



Inshore Fisheries and
Conservation Authority

North Western
Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority

Annual Plan

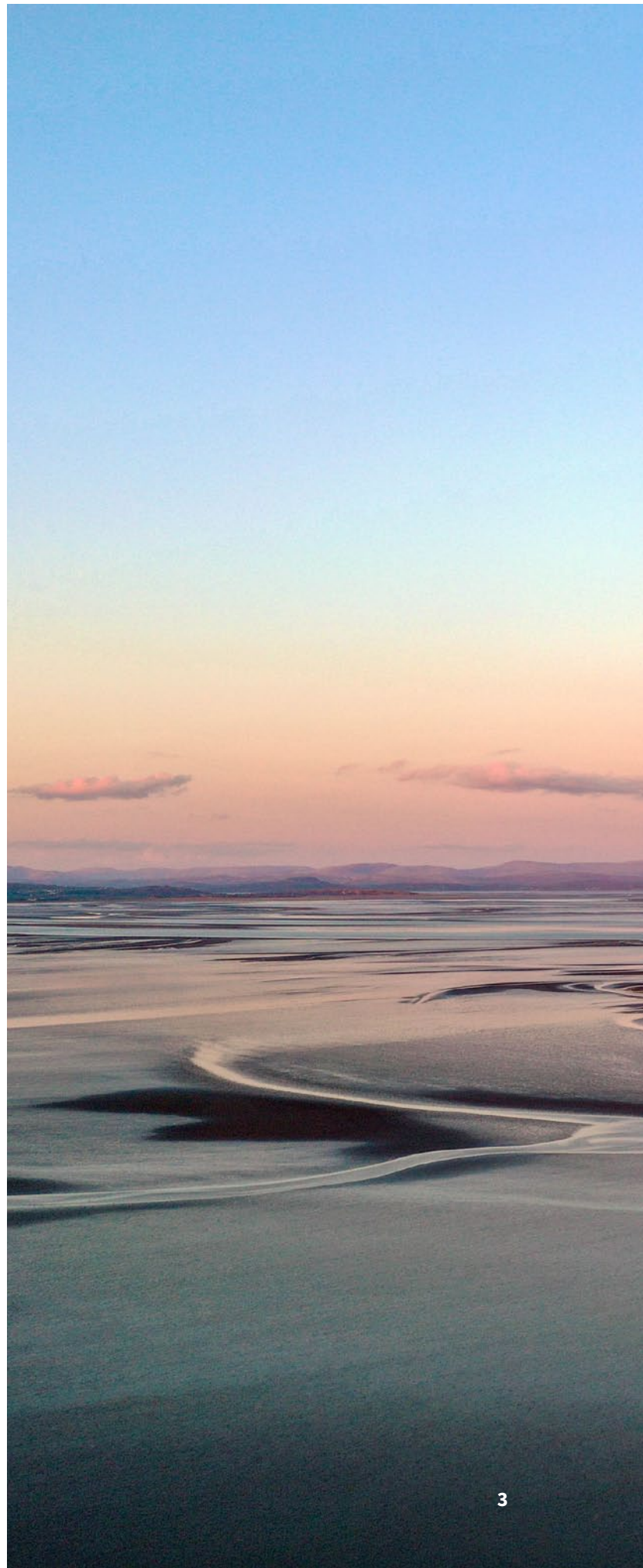
2024/2025

Our Vision

“To lead, champion and manage a sustainable marine environment and inshore fisheries, by successfully securing the right balance between social, environmental and economic benefits to ensure healthy seas, sustainable fisheries and a viable industry.”

Contents

| | |
|--------------------------------|----|
| Our Vision | 2 |
| Foreword | 4 |
| Introduction | 5 |
| Our Functions | 5 |
| The District | 6 |
| Staff Structure | 8 |
| Assets | 10 |
| Members | 12 |
| Finances | 13 |
| Expenditure | 14 |
| Main Objectives and Priorities | 15 |
| Operational | 15 |
| Science | 18 |
| Enforcement | 18 |
| Marine Environment | 19 |
| Fisheries | 21 |
| Communications | 23 |
| Governance | 24 |
| Staff | 25 |
| IFCAs' Success Criteria | 27 |
| Success Criterion 1 | 29 |
| Success Criterion 2 | 30 |
| Success Criterion 3 | 32 |
| Success Criterion 4 | 33 |
| Success Criterion 5 | 34 |





Foreword

Last year was one of significant change and progress for North Western Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority (NWIFCA), which saw not only my appointment, but also the arrival of seven other new members of staff, marking an unprecedented period of recruitment for the Authority. New faces joined experienced officers, giving a fresh impetus to our work, bolstered by the continued support of our dedicated members who judiciously oversaw our governance and strategic direction.

This year will again be one of progress, as we seek to make NWIFCA a modern, adaptable, and a more resilient organisation that continues to build strong relationships with our stakeholders and partners and finds new, innovative ways of delivering our statutory responsibilities.

In the context of the current policy and legislative climate, and as the UK continues acclimatising to its position as an independent coastal state, I firmly believe that IFCA's will be more important than ever in enabling the sustainable management of our marine environment. Our unique regional expertise and ability to respond quickly to dynamic environmental and economic circumstances means we continue to provide the best means by which sustainable fisheries and healthy marine ecosystems can be achieved across the North West English coast and throughout our inshore waters.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a series of fluid, overlapping loops and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Mark Taylor Chief Executive Officer, NWIFCA

Introduction

NWIFCA is the lead statutory regulator under the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 (MaCAA) responsible for the protection of the marine environment and sustainable use of sea fisheries resources within our district. The Authority's statutory duties are defined in MaCAA, which includes the requirement for us to prepare an annual plan setting out our main objectives and priorities for the year ahead; this is that plan.

This Annual Plan sets out NWIFCA's main performance targets and priorities to deliver in the forthcoming fiscal year. It demonstrates how we will continue to implement and improve our inshore marine management and contribute towards the operational implementation of the UK Government's marine and fisheries policies.

Our Functions

NWIFCA is responsible for managing the exploitation of sea fisheries resources within our district. This includes all animals and plants which habitually live in the sea. In delivering this function, the Authority is required to ensure that all exploitation and development taking place within the district is sustainable, and that stakeholders' socio-economic needs are balanced with the requirement for strong marine environmental protection.

The Authority's principal regulatory functions relate to the enforcement of minimum landing sizes for specific species, fishing gear restrictions, restricted fishing areas, opening and closing of certain shellfisheries, and the management of marine protected areas (MPAs)¹. Alongside our enforcement responsibilities, our scientific work continually furthers our collective understanding of our main fisheries and how our inshore marine environment is responding to various pressures. This enables us to implement sound adaptive management processes and flex our approach depending on the environmental circumstances at play.

To support the delivery of our management functions, the Authority can make byelaws to address local and regional fisheries and marine environmental management issues. This also extends to the ability to make emergency byelaws to address the most urgent matters.

¹ MPAs include the international designations of Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), protecting habitats, and Special Protection Areas (SPAs), protecting birds, known collectively as European Marine Sites (EMSs), along with national designations known as Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs) and Highly Protected Marine Areas (HPMAs).

