

AT A MEETING OF THE NORTH WESTERN INSHORE AND CONSERVATION
AUTHORITY HELD AT TRUCKHAVEN, CARNFORTH, 5th DECEMBER 2024

PRESENT – MEMBERS

Mr. P. Capper	Chair	MMO Appointee
Mr. B. Leigh	Vice Chair	MMO Appointee
Cllr. A. Markley		Cumberland Council
Cllr. P. Norris		Liverpool City Council
Cllr. S. Brookes		Blackpool Council
Cllr. S. Clarke		Lancashire Council
Cllr. C. Richards		Sefton Council
Clr. H. Deynem		Cheshire and Cheshire West Council
Mr. S. Johnston		MMO
Mr. J. Turner		Environment Agency
Mr. L. Browning		Natural England
Ms. S. Isles		Natural England (Guest)
Mr. N. Baxter		MMO Appointee
Mr. S. Brown		MMO Appointee
Mr. G. Pidduck		MMO Appointee
Mr. K. Thompson		MMO Appointee
Mr. L. Stainton		MMO Appointee
Mr. W. Friend		MMO Appointee
Mr. T. Jones		MMO Appointee
Ms. G. De Jong Cleynert		MMO Appointee
Dr. M. Tupper		MMO Appointee

NWIFCA OFFICERS ATTENDING

M. Taylor	CEO
J. Moulton	Head of Enforcement (HoE)
A. Plumeridge	Head of Science (HoS)
S. Reid	Administration Officer
C. Silverwood	Administration Officer

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Cllr. J. Hugo	Blackpool Council
Cllr. B. Woolfall	Halton Council
Cllr. G. Davies	Wirral Council
Cllr. J. Parr	Lancashire Council
Mr. R. Lomax	MMO Appointee
Mr. R. Donnan	MMO Appointee
Mr. R. Benson	MMO Appointee

21 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS (AGENDA ITEM 1)

The Chair welcomed Cllr. Carol Richards from Sefton Council and Cllr. Shaun Brookes from Blackpool Council.

The Chair welcomed Mr. Kelsey Thompson, as he has successfully been reappointed to the Authority after his ten-year tenure finished in November.

The Chair also welcomed Dr. Mark Tupper, who will be joining the Authority as an MMO representative. Dr. Mark Tupper is an Associate Professor for the Institute of Science and Environment at the University of Cumbria.

The Chair also reminded members to sign the attendance register and declare any items of interest.

22 DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS (AGENDA ITEM 2)

A number of questions regarding procedures surrounding the declarations of interest have been raised.

For the duration of this meeting, we will continue with our normal practice. For members who have a pecuniary interest, they will be allowed to speak but not to vote. This item will be added to the agenda of a future meeting to discuss further.

Mr. T. Jones expressed that he had an interest in all the items on the agenda, confirming that this was not a pecuniary interest, only a disclosable interest.

23 MINUTES OF MEETING 26 SEPTEMBER 2024 (AGENDA ITEM 3)

There are two small amendments to the minutes from the meeting held on 26th September 2024. In Attendance section alter Brooker to Brookes and add Mr. Wayne Friend to the apologies.

RESOLUTION: THE MINUTES BE APPROVED WITH THE NOTED AMENDMENTS

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

24 MATTERS ARISING (AGENDA ITEM 4)

Cllr. A. Markley requested an update on the ongoing research work in to shrimps, currently being undertaken by Lucy Loud.

This is covered in the Science Report (agenda Item 12).

25 FINANCE REPORT (AGENDA ITEM 5)

The CEO presented the Financial Report for the second quarter of the financial year 2024/2025 on behalf of Rushton's Accountants.

Mr. L. Stainton queried the figure of expected expenditure being higher than expected. CEO explained that some payments are made in full at the start of the year and it may be advisable to ask for these costs to be spread across the full financial year.

THE REPORT WAS RECEIVED

26 FINANCIAL AUDIT REPORT (AGENDA ITEM 6)

The CEO explained that the report and the management letter had been shared with members. It has been three years since the previous audit. The Authority has committed to annual audits moving forward as this is best practice.

