previous issues with the fishery and allaying partners' concerns about its management. With the subsequent decision to open Leasowe in October (subject to a resurvey), a further meeting has been organised by Andy to update partners there.

I used the late summer and some slight 'breathing room' in my workload as an opportunity to get out on the coast with some of our officers so I can continue to familiarise myself with our areas of operation and the day-to-day challenges officers face. I accompanied IFCO Anthony Graham on a sampling run at Knott End on 21<sup>st</sup> August and the following day joined IFCO Robin Love on a patrol covering the Flookburgh mussel fishery. On 3<sup>rd</sup> September I attended the second day of the Flookburgh cockle fishery to assist the Enforcement Team there and liaise with stakeholders.

The Chair and I attended an AIFCA Members' Forum on 3<sup>rd</sup> September via Teams to receive updates on the Association's achievements in 2023/24 and their plans for the year ahead.

I spent three days in Newcastle 10<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> September attending the International Council for the Exploration of the Seas' (ICES') Annual Science Conference. This prestigious event brings eminent fisheries scientists from around the world together and I wanted to take the opportunity to attend this year given it was being held in the UK for the first time since 2005. I learnt a great deal from the

various talks and sessions and made some very useful connections. Going forward, we will review our future attendance at the conference; the location of future years' events is an obvious limiting factor but the subjects covered do offer value to the development of the fisheries management work in our district.

*Mark Taylor, North Western IFCA CEO, 16<sup>th</sup> September 2024.*