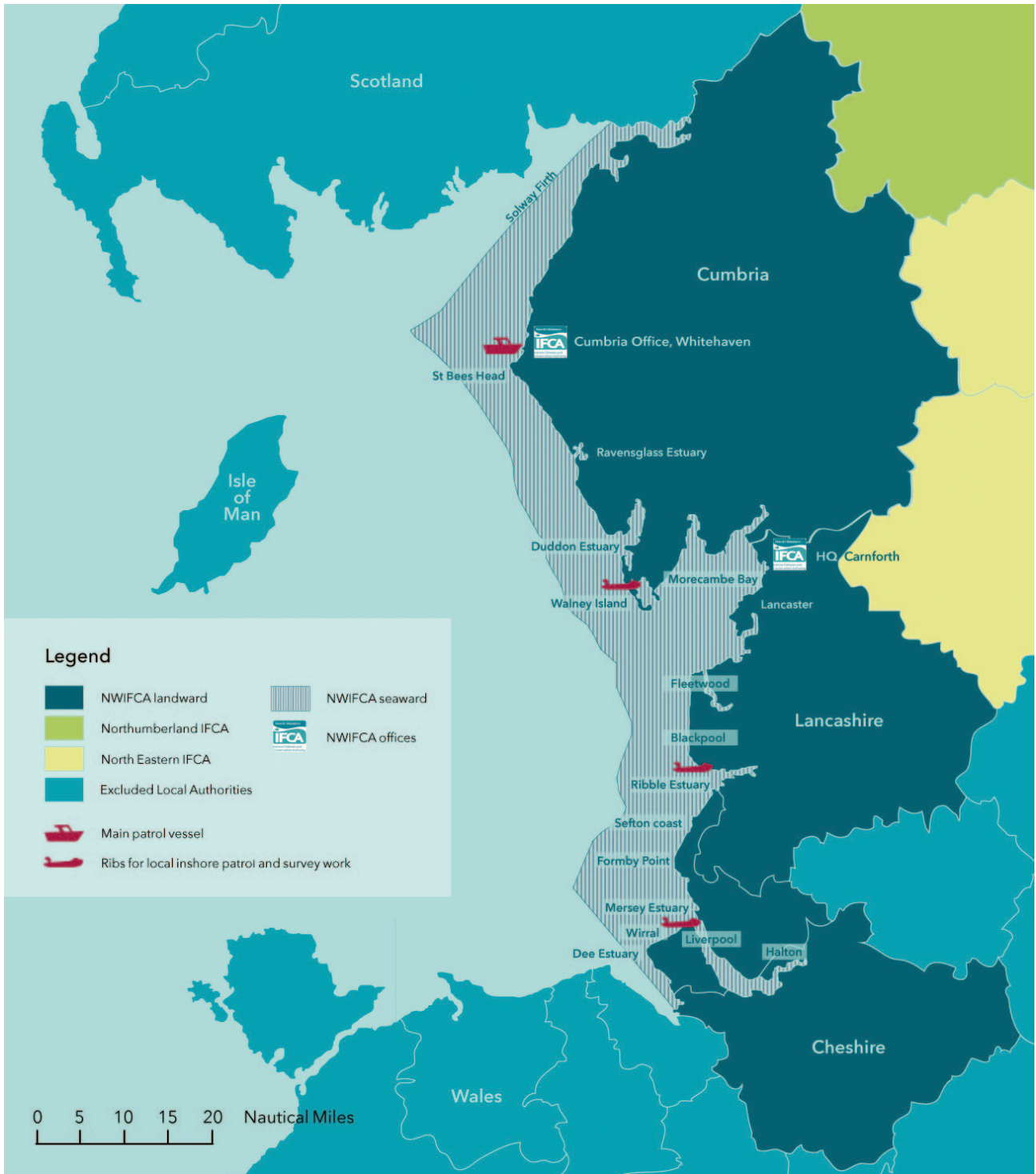


The District

NWIFCA's district encompasses the entire coastline² of North West England, from the Scottish to Welsh borders, its coastal councils' landwards areas, as well as its inshore coastal waters out to six nautical miles. NWIFCA is unique in that it is the only IFCA which does not share a jurisdictional border with any other IFCA.

Our district is one of diversity and contrast, with highly dynamic and ecologically productive marine environments existing alongside varying coastal communities, from the relatively low-density coastal populations of Cumbria in the north, to the more populated areas of Lancashire, Merseyside, and Cheshire. Within the district are many significant inshore marine environments, demonstrable by the fact that almost the entire North West's coastal waters are designated as an MPA of one form or another. Our estuarine and intertidal environments within the Solway Firth, Morecambe Bay, and the Duddon, Wyre, Ribble, Mersey, and Dee Estuaries are some of the most biologically diverse in the country and yield some significant fisheries for our commercial and recreational fishing stakeholders. Individually and collectively, these marine environments and fisheries are managed by the Authority to ensure they are maintained, and where necessary improved, for the benefit of all our current and future stakeholders.

² Approximately 850km.

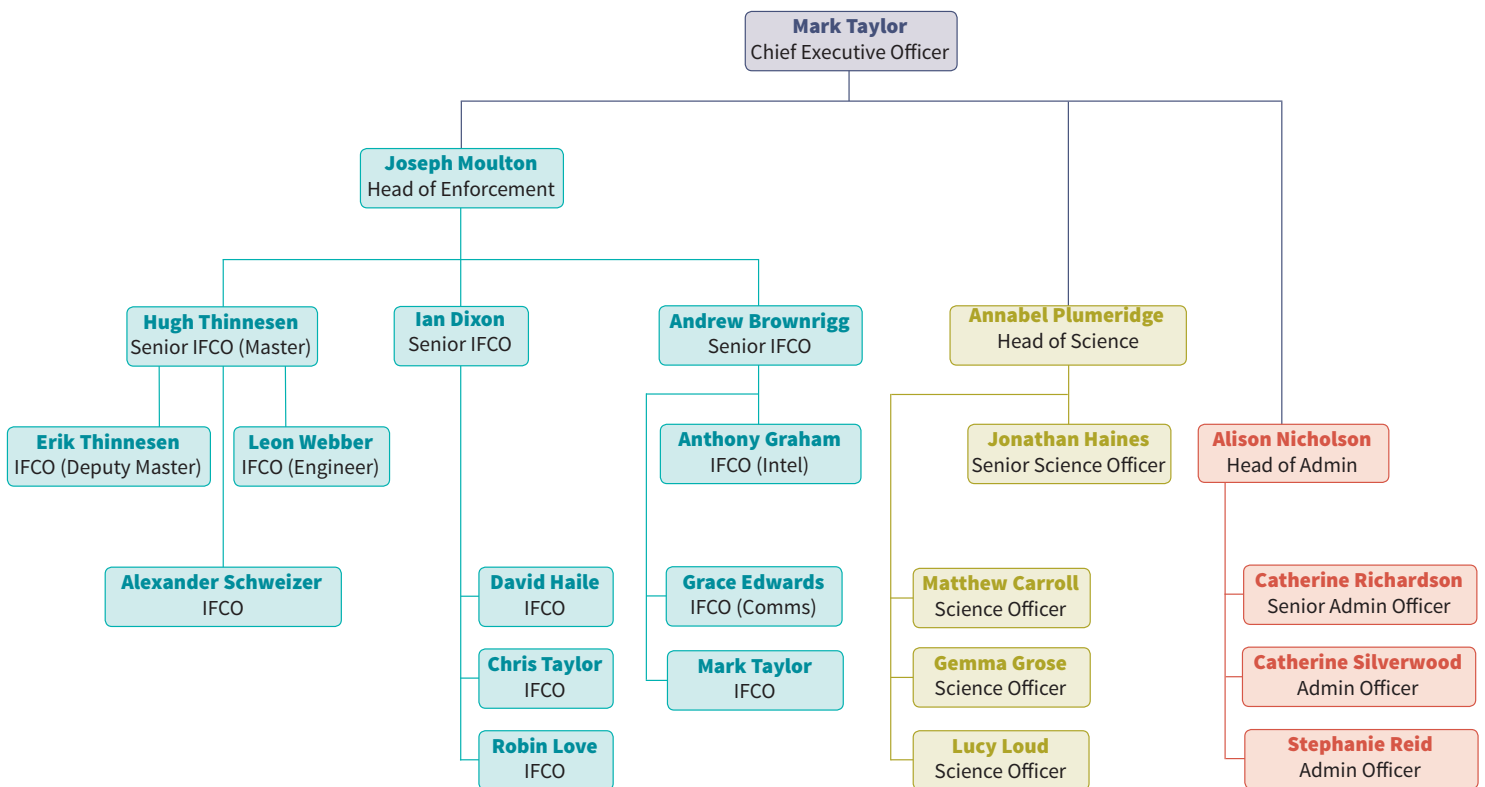


Staff

NWIFCA has 23 members of staff working across three distinct teams; the Enforcement Team, the Science Team and the Administration Team. Overseen by the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), each team has a senior manager responsible for the delivery of the teams’ day-to-day duties.