Discussion took place around the process of the approval of purchase orders for small amounts. The Admin Team are currently being trained to facilitate a tighter control procedure to address this.

Mr. T. Jones queried the exceptional item of £674,158 on the Financial Report for 2023. The CEO said he would clarify this with the accountants and inform members accordingly.

THE REPORT WAS RECEIVED

27 F&P REPORT FROM MEETING 26TH NOVEMBER 2024 (AGENDA ITEM 7)

Cllr. A. Markley provided a summary of the Financial and Planning Meeting that was held 26th November 2024. A good discussion took place; however, no agreement could be reached on the percentage levy increase.

A request for an increase of 10.1% on the levies was made for this year. The CEO explained that there had been overspends already this year in some areas such as insurance where there was a significant increase in costs. The adoption of Xero accounting software has resulted in more detailed spending information being available.

Cllr. S. Clarke explained that he had taken the request of 10.1% to his finance department who were only prepared to pay a maximum of a 5% increase, raising questions around transport, professional services and sundry costs.

Cllr. H. Deynem supports the work of the IFCA but every pound paid to the IFCA takes that money away from Children's Services, recommends an increase of less than 5%.

Cllr. P. Norris supports the work of the Authority, also noting that over the last three years there has been a surplus every year and that there are significant non-committed financial reserves.

Cllr. A. Markley understands the need for the money and reiterated that they can only make decisions based on the information they are provided with, stating that an increase of 5% would be more palatable to take to the councils.

Cllr. S. Brookes stated that he wants an IFCA that is fit for purpose, but the budget needs to be as tight as it can be.

The CEO addressed the points raised by the councillors covering staff retention, fair pay regime and vehicle and vessel replacement. The Professional Services costs include setting aside money for prosecutions, subscription to the Association of IFCA, subscription for the body cameras, MMO for intel database and the accountants.

Discussion took place around where the necessary cuts could be made to allow for a lower levy increase for the council and how a replacement vessel could be funded in the future.

Cllr. P. Norris mentioned that the general unallocated reserves are gaining interest and suggested that this be used as an income stream, going on to suggest the need for an asset review for the Authority and the issues around maintaining North Western Protector.

The HOE has commenced an asset review and is considering an operational strategy to consolidate and streamline the assets.

A reduction in the contribution to the Capital Asset Replacement Fund could facilitate the necessary savings for the councils.

The councillors took a 15 minute break to discuss the levy increase.

The meeting reconvened at 11.25am.

Cllr. A. Markley stated that the councils all feel that 5% is the figure they can take back to the councils for approval, however they could go to 6%.

The CEO stated that by reducing the contribution to the Capital Asset Replacement Fund to £71,500, this would reduce the requested increase from 10.1% to be 6%.

Recommendation from the Finance and Personnel Committee is to accept a 6% increase on the budget for this year.

15 in favour, 3 abstentions, carried.

28 TSB SUMMARY 5TH NOVEMBER 2024 (AGENDA ITEM 8)

Mr. S. Brown provided a summary of the TSB meeting held on 5th November 2024.

Discussion took place around the Pilling cockle fishery with a resolution being made for Pilling to open to west of the Fluke Hall Lane subject to the HRA. The HRA has been submitted and is with Natural England.

The Byelaw Strategy Review process was considered with a resolution to adopt a five-year strategy.

The Authority are seeking legal advice with regards to reviewing Byelaw 3 Permits including prioritising young people on the waiting list, 'use it or lose it' and a handover scheme.

An update was provided by the HOE as verbal legal advice was received on Monday 2nd December. The Authority are able to progress with considering 'use it or lose it' and a handover scheme however, not prioritising young people. There will be caveats included on the handover scheme such as a direct, familial relative.

The CEO mentioned that the Byelaw Strategy is available on the website.

Proposed: Mr. K. Thompson; Seconded: Mr. N. Baxter.

All in favour, carried.

THE REPORT WAS RECEIVED

29 TSB VACANCY (AGENDA ITEM 9)

Discussion took place around the need for balanced representation on the TSB with representation from commercial fishers and marine environment. As per the Constitution TSB is made up of ten members, including the three statutory members. Cllr. A. Markley stated that anyone can attend the meetings and can have their voices heard even though they cannot vote. Mr. B. Leigh stated that it is in the gift of the

Authority to change the membership composition of the TSB and to increase the number of members.

