

14 AT A MEETING OF THE NORTH WESTERN INSHORE AND CONSERVATION AUTHORITY
HELD AT TRUCKHAVEN, CARNFORTH, 7th DECEMBER 2023

PRESENT – MEMBERS

Dr.J. Andrews	Vice-Chair	MMO appointee
Cllr. A. Markley		Cumberland Council
Cllr. J. Boak		Westmorland & Furness Council
Cllr. S. Clarke		Lancashire County Council
Mr. R. Benson		MMO appointee
Mr. N. Baxter		MMO appointee
Mr. S. Brown		MMO appointee
Mr. S. Manning		MMO appointee
Mr. L. Stainton		MMO appointee
Mr. K. Thompson		MMO appointee
Ms. C. Salthouse		MMO appointee
Mr. W. Friend		MMO appointee

IN ATTENDANCE

Mr. T. Smith AIFCA
Mr. M. Rowlings, Mr. T. Davies, Mr. S. Ward Members of Industry

NWIFCA OFFICERS ATTENDING

CEO, Head of Enforcement, Head of Science, Head of Administration (Clerk)

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Cllr. J. Hugo		Blackpool Council
Mr. P. Capper	Chair	MMO appointee
Mr. B. Leigh		MMO appointee
Mr. S. Johnston		MMO
Dr. C. Mihailovici		MMO appointee
Mr. G. Pidduck		MMO appointee
Mr. R. Lomax		MMO appointee
Cllr. G. Davies		Wirral Council
Mr. D. Williams		MMO appointee
Mr. L. Browning		Natural England

15 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS (AGENDA ITEM 1)

Dr. Andrews, took the chair in the absence of Mr.Capper
He reminded members to sign the attendance register and declare any interests prior to speaking on the relevant agenda item.
The Chair paid tribute to the late Mr. Dave Dobson former Chief Fishery Officer for CSFC and husband of Mrs. Cath Dobson, all present stood for one minute's silence.

16 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS (AGENDA ITEM 2)

Mr. Manning and Mr. Benson agenda items 8 and 9

17 MINUTES OF MEETING 21st SEPTEMBER 2023 (AGENDA ITEM 3)

RESOLUTION, THE MINUTES BE APPROVED

Proposed: Cllr. Markley Seconded Cllr. Clarke, all in favour, carried

18 MATTERS ARISING (AGENDA ITEM 4)

There were no matters arising.

19 REPORT FROM MEETING OF FINANCE & PERSONNEL 1ST DECEMBER 2023 (AGENDA ITEM 5)

Cllr. Markley and the CEO updated members on the recent meeting of Finance & Personnel which discussed the annual budget and levy for 2024-25. A significant increase from previous years was proposed by way of a 'reset' which was required to bring the Authority back up to an acceptable operating standard. It was noted that the Authority had been underfunded for several years due to legacy issues with the previous management and included an increase in staff salaries and back pay which were previously approved as part of the independent cultural review undertaken.

The Chair said that it had been a very good and constructive meeting with Councillor Clarke saying that Lancashire County Council would agree to this levy for the reasons given but somewhat alarmed by the level of increase requested, LCC being the Authority's largest single funding council.

The Finance & Personnel Sub Committee recommended a budget and levy increase of 21% to be approved by full Authority.

20 FINANCIAL REPORT (Agenda Item 6)

CEO presented the Financial Report and provided further context to the requested budget increase, saying it was hoped that in 2025-26 and beyond, the Authority could return to previous levels of increases circa 3%. He emphasised that cuts had been made wherever possible but the current rate of inflation and cost of living crisis made the increase inevitable. He added that our Reserves were now ringfenced in order to secure future funding of operational requirements.

RESOLUTION 1: TO APPROVE BUDGET AND LEVY FOR 2024-25

Proposed: Mr. Baxter, Seconded: Mr. Friend, all in favour, carried

RESOLUTION 2: TO APPROVE THE BUDGET REVIEW TO 30TH SEPTEMBER 2023

Proposed: Mr. Baxter, Seconded: Ms. Salthouse, all in favour, carried

21 DATES OF MEETING 2024 (AGENDA ITEM 7)

The Clerk presented proposed dates for meetings for 2024, these included all full Authority meetings. It had been previously agreed by TSB to trial setting each meeting date at the end of each meeting.

RESOLUTION: TO APPROVE THE MEETING DATES FOR 2024

Proposed: Mr. Thompson, Seconded: Mr. Stainton, all in favour, carried

22 AIFCA COCKLE FMP UPDATE (Agenda Item 8)

Mr. Smith from AIFCA returned to the Authority to update members on the national Cockle Fisheries Management Plan which is aimed at protecting the long-term sustainability of our national cockle beds and to ensure they are not over exploited.

Several members including members of industry present raised several concerns over the plans saying that there were too many local issues which made these plans not fit for purpose in our district, water quality was a recurring theme in these concerns. Mr. Smith said that the national plan was providing overarching principles and local IFCA's would manage their own beds and is happy to work with our science team. He added that there would be stakeholder events coming up that everyone was welcome to attend and should any member require a copy of his presentation to request one.

Dr. Andrews had to leave the meeting and Cllr. Markley took over the role of Chair.

23 TSB SUMMARY (AGENDA ITEM 9)

HoE gave a verbal summary of the November TSB meeting. There were several agenda items of importance including stakeholder events, including, cockle fisheries including Penfold fishery and then potential to amend the cockle open season dates and mussel MLS. A significant survey and inspection report was discussed.