During 2023/24, the Authority underwent a job evaluation exercise and pay review. This led to a significant restructuring of the organisation, which included the creation of an entirely new Administration Team, as well as the implementation of a six-grade structure with associated new line management chains and a new middle-management level. Our new organogram is shown below.

North Western Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority Organogram



Our Enforcement Team, led by Joseph Moulton, handles the operational delivery of our fisheries and marine environmental regulation. This centres on helping our regulated stakeholders remain compliant with the raft of legislation that we are statutorily responsible for. The team of thirteen Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Officers (IFCOs) provides guidance and education to our fishing industry stakeholders and other relevant groups to enable their compliance and, as a last resort, take enforcement action against any non-compliance that has the potential to be of significant detriment to our fisheries or wider marine environment.

Annabel Plumeridge leads our Science Team, who deliver all our scientific research and monitoring work across the district. This team of technical specialists regularly devises and applies a variety of bespoke survey methodologies to assess the state of our various fisheries and marine environments and works closely with key partner organisations to maximise the scope of our scientific understanding. With ever-changing marine ecosystems and habitats, their work is never dull, and they are constantly innovating and adapting their approaches to deliver the best evidence base upon which the Authority can make informed, sound decisions.

The Authority's Administration Team provides all the necessary administrative support to our two operational teams and our CEO. Managed by Alison Nicholson, they deliver our finance and HR functions, organise our various committee meetings, manage and maintain all our assets, including estates, vessels and vehicles, run our fisheries permit schemes, and process all our enforcement and fisheries data.



Assets

NWIFCA deploys a number of specialist operational assets in order to fulfil all our responsibilities. Our main patrol vessel, North Western Protector, is based in the north of the district in Whitehaven. A former windfarm vessel, commissioned by the Authority in 2018, it is a 20.5m aluminium catamaran with a specification that enables us to deliver our enforcement and scientific work across the district. It has twin Man 1,100hp 12-cylinder 1,200rpm engines that power its Ultra-Dynamics UJ575 waterjets, giving it a cruising speed of 23 knots. It employs a ‘mother-daughter’ system with a small, stern-launched rigid inflatable boat (RIB) used to transport officers across to nearby fishing vessels for inspection. It is capable of lifting fixed fishing nets and pots for inspection, as well as deploying specialist scientific equipment for underwater surveys. As a twin-hulled catamaran, it can also ‘dry out’ on intertidal areas on low tides to enable officers to conduct scientific or enforcement work on foot.

Completing our seagoing fleet are two RIBs, one in the central part of the district, ordinarily based in Barrow, and one in Liverpool covering the southern area. These craft provide us with further capabilities to deliver proactive and reactive enforcement and scientific work, enabling responsive operational coverage across the entire North West.

As well as our vessels, we also have a fleet of all-terrain vehicles (ATVs, or ‘quad bikes’), pick-up trucks and vans to enable officers to travel throughout the district and deploy their specialist equipment wherever needed.



North West Protector



Members

The Authority’s full committee has thirty members as defined in The North Western Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Order 2010 (‘the Order’). It is made up of ten councillors appointed by our nine constituent councils, seventeen members appointed by the Marine Management Organisation (MMO), and three statutory appointees representing the MMO, Natural England (NE) and the Environment Agency (EA).

Correct as of April 2024

Council Members

| | |
|--------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Cllr. J. Hugo | Blackpool Borough Council |
| Cllr. H. Deynem | Cheshire West and Chester Council |
| Cllr. A. Markley | Cumberland Council |
| Cllr. B. Woolfall | Halton Borough Council |
| Cllr. S. Clarke | Lancashire County Council |
| Cllr. J. Parr | Lancashire County Council |
| Cllr. S. McGinnity | Sefton Metropolitan Borough Council |
| Cllr. J. Boak | Westmorland and Furness Council |
| Cllr. G. Davies | Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council |
| Vacancy | Liverpool City Council |

MMO Appointees

| | |
|--------------------------------|------------------------|
| Mr. P. Capper (Chair) | Marine Environment |
| Dr. J. Andrews (Vice Chair) | Marine Environment |
| Mr. N. Baxter | Marine Environment |
| Mr. R. Benson | Commercial Fisheries |
| Mr. S. Brown | Recreational Fisheries |
| Mr. R. Donnan | Commercial Fisheries |
| Mr. W. Friend | Recreational Fisheries |
| Mr. T. Jones | Commercial Fisheries |
| Mr. B. Leigh | Recreational Fisheries |
| Mr. R. Lomax | Recreational Fisheries |
| Mr. S. Manning | Commercial Fisheries |
| Mr. G. Pidduck | Commercial Fisheries |
| Ms. C. Salthouse | Marine Environment |
| Mr. L. Stainton | Recreational Fisheries |
| Mr. K. Thompson | Commercial Fisheries |
| Mr. D. Williams | Recreational Fisheries |
| One Vacancy | |

Statutory Appointees

| | |
|-----------------|-----|
| Mr. L. Browning | NE |
| Mr. S. Johnston | MMO |
| Mr. J. Turner | EA |

Finances

IFCAs' operating budgets are derived from levies paid to them by each of their constituent councils. For NWIFCA, the percentage of the total levy which each council pays is defined within the Order and is as follows:

| | |
|---------------------------------------|--------|
| • Blackpool Borough Council | 1.65% |
| • Cheshire West and Chester Council | 7.30% |
| • Cumberland Council | 20.47% |
| • Halton Borough Council | 2.22% |
| • Lancashire County Council | 33.14% |
| • Liverpool City Council | 4.26% |
| • Sefton Metropolitan Borough Council | 5.09% |
| • Westmorland and Furness Council | 20.47% |
| • Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council | 5.40% |

At a meeting of the Authority's full committee in December 2023, our total levy for 2024/25 was agreed and set at £1,750,274. This was split between the nine constituent councils as follows:

| | |
|---------------------------------------|----------|
| • Blackpool Borough Council | £28,880 |
| • Cheshire West and Chester Council | £127,770 |
| • Cumberland Council | £358,281 |
| • Halton Borough Council | £38,856 |
| • Lancashire County Council | £580,040 |
| • Liverpool City Council | £74,562 |
| • Sefton Metropolitan Borough Council | £89,089 |
| • Westmorland and Furness Council | £358,281 |
| • Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council | £94,515 |

This year's operating budget represented an unprecedented increase of 20.97% on 2023/24. This increase was sought due to historic low-level increases over previous years which had led to a real-terms budgetary decrease for the Authority and £1,750,000 was agreed so as to return the Authority's operating budget to parity and enable us to continue to deliver our performance targets and objectives as set out in this Annual Plan.

The breakdown of this year's operating budget into our various budgetary headings and sub-headings is shown in the table over.

Expenditure

| Budget Heading | Budget Sub-Heading | Amount |
|--------------------------------|--|-------------------|
| Employees | <i>Gross Pay</i> | £846,685 |
| | <i>Employer's NI</i> | £101,504 |
| | <i>Employer's Pension</i> | £160,714 |
| | <i>Expenses</i> | £20,000 |
| | <i>Training</i> | £25,000 |
| | <i>Recruitment</i> | £3,500 |
| | <i>Equipment and Uniform</i> | £27,000 |
| Estates | <i>Estates Maintenance and Repairs</i> | £50,000 |
| | <i>Utilities</i> | £23,000 |
| | <i>Rents</i> | £105,000 |
| | <i>Rates</i> | £30,000 |
| | <i>Sundries</i> | £6,000 |
| Transport | <i>Fuel and Oil</i> | £90,000 |
| | <i>Transport Maintenance and Repairs</i> | £30,000 |
| | <i>Road Tax</i> | £4,000 |
| Capital Asset Replacement Fund | | £144,151 |
| Corporate | <i>Pension Fund (Ex-Staff)</i> | £16,000 |
| | <i>Professional Services</i> | £32,300 |
| | <i>Insurance</i> | £45,000 |
| | <i>General Admin</i> | £10,000 |
| | <i>IT</i> | £42,420 |
| | <i>Members' Expenses</i> | £5,000 |
| | <i>Events</i> | £11,000 |
| | <i>Hotels</i> | £7,000 |
| TOTAL GROSS EXPENDITURE | | £1,835,274 |
| INCOME | | |
| Permit Fees | | £85,000 |
| TOTAL INCOME | | £85,000 |
| TOTAL NET EXPENDITURE | | £1,750,274 |

Main Objectives and Priorities

This section of the Annual Plan defines our main objectives and priorities for the year ahead. It comes before a section on the IFCA's success criteria and how NWIFCA aims to work towards or meet these this year. However, the objectives laid out in that section do not entirely encompass what we wish to achieve over the next twelve months and so, this section describes our primary operational and administrative objectives and priorities for 2024/25.

Operational

North Western Protector

2024/25 will mark the first full year in which our flagship patrol vessel North Western Protector has been continuously operational since 2021/22. The priority for the year is to return her to full operational capacity. With the direction of our experienced Senior IFCO (Master), Hugh Thinnesen, and IFCO (Deputy Master), Erik Thinnesen, we will develop the capabilities and experience of our four new IFCO crew members, who all joined us in 2023/24, and move towards having an effective and well-drilled crew.

We will deliver at least 30 fisheries protection patrols over the year and aim to conduct upwards of 50 fishing vessel inspections. We will also conduct at least six patrols of the newly designated Allonby Bay Highly Protected Marine Area (HPMA) and look to support NE in their monitoring work for the site.

Furthermore, North Western Protector will return to supporting our scientific work across the district, and will conduct at least five research trips over the course of the year.

Between the Head of Enforcement, Senior IFCO (Master) and IFCO (Deputy Master), we will develop a new patrol plan template and implement this, so that officers and senior managers can understand when we expect North Western Protector to be at sea and what we expect her to achieve over each patrol.

Lead Officer: Head of Enforcement

Capital Asset Replacement Scheme

Last year, members voted to allocate a proportion of our reserves towards replacing our ageing operational assets, namely our RIBs, pick-up trucks, vans and ATVs. They agreed a proposed strategy put forward by the CEO for the approach to, and timeframe over, which all these assets would be replaced; this was set at three years and amounted to an estimated £500,000-£600,000 net expenditure from our reserves over this period. A new policy for the normal timeframes in which such assets should be routinely replaced was also drawn up. It was agreed that, for our RIBs, replacement timeframes will be reviewed on an ongoing basis, but pick-up trucks and vans will be replaced every five years and ATVs every three.

The process for replacing all these assets began last year and will continue in earnest in 2024/25. We will look to replace two more of our oldest remaining pick-up trucks and sell another, superfluous one which does not need replacing. We will also replace our two oldest vans and our four oldest ATVs. As part of an organisational move towards more sustainable, environmentally friendly policies we will look to procure electric vans to replace our current diesel / petrol ones, if it is cost effective and appropriate to do so.

During this annual plan period, we will review the operational requirements around our two RIBs based in the central and southern areas of our district, and by the end of the year, will have developed some proposals for members to consider how best to proceed with replacing them. It is unlikely that either RIB will be replaced in 2024/25, but a succession plan for them will be agreed this year and, if new RIBs are required, the procurement process began.

Lead Officer: CEO

Drones

Two specialist drones were procured by the Authority in 2023 to support our operational work across both our Enforcement and Science Teams. With all the necessary policies, procedures, risk assessments and insurance now in place, this year we will focus on developing operational competence amongst our four officers trained to fly the drones and implement and refine our use of the drones in the field. We will focus on learning more about how we can get the most from our new drones, and so, at this stage, no explicit targets for number of flights or operational outputs are being set. We will also ensure we continue to communicate with our stakeholders, in particular fishers, who may be affected by, or have queries about, our drone usage.

Lead Officers: Heads of Enforcement and Science

Office Moves

The intention for this year is to further explore options for new properties to replace our current offices at Carnforth and Whitehaven. Whilst it affords us the necessary floorspace, our Head Office at Carnforth is not ideal in terms of its layout, age, state of repair and surrounding infrastructure. To that end, we are aiming to move to a new Head Office, remaining within the Lancaster district or surrounding area. Further exploration of appropriate options will be made this year, and if a suitable property is found, the process of relocating will be commenced. However, our lease does not expire until March 2026, so it is not necessarily imperative that a new Head Office is found in 2024/25. Alongside moving the Head Office, a new lock-up facility for our vehicles based at Carnforth will also need to be sought.

NWIFCA and its predecessor organisation has been based out of our current Whitehaven office for several decades now. With the growth and development of the Authority, and of the number of officers based there, the Whitehaven office is no longer suitable for our operational and staffing requirements. We wish to remain at Whitehaven due to its strategic location, and ideally, would like to find a property close to the harbour that acts as an office and lock-up space in one. Towards the end of 2023/24, a potentially suitable property presented itself, and this will be explored further in 2024/25 with a view to presenting options to the Authority's members in due course.

Lead Officer: CEO



Science

Research

We have a number of research priorities for 2024/25 to support our fisheries and marine environmental management work. However, as it is a requirement under IFCA Success Criterion 5, a separate Research Plan will be developed and published which will lay out our objectives and priorities in this area.

Lead Officer: Head of Science

Academic Partnerships

Despite adding an additional Science Officer to our ranks last year, and whilst we continue to deliver our statutory requirements in this area, it is apparent that we do not have the resources to do everything we would like to do across our fisheries and marine environmental scientific work. Therefore, in 2024/25, we will look to explore the potential for developing our relationships with academic institutions in the North West, to see if there are opportunities to support one another in specific scientific projects and provide the Authority with an even greater evidence base from which to make its environmental management decisions.

Lead Officer: Head of Science

Enforcement

New Intel Database

As part of a joint project with the MMO, all IFCAs are procuring a new intelligence database to help improve intel reporting, processing and sharing across England. It is expected that this new system will be available to IFCAs early in the year, and so in the proceeding months, NWIFCA will be focussed on implementing the system internally, ensuring it is secure and operationally sound and that officers are trained in using it to record, report, and analyse intel.

Lead Officer: Head of Enforcement

New Permit Database

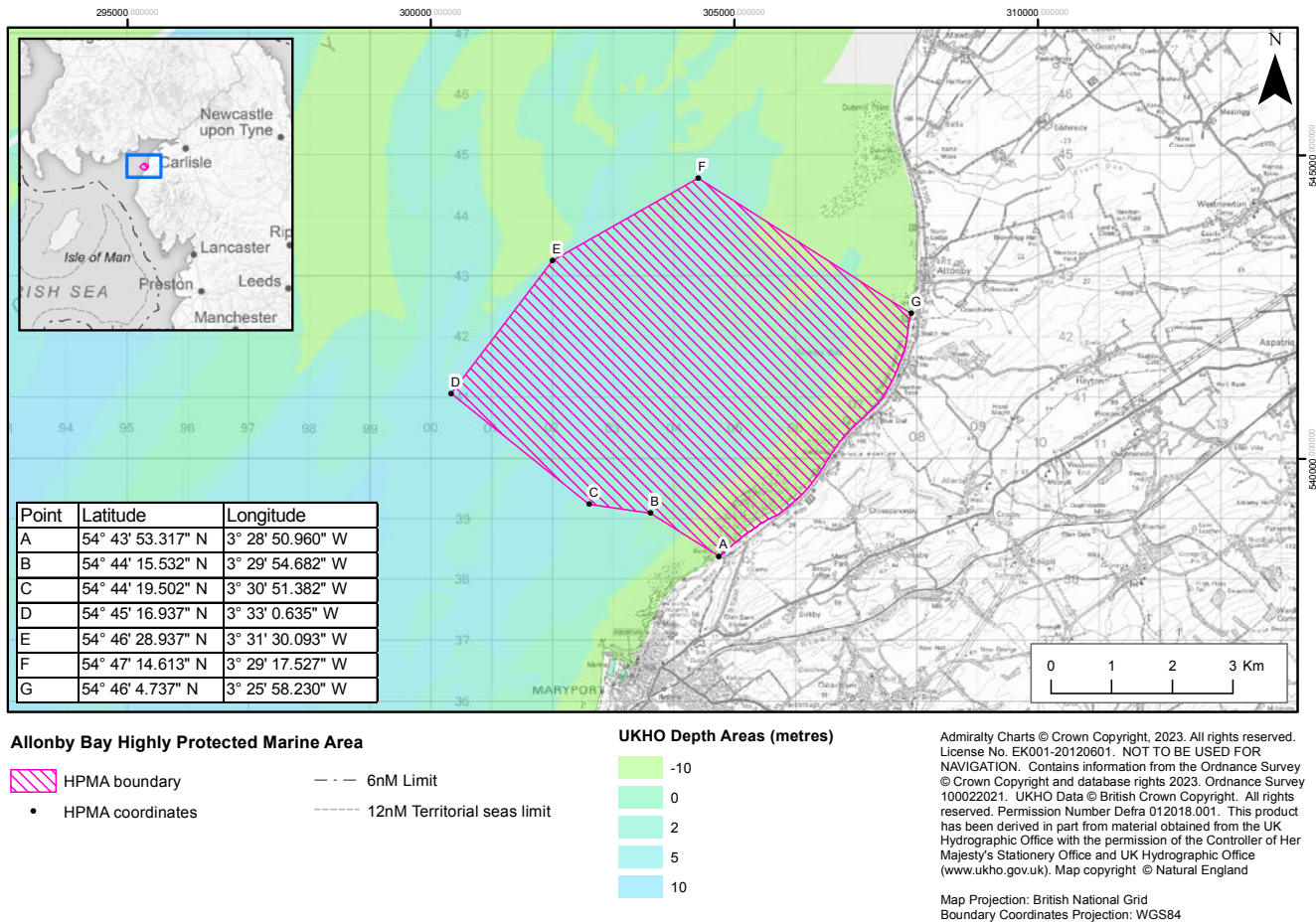
Another joint project between the IFCAs is the development of a new database to support our respective workstreams around permitting. Alongside Sussex IFCA, NWIFCA has been one of the frontrunners in the development and procurement of this new system, and in the previous year, officers spent a good deal of time working with the database's developers to ensure it was fit for purpose for the Authority. The database is expected to go live in early 2024/25 and so we will be working to ensure its smooth implementation into our operational and administrative practices in order to maximise its benefits to our work; this will include training all staff on how to use it. As it is also an external-facing system, to be used by permit holders who submit statutory returns data, we will also provide appropriate guidance and training to those stakeholders and maintain ongoing support to them to ensure their effective, timely and compliant use of it.

Lead Officer: Head of Administration

Marine Environment

Allonby Bay HPMA

Back in June 2023, Defra designated the UK’s first two HPMAs, with the new Allonby Bay HPMA off the Cumbrian coast being the only inshore one, designated for its biodiverse subtidal and seabed habitats. Since then, we have been working closely with our strategic partners at the MMO and NE to develop an effective byelaw and monitoring regime respectively.



We are hoping that the MMO byelaw for the HPMA will be made within this reporting period, and thereafter, we will commence our compliance assurance and enforcement responsibilities towards it. In the meantime, we will continue our work publicising the HPMA, both through our communications work and via officers on the ground so that, when the byelaw is implemented, we have maximised awareness of the HPMA and the associated restrictions on activities therein. To support this, we will conduct at least six at sea patrols in the HPMA and at least ten shore-based patrols along its landward boundary.

In addition to delivering our statutory enforcement duties for the HPMA, we also want to continue working closely with NE to support them in delivering their own duties around monitoring the environmental impact of the HPMA. In 2023/24, we commenced discussions with our NE colleagues on providing resources to them, in the form of officers and vessels, to help them deliver their monitoring work. This year, we will finalise these agreements and look to have NE officers working alongside our own onboard North Western Protector, delivering a bespoke monitoring methodology within the HPMA which will hopefully help demonstrate the HPMA's positive ecological impacts.

Lead Officer: CEO

MPA EIAs

There are 21 MPAs across NWIFCA's district, with six Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), seven Special Protection Areas (SPAs), seven Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs) and one HPMA. These have come into being over many years of designation, and over the intervening years, we have prioritised assessment of fishing activities in specific MPAs to ensure they are compliant and minimise impacts on protected features, whether those are marine habitats or species. This process, known as an environmental impact assessment (EIA), is a statutory requirement for us to undertake. It involves significant data gathering, collation and analysis, which is then used to inform our technical assessments of the potential impacts fisheries activities might have on an MPA's protected features.

We have now conducted these assessments for the majority of our fisheries activities occurring within MPAs, but we still have some outstanding MPA fisheries to assess. In 2024/25, we will aim to carry out fisheries assessments on Cumbria Coast MCZ, Allonby Bay MCZ (the area not covered by the HPMA) and Solway Firth MCZ. Further assessments are required for Wyre and Lune MCZ, and Ribble MCZ. However, these sites still have outstanding NE conservation advice packages, and so they will be best placed for assessment once these are available. In addition, we will assess mussel fishing activity on the Foulney mussel beds in the Morecambe Bay and Duddon Estuary SPA and Morecambe Bay SAC.

Lead Officer: Head of Science

For SACs and SPAs, the specific EIA process is known as a habitats regulations assessment (HRA).

Fisheries

Cockle FMP

Last year, we began drafting our first district-specific fisheries management plan (FMP), which will focus on one of our largest and most economically significant fisheries, cockles. This year, we will finalise a draft Cockle FMP and consult on it with stakeholders, before bringing it to our members for agreement. Thereafter, we will start to look at implementing the FMP in time for our 2025/26 season.

The FMP will set out management principles for our cockle beds across the district, and will focus on things such as survey schedules, biomass and maturity assessments, thresholds for opening, appropriate use of total allowable catches, effort restrictions, economic conditions, cold weather closures and bird food modelling. Ultimately, it will provide a meaningful framework from which officers, members and stakeholders can work to understand how we will manage our cockle fisheries year-on-year and over the longer-term.

Lead Officer: Head of Science

Netting Byelaw

Last year, we began drafting our new byelaw to better regulate our static net fishing activities across the district and worked closely with members to develop its content. This byelaw will implement a flexible permit scheme for commercial and recreational fixed net users, whether operating from a vessel or shore-based. It will legitimise this important fishery and provide consistent regulation across the entire district, whilst enabling the Authority to react quickly to changing circumstances so as to better manage netting for the benefit of affected species, local communities and fishers themselves.

As we transitioned from 2023/24 into 2024/25, we had finished drafting the byelaw and had taken it out to consultation with stakeholders. Early this year, we hope to gain internal agreement with members on the byelaw's final content and then begin the formal quality assurance and implementation process with MMO and Defra. We would hope to have the byelaw implemented within this reporting period, but to some extent, this is dependent on external factors within MMO and Defra, and so this cannot be guaranteed.

Lead Officer: Head of Enforcement

Byelaw 1 – MCRS Byelaw

2023 saw the laying and making of our new byelaw setting out a minimum conservation reference size (MCRS) for specific species routinely caught and landed within the district; this byelaw is known as ‘Byelaw 1’. The remainder of the previous year focussed on issuing comms and guidance to stakeholders on this, and in 2024/25 we will move to full implementation of the byelaw, conducting compliance assurance checks on relevant commercial and recreational fishers to ensure species below their designated MCRS are not being landed, undertaking proportionate enforcement action where necessary.

Lead Officer: Head of Enforcement

Byelaw 3 – Cockles and Mussels Permit Byelaw

The byelaw establishing our permit regime for hand-gathering of cockles and mussels within the district is known as ‘Byelaw 3’. This byelaw entitles 150 fishers to hand gather cockles and mussels on relevant open beds throughout the district. It also creates a waiting list for individuals who wish to acquire a permit. Over previous years, this waiting list has grown as more and more individuals have asked to be placed on it. This means that individuals further down on the waiting list face the prospect of having to wait several years, or even decades, before they might receive a Byelaw 3 permit.

Last year, we decided to review this waiting list and condense it where possible. As such, we wrote out to all individuals on the waiting list, asking them to positively confirm that they wished to remain on it. In early 2024/25, we will review responses from this exercise and remove any individuals who confirmed they no longer wished to remain on the list, or who did not respond to us. We will then readvertise waiting list positions to the remaining individuals and communicate the results of this refresh exercise to our members.

Lead Officer: CEO

Byelaw 4 – Potting Permit Byelaw

In 2023/24, our Science Team conducted work to look at the size of maturity of whelks throughout the district. This work was undertaken to inform the ultimate MCRS for whelks as prescribed in Byelaw 4 and involved working with permit holders to collect samples for analysis. Further samples and analysis are needed in 2024/25 to determine the final MCRS that will be set under Byelaw 4; the default position is the MCRS will increase to 75mm in June this year and we need to collect evidence to support any MCRS that might be considered.

Lead Officer: Head of Science

Byelaw Strategy Review

The Authority has an existing strategy in place for how it plans to rationalise its suite of legacy byelaws and what new byelaws are needed in future years. This was drawn up a number of years ago now and needs a fundamental review in the context of current environmental, socio-economic and political circumstances. NWIFCA officers will work closely with members to review our Byelaw Strategy and ensure it is appropriate, both in terms of how it identifies the byelaws needed and how it holds the Authority to account on timeframes for their delivery. Upon review and agreement from members, we will publish this strategic document on our website, so that stakeholders can see and understand how the Authority will rationalise and modernise its suite of byelaws in the years to come. In addition, we will review our existing byelaws, in particular Byelaw 2 – North Wirral Foreshore Byelaw, which is due for statutory review before June 2025, as well as the flexible permit conditions derived from Byelaws 3 and 4.

Lead Officer: CEO

Communications

Stakeholder Engagement Events

Over the course of this twelve months, NWIFCA will be looking to proactively engage with its primary stakeholders by holding a series of events. Last year, face-to-face events open to anyone were held at several locations around the district but attendance was limited. This year, we will look to focus our engagement on specific stakeholder groups, namely fishers affected by our Byelaw 3 (i.e. cockle and mussel permit holders and waiting list members), Byelaw 4 (commercial potting vessel operators) and the new netting byelaw (any relevant commercial and recreational netters). We will communicate directly with these core groups, consult on the most appropriate means of future engagement and look to establish a recurrent regime of events whereby stakeholders' key issues can be discussed, concerns raised, and ideas shared.

We will hold at least three stakeholder engagement events over the course of 2024/25.

Lead Officer: CEO

Website and Social Media Strategy

This year we will look to refresh our website, reviewing its layout, accessibility, user experience, and content to ensure it is representative of the Authority's current priorities and is an engaging and useful resource for stakeholders and the wider public. As part of this review, we will consult with stakeholders on what they would like to see on our website.

We will also develop a social media strategy to ensure we are maximising the potential that platforms such as Facebook, X and LinkedIn provide us in terms of engaging with our stakeholders and the wider public.

Lead Officer: CEO

Governance

Risk Register

An organisational risk register will be drafted and submitted to members for approval. This will act as a means by which the Authority's CEO, its senior management team and members can be held accountable to the overall running of NWIFCA. The risk register will highlight key organisational risks, as well as opportunities, and set out a clear action plan for how such risks will be mitigated or opportunities leveraged.

A final version of this risk register will be published on our website by the end of the year.

Lead Officer: CEO



Staff

Performance and Development

This year we will look to introduce a formal system by which staff performance and development can be planned, monitored and evaluated. This will include the implementation of a formal performance management process, with personal objective setting for the beginning of the year and mid-year and end-of-year reviews for staff with their line managers. This will give the Authority a standardised and consistent basis from which to assess individual staff members' performance and help them better understand their roles and how they feed into the wider objectives of the Authority.

In addition to a formal performance management process, we will introduce development objectives for staff. This year's operating budget includes £25,000 for training and a clear set of development objectives focussed on the needs of individuals, teams and the Authority overall will help ensure this budget is spent and used appropriately. There will be specific training for all staff, or select groups, on the following:

- Advanced Enforcement training for our experienced IFCOs
- Bodycam training for all IFCOs
- Navigation training for all Enforcement and Science Team staff
- HRA training for our Science Officers

We will also be developing a clear induction policy and procedures for new starters joining the Authority. As 2024/25 begins, we do not hold any vacancies and so do not anticipate any immediate recruitment, which will mean that we can use this period to develop a more structured induction process for new starters joining the Authority in the future, making this bespoke for whether they are joining the Enforcement, Science or Administration Team.

Lead Officer: CEO

Policies and Procedures

A good deal of progress was made last year on our organisational policies and procedures, reviewing and updating those already in place and creating many new ones which were needed. This culminated with the publishing of our new Employee Handbook and new Employment Contracts at the end of 2023. This improved HR framework has provided a clearer picture of organisational benefits and expectations for staff and have helped breed consistency and fairness in how our staff are treated.

This year, further work is needed to improve the Employee Handbook as well as updating our operational policies and procedures around health, safety and wellbeing (HS&W). We will continue to run our internal Policy Working Group to develop new staff policies and review existing ones, working closely with our union UNISON to progress this. We will also conduct a wholesale review of our HS&W policies, ensuring they are fit for purpose, and as importantly, they are being understood and followed by staff, particularly when out on operational duties on the coast or at sea.

Lead Officer: CEO

Green Officer

As an environmental management organisation with regulatory responsibility for the marine environment, it is incumbent on NWIFCA to be cognisant of its environmental impact and put in place measures that mitigate negative impacts and maximise positive impacts, whilst ensuring we retain our operational capabilities.

As a first step towards improving our environmental credentials, we will nominate a Green Officer from within our staff cohort this year, who will act as a conduit between staff, senior management, and our stakeholders to identify and implement opportunities for improving our environmental credentials and reducing our carbon footprint.

In the first instance, this new Green Officer will work with the senior management team to develop a new environmental / sustainability policy for the Authority, which can then be iterated and expanded upon over the year and in future years to ensure we are continually reviewing the impact our activities, estates, vessels and vehicles might have and how we might change our practices for the benefit of the environment.

Lead Officer: CEO

IFCAs' Success Criteria

This section sets out the five national IFCA success criteria and how NWIFCA intends to deliver against these in 2024/25. In the tables below, we outline specific actions we will take this year to help us work towards or meet each success criterion.

To support the delivery of the national IFCA vision, IFCAs work to a set of success criteria matched with corresponding high-level objectives. The vision, success criteria and high-level objectives are designed to assist in the creation of a shared understanding of the collective aims and objectives of all ten IFCAs, and focus service delivery towards achievement of the national vision. These national IFCA performance criteria also link directly to the UK Marine Policy Statement.

The following five success criteria have been agreed and adopted nationally by all IFCAs:

1

Success Criterion 1: IFCAs are recognised and heard, balancing the economic needs of their fisheries whilst working in partnership and engaging with stakeholders.

IFCAs will be visible, respected, and trusted regulators within coastal communities and will maintain and deliver strategies to communicate their vision and duties effectively. IFCAs will engage with policy makers, industry, non-governmental organisations, recreational and commercial users and other regulators. They will work jointly and collaboratively with partner organisations across boundaries, participate in and contribute to the development and implementation of regional and national marine policy, including the marine planning regime, and take long-term strategic decisions and manage risks effectively. IFCAs may maintain a national body to coordinate the activities of authorities that are party to arrangements.

2

Success Criterion 2: IFCAs implement a fair, effective and proportionate enforcement regime.

The IFCA enforcement regime is risk-based, makes appropriate use of intelligence, meets legislative standards and complies with the Regulators Code. It should make effective use of the resources available to regulators, complement and align, if possible, with the regimes in adjacent IFCA districts and management by other organisations including the MMO and EA. Consistency and fairness are important, regulatory compliance is promoted, and enforcement action is carried out by trained, professional officers working to clear standards of conduct.

3

Success Criterion 3: IFCAs use evidence based and appropriate measures to manage the sustainable exploitation of sea fisheries resources and deliver marine environmental protection within their districts.

The IFCAs were created as statutory inshore regulators by MaCAA. They are relevant authorities for implementing international environmental commitments including the Birds, Habitats, Water and Marine Strategy Framework Directives and make an important contribution to securing a network of well-managed MPAs. FMPs identify local management measures which should be based on evidence, timely, subject to appropriate consultation and in step with national initiatives and priorities. IFCAs should balance the socio-economic benefits of exploiting sea fisheries resources with the need to protect the environment. They should make a contribution to sustainable development.

4

Success Criterion 4: IFCAs have appropriate governance in place and staff are trained and professional.

IFCAs are statutory authorities and sit within the local government family. Authority members may be either general members or local councillors. They comply with Codes of Conduct and the Standing Orders that apply to meetings of local government committees. General members are appointed on merit, through open competition and for a fixed term. They are subject to annual performance appraisals. IFCAs are funded by levy, charged to their member councils. Funding originates in local taxation. IFCAs are accountable for their use of public resources and should ensure that a proper auditing regime provides confidence in their commitments and spend of public money. They should make effective use of their resources, including staff and assets. IFCAs have a statutory obligation to prepare and publish Annual Plans and Annual Reports.

5

Success Criterion 5: IFCAs make the best use of evidence to deliver their objectives.

IFCAs are statutory regulators for their districts. Decision-making should be based on evidence. All IFCAs are supported by officers who pool their expertise and share best practice through a Technical Advisory Group (TAG). Programmes of research activity and monitoring are planned, developed, and updated in consultation with partners. These programmes inform management decisions and support justification for additional research and evidence gathering.

Success Criterion 1

IFCAs are recognised and heard, balancing the economic needs of the fishery whilst working in partnership and engaging with stakeholders.

| Indicator | Workstream Objective | Lead Officer(s) | Intended Outcome |
|---|--|---|------------------|
| SC1A: Maintain a database of stakeholder contacts that has been reviewed and updated. | Our stakeholder database will be reviewed and updated accordingly and will be integrated into the new (in development) permit and stakeholder database that will be finalised and implemented within this year. | CEO Head of Enforcement | Met |
| SC1B: Complete a review of our communication strategy and implementation plan. | A new communications strategy will be created, focusing on how we will leverage different communication methods and approaches for different purposes and towards different stakeholder groups. Our social media platforms will be reviewed and updated to ensure we are maximising our reach and impact across our stakeholders and the wider public. | CEO | Met |
| SC1C: Review our website monthly. | A new regime of regular website reviews will be implemented, to ensure it is up-to-date and reflects our current regulatory position. | CEO | Met |
| SC1D: Review our website and ensure it meets the objectives of our communications strategy. | The website will be restructured and modified to ensure it remains engaging to visitors and traffic is optimised. This will include the use of new, higher quality and more representative images and more interactive features. | | Met |
| SC1E: Review all our Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) and have a clear plan in place to update them where necessary. | All extant MoUs will be reviewed to ensure they are concurrent and fit-for-purpose. New MoUs will be drafted collaboratively and will ensure that NWIFCA can leverage partner organisations' expertise and assets, provide our expertise and assets appropriately whilst not impinging on our ability to deliver our statutory objectives. | CEO Head of Enforcement Head of Science | Met |
| SC1F: Participate appropriately, proportionately and at the right level of delegation in regional and national fisheries and conservation activity. | Participation in regional and national forums will be reviewed and new opportunities for further participation identified. We will continue to participate in, and contribute towards, the MMO's Regional Fisheries Group for the North West. We will continue to contribute to the development of wider IFCA policies and procedures via the IFCAs' Chief Officer Group, National Inshore Marine Enforcement Group (NIMEG) and TAG. We will continue to contribute to the development of national marine and fisheries policy via Defra's Marine and Fisheries Chief Officer Group. We will continue to act as the primary technical advisor to the Association of IFCA (AIFCA) in the development and implementation of Defra's national Cockle FMP. | CEO Head of Enforcement Head of Science | Met |

Success Criterion 2

IFCAs implement a fair, effective and proportionate enforcement regime.

| Indicator | Workstream Objective | Lead Officer(s) | Intended Outcome |
|---|--|---|------------------|
| SC2A: Ensure our enforcement risk register and strategy are published and available on our website. | <p>Our Compliance and Enforcement Strategy was originally drafted in 2012 and, whilst it has been intermittently updated, is in need of a wholesale review. This review will be conducted this year, and any significant proposed changes will be brought to the committee and, where appropriate, consulted on with our stakeholders.</p> <p>We do not currently have an enforcement risk register or similar. This will be created this year.</p> <p>Our vessel and survey plans will be reviewed and updated accordingly.</p> | Head of Enforcement | Met |
| SC2B: Work with other regulators to achieve consistent quality, application, and enforcement of management measures. | This year, NWIFCA will continue to foster our relationships with partner organisations, in particular MMO, NE and EA. Wherever possible, new opportunities for partnership working with other regulators and non-regulatory organisations will be sought to help support our work. | CEO Head of Enforcement Head of Science | Met |
| SC2C: Compile records of enforcement activity in a standard format, provide them to NIMEG and publish on our website. | <p>We need to improve the timeliness within which we record our inspection and enforcement activity, to ensure records are available to our partner organisations (namely MMO) and publicly to our stakeholders. Inspection and enforcement records will be uploaded on the national system within one week of the activity / action taking place, and onto our website within one month.</p> <p>We will continue to supply enforcement statistics to NIMEG to support the IFCAs' national enforcement work.</p> | Head of Enforcement Head of Administration | Working towards |
| SC2D: Adopt the national code of conduct for IFCOs, review annually and publish on website. | We will review our current code of conduct for IFCOs to ensure it is up-to-date and relevant and, once this is complete, publish it on our website, as it currently is not on there. | Head of Enforcement | Met |
| SC2E: The code of conduct for IFCOs is reflected in work objectives and annual appraisals for all warranted officers. | Following the review of the code of conduct, IFCOs will be trained on this and reference to it will be made in all IFCOs' future work objectives and performance appraisals. | Head of Enforcement | Working towards |

| Indicator | Workstream Objective | Lead Officer(s) | Intended Outcome |
|---|--|--|------------------------|
| <p>SC2F: Warranted officers attain accreditation and all officers undertake continued professional development (CPD).</p> | <p>Our continued participation in the MMO-led marine enforcement officer accreditation scheme will be reviewed. Progress with officers working towards accreditation has been limited due to various factors, internal and external. We will review the value accreditation affords us and decide a way forward.</p> <p>A culture of CPD will be developed to support all staff with developing and expanding their skillsets. A training budget of £25,000 has been allocated for 24/25 and this will be utilised proportionally across the Authority to ensure all staff have access to appropriate CPD opportunities.</p> <p>Our training matrix will be reviewed and updated, with a new focus on all staff, not just IFCOs. We will formalise our training routes towards becoming seagoing officers, helming RIBs, operating drones etc. so that all staff, in particular new starters understand the training expectations on them, and opportunities afforded to them.</p> <p>We will continue to contribute towards the national IFCA training programme, primarily through our Heads of Enforcement and Science. Mandatory training for all IFCOs will be delivered to nationally agreed standards. We will look to contribute towards the improvement of a formalised training programme for IFCA Science Officers.</p> | <p>CEO</p> <p>Head of Enforcement</p> <p>Head of Science</p> <p>Head of Administration</p> | <p>Working towards</p> |



Success Criterion 3

IFCAs use evidence based and appropriate measures to manage the sustainable exploitation of sea fisheries resources and deliver marine environmental protection within their districts.

| Indicator | Workstream Objective | Lead Officer(s) | Intended Outcome |
|--|---|--|------------------|
| SC3A: Record site-specific management considerations for MPAs and report progress to the Authority's committee. | <p>Our MPA Monitoring and Control Plan will be reviewed and updated as necessary.</p> <p>Outstanding HRAs for lower priority MPAs will be conducted and submitted to NE for approval.</p> <p>HRAs for new fisheries will be completed and submitted to NE for assessment within two weeks of a decision to open a fishery being made.</p> <p>To support our work around HRAs, our Science Officers will receive external, specialist technical training on HRAs.</p> | Head of Science | Working towards |
| SC3B: Data analysis and evidence supporting new management measures will be published on our website. | <p>Data and evidence used in impact assessments, HRAs etc. will continue to be published on our website.</p> <p>Stakeholders will be consulted where appropriate on data and evidence collection methodologies and interpretation, and on any suggested management measures.</p> | Head of Science | Met |
| SC3C: Management information (e.g. sampling and / or survey results) will be collected periodically after new management measures have been implemented, to demonstrate the effectiveness of the intervention. | <p>Our Science Team will continue to monitor the impacts of new management measures and report these to our Technical, Scientific and Byelaws Sub-Committee (TSB) and full committee as appropriate.</p> <p>Post-implementation surveys will be schedules and delivered, working with partner organisations where appropriate. Results will demonstrate degree of effectiveness of new measures and inform ongoing fisheries management. They will be reported to the committee and on our website.</p> <p>Inspection and enforcement data will be analysed to provide additional information towards assessment of the effectiveness of new management measures.</p> | Head of Science Head of Enforcement | Working towards |
| SC3D: Develop a range of criteria-based management options that are explained to stakeholders through the website. | New management measures will be developed after assessment of options against criteria which define objectives. | Head of Science Head of Enforcement | Working towards |
| SC3E: New management measures selected for development and implementation will be delivered within agreed timescales. | We will seek to define timescales alongside the decision to affirm any new management measures and communicate these timescales to affected stakeholders and on our website, so that they can understand when such measures are likely to be implemented. | CEO Head of Science | Met |
| SC3F: Include shared agreed objectives and actions from FMPs in its own Annual Plan. | At the beginning of 24/25, no FMPs have yet been implemented. If any FMPs are implemented during this year, we will review them and incorporate relevant measures or considerations into our own management measures. | CEO Head of Science | Met |
| SC3G: Progress made in relevant FMP areas, including Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY) commitments, will be noted in the Annual Report. | <p>We will continue to act as the primary technical advisor to AIFCA in the development and implementation of Defra's national Cockle FMP.</p> <p>We will continue to develop, finalise and implement our internal Cockle FMP this year.</p> | CEO Head of Science | Met |

Success Criterion 4

IFCAs have appropriate governance in place and staff are trained and professional.

| Indicator | Workstream Objective | Lead Officer(s) | Intended Outcome |
|--|--|-------------------------------|------------------|
| SC4A: Publish an Annual Plan on our website setting out the main objectives and priorities for the next financial year; a copy will be sent to the Secretary of State (SoS). | This Annual Plan will be agreed by our committee, published on our website and sent to the SoS by the end of March 2024. | CEO | Met |
| SC4B: Publish an Annual Report on our website describing activities and performance, and a summary of audited financial information; a copy will be sent to the SoS. | Our Annual Report for 2024/25 will be drafted, agreed with our committee and published on our website and sent to the SoS by the end of November 2025. | CEO | Met |
| SC4C: All staff will have annual performance management plans in place and receive annual appraisals. | <p>A standardised performance management process for all staff will be implemented. A new performance management plan form for each staff member will be created and will be the basis against which performance is appraised. A new appraisal form will be created. Staff will receive a six-month appraisal, no earlier than 1st October and no later than 15th November 2024 and will receive a final appraisal for the year no earlier than 1st April and no later than 15th May 2025.</p> <p>All staff will receive in-house training on the new performance management process, with line managers receiving additional training on the objective setting and appraisal processes.</p> | CEO Head of Administration | Working towards |
| SC4D: An efficient secretariat of staff support Authority meetings which are held quarterly and are quorate. Meeting documentation will meeting standing orders. | <p>With the previous year's organisational restructuring, secretariat duties for Authority meetings will be reallocated this year. Head of Administration will continue to act as clerk for our Finance and Personnel Sub-Committee (F&P), whilst all clerking duties for our