Ms. Georgia de Jong Cleynert and Dr. Mark Tupper expressed an interest in joining the TSB.

Mr. B. Leigh is going to draft changes to the TSB and it will be added as an agenda item for the next quarterly meeting.

Members of the Authority will be asked to provide a short bio to go on the website. The Admin Team will request these and update the website moving forwards.

Mr. G. Pidduck was appointed to the TSB as he was the next person with the most votes following the September meeting.

30 PATROL AND ENFORCEMENT REPORT (AGENDA ITEM 10)

The HoE provided a summary of the Patrol and Enforcement Report presenting updates from staff across the district.

An in-house training scheme is being developed with the assistance of the Admin Team. Training already delivered includes the use of body worn video cameras and 'Bitesize Byelaws'.

The Netting Byelaw is currently with the MMO.

Clue is our new intelligence reporting system, jointly operated with the MMO. It is used for submitting online reports and the information can be used for better planning, resourcing and staff allocation.

The permit database is developing quite rapidly. The stakeholders are engaging, and this is helping with fishery reporting.

The cockle fisheries are resource intensive involving Enforcement, Science and Admin Teams.

Flookburgh opened on the 2nd September 2024 with a maximum of 118 gatherers attending. The fishery operated well. Following the opening of the fishery, there was a slight change to the flexible working conditions moving to Monday to Friday arising from representation from industry. There were minor issues around minimum landing size initially.

There is not a fair distribution of Byelaw 3 permit holders across the fisheries when open.

Pilling opened on the 7th October 2024. There was a complete transfer of all gatherers from Flookburgh to Pilling. There was a maximum of 90 fishers on the first day and it was initially quite chaotic. There were issues around undersize cockles. Permit holders were advised to riddle more and to move to better areas. There were 26 minimum landing size (MLS) inspections undertaken and catches of between 1% and 52% undersize were detected. Ten Financial Administrative Penalties were issued to permit holders.

A summary was provided of the returns data that has been submitted through the new database.

A verbal warning has been issued for recreational gathering of cockles from a closed fishery. This was identified by drone work.

Mr. L. Browning asked how much cockle was coming off Leasowe over the last two weeks. The HOE responded explaining that there was a TAC of 570 tonnes, as of yesterday 463 tonnes had been removed. Discussion took place around market economics and the reasoning behind the daily yields dropping off including harder ground, less active fishers and shorter tides.

Mr. K. Thompson queried that there were only 17 patrol days for North Western Protector over the three-month period of the report and asked if this was offering value for money. Discussion took place around the ongoing maintenance issues with NWP involving the engines, jet drives and impellers, whether the work is covered by warranties and the low morale of the staff in Whitehaven.

Mr. B. Leigh stated that a debate needs to take place around North Western Protector and the need for a productive asset as there are statutory responsibilities that must be met.

Mr. W. Friend raised concerns around Bay Protector only spending 91 hours in the water over the last year. The HOE explained that this was due to operational demands, logistics, staffing (13 IFCOs across 850km of coastline), enforcement of the cockle fisheries and resilience within the team for helming the RIBs.

Lunch started at 12:15pm and the meeting recommenced at 12:50pm.

Discussion continued around the suitability of North Western Protector, the maintenance costs and issues around fuel. The HOE has commenced an asset review and is considering an operational strategy to consolidate and streamline the assets. This report will be available at the next quarterly meeting.

Cllr. H. Deynem enquired about KPIs covering the use of the RIBs and NWP, requesting to see targets set on a monthly and annual basis. Of interest to the councillors would also be the number of days of patrol and the number of days available including availability of staff. A task and finish group was suggested around NWP and moving things forward.

Proposed Cllr. H. Deynem; Seconded Mr. N. Baxter

All in favour, carried.

THE REPORT WAS RECEIVED

31 CEO REPORT (AGENDA ITEM 12)

CEO reviewed the report providing a very brief summary of the contents.

The Authority has received confirmation, though the Association, that there will be Defra funding of £140,000 per year for the next two years. The money is to uplift human resources covering additional responsibilities such as MPA management and input in to Fisheries Management Plans.

With regards to Estates, we are awaiting a response from Cumberland Council. Cllr. A. Markley suggested resending the letter to Mr. Michael Barry, Assistant Director of

Inclusive Growth and Placemaking and Mr. Andrew Seeking, Chief Executive and also cc'ing in himself.

Communication has focused on keeping our Byelaw 3 permit holders up to date with information on the fisheries. Stakeholder engagement events will be organised for the new year.

As a result of feedback from the Staff Survey, we are developing a more formal inhouse training calendar, we have created a staff suggestions email inbox and senior management need to be more visible on both the fisheries and at the other offices. We will be doing more to recognise the good work of officers on the website, in the Annual Plan and also internally.

Cllr. P. Norris asked about the use of drones and the issues around using drones. The HOE explained that there was now a page on the website detailing our use of drones. There are two drones and three trained members of staff. The policies and procedures are in place. Officers are producing pre-determined operational plans for each area where the drones are used. The Science Team need landowners' permission to use the drone and are developing how officers can use drones to assist with surveys. Currently, drones can only be used in visual line of sight.

Cllr. H. Deynem asked if it was possible to share the outcome of the staff survey.

Proposed Mr. W. Friend; Seconded Cllr. A. Markley.

All in favour, carried.

THE REPORT WAS RECEIVED

32 SCIENCE REPORT (AGENDA ITEM 11)

The HOS reviewed the contents of the Science Report summarising the work that the Science Team had undertaken over the last few months, providing details on the surveys undertaken, the potting survey in the HPMA, mussel stock assessments, the whelk study on size at maturity of whelks in the district to assess the appropriateness of the minimum conservation reference size (MCRS) stipulated in the flexible permit conditions, research into shrimping in the North West and the ongoing work on the use of social and cultural values in decision making.

Mr. T. Jones asked if there had been a reduction in birds. Mr. L. Browning explained that generally the pattern in Morecambe Bay, over the last few years, is that several species has seen a decline in abundance. It is a complex picture.

Cllr. P. Norris suggested engaging with the Liverpool universities. The HOS explained that she was already in contact with someone from Liverpool University.

Proposed Mr. B. Leigh; Seconded Mr. S. Brown.

All in favour, carried.

THE REPORT WAS RECEIVED

33 HS&W REPORT (AGENDA ITEM 13)

The CEO provided a summary of the HS&W report.

There has been a reduction in the number of HS&W training days from the previous quarter, due to the focus on meeting the requirements of the Work Boat Code earlier in the year.

The training matrix is up-to-date and monitored proactively.

There is an on-going policy development programme where policies are reviewed and refreshed. Policies that have recently been updated are lone-working, ATVs, drones and currently working on sea-going procedures with North Western Protector and the RIBs.

Discussion took place around the issue with the stakeholder that took place at the Carnforth Office and a security review has taken place. The stakeholders were contacted multiple times via email, text and telephone to inform them that the renewal process was underway. Initial letters are sent out in April and the deadline is the end of July.

Fire Risk Assessment have been undertaken across three of the four offices. Remedial works are ongoing.

Mr. B. Leigh queried HS&W training, auditing possibilities and working with other IFCA's with regards to H&S. The CEO is the named, responsible person. Science Officer Gemma Grose has recently undertaken a three-day training course and is now the employee HS&W representative. HS&W is a standing agenda item at NIMEG.

Proposed Mr. P. Capper

All in favour, carried.

THE REPORT WAS RECEIVED

34 PROPOSED MEETING DATES 2025-2026 (AGENDA ITEM 14)

Full Authority Dates

Thursday 20th March

Thursday 26th June (Annual Meeting)

Thursday 25th September

Thursday 4th December

Technical, Science and Byelaws Sub-Committee Dates

Tuesday 11th February

Tuesday 13th May

Tuesday 5th August (TBC)

Tuesday 4th November

35 ANY OTHER BUSINESS (AGENDA ITEM 15)

The Chair thanked members for their attendance and closed the meeting at 14:15.