Flookburgh had been resurveyed at members request but there was no significant change therefore the fishery would remain closed. Mr. Manning and Mr. Brown queried the methodology used and Mr. Manning disagreed with the recommendations in the report.

HoS had updated members on the new permit database and informed the committee that practical training to fly the new drone had been completed and would significantly enhance surveys and reporting. Work was continuing on the whelk MLS but was proving challenging as few fishers had come forward to provide samples for analysis.

Discussions have taken place with Natural England regarding Allonby Bay HPMA and a Memorandum of Understanding had now been drafted.

The mussel MLS was again discussed at some length with Mr. Manning and Mr. Benson declaring an interest on this item. It was resolved that the MLS remain at 45mm.

Penfold cockle fishery was opened on 30th October under flexible working conditions following challenging discussions with partner agencies, there has been a relatively low number of gatherers on the bed. Mr. Rowlings asked if would be possible for members of industry to be invited to future meetings with partner agencies prior to the potential opening of a fishery.

The open dates for the cockle season were discussed with no decisions reached and will be on the agenda again for the next TSB.

24 PATROL AND ENFORCEMENT REPORT (AGENDA ITEM 10)

HoE referred to his report for further information on individual patches.

He reported that North Western Protector has had its engines refitted and was ready to undertake sea trials.

The Enforcement Team also have a new drone and he provided some technical data. Officers had undergone training and now had their CAA 'pilot' licences.

Since the last Authority meeting Enforcement have recruited five new officers one of which is the new Engineer. He went onto report on officer training which has been undertaken in the last quarter.

Members were updated on Health & Safety including a vehicle recall.

The MCRS Byelaw has now been signed by the Secretary of State and we will begin the process of implementation by first communicating with stakeholders.

He referred to his update in the previous agenda item with reference to Penfold cockle fishery, and updated members on activity at Foulney.

THE REPORT WAS RECEIVED

25 SCIENCE REPORT (Agenda Item 11)

HoS presented her report for information. Much of its content has been reported on within agenda item 9 TSB summary.

The key updates from that meeting include the completion of analysis of the mussel MLS survey, the completion of HRAs for the seed mussel fishery and Southport cockle fishery. The team have carried out four mussel inspections and an additional cockle biomass survey at Flookburgh.

THE REPORT WAS RECEIVED

26 CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER'S REPORT (Agenda item 12)

CEO presented his report for information.

He informed members that one of his main priorities for 2024 was to concentrate on Health and Safety. Although there are no immediate issues, policies and procedures are in need of reviewing and the Health & Safety and Wellbeing Working Group had now reconvened.

He reported that the pay and grading review, authorised by the Authority, was now complete and new Contracts of Employment had been issued to all officers and a new Employee Handbook had been introduced, this is a live document that will be regularly updated and added to.

We continue to look for new premises in Whitehaven and in the Carnforth area. Local solicitors Ratcliffe & Bibby have been appointed to provide assurances over our estate leases.

In relation to vessels and vehicles, NWP is very close to being operational again and will shortly be undertaking sea trials. At the September meeting of Finance & Personnel a new long-term strategy was approved for the replacement of vehicles and vessels and its implementation has begun with the purchase of two new Ford Rangers and five ATVs with trade-in deals.

The Authority has completed recruitment of new officers, as previously stated in agenda item 10. He added that two new Admin Officers have also been recruited to the newly formed Administration Team and will start in January. One of these officers is a replacement for Cath Dobson who retires in March and the second is RDEL funded and employed on a two-year fixed term contract.

Recent stakeholder events have been held around the district with unfortunately no attendance at Whitehaven and Wallasey, and only limited attendance at Rampside, near

Barrow. Moving forward we will continue with these events but review the way these are communicated prior.

The Byelaw Working Group has also reconvened, and the first meeting was held on 16th October, with constructive discussions surrounding our current suite of byelaws and the new netting byelaw. There was also discussion around how to enable young fishers to navigate the permit system.

Discussions are continuing with Natural Resources Wales (NRW) regarding future responsibility for Dee cockle management, and updates will be given at the next meeting.

CEO concluded his report by also paying tribute to Mr. Dave Dobson.

THE REPORT WAS RECEIVED

27 DRAFT ANNUAL PLAN (AGENDA ITEM 13)

CEO reported that work had begun on drafting the Annual Plan for 2024-25 but had been awaiting confirmation of the annual budget to enable its completion, the report will be emailed to members in the intervening period between this meeting and the next on 21st March 2024. Members will then be able to provide comment electronically, with a view to final amendments being made and a final version brought to this committee when it convenes again on 21st March. This will ensure next year's Annual Plan is in place before 1st April 2024, as is required by Defra.

28 ANY OTHER BUSINESS (AGENDA ITEM 14)

Mr. Brown again raised the issue of limestone being used at sea defences at Rossall and asked that the CEO write to the relevant authorities. In response CEO said he would need to have some firm evidence before being able to intervene.

The 20-year anniversary of the Morecambe Bay cockle disaster is on 5th February 2024 and CEO said that a commemoration was being held and asked members to what level of involvement should the Authority have. It was agreed to acknowledge the tragedy on our website and social media and for the CEO and HoE to attend the event.

The Chair thanked members for their attendance and closed the meeting at 14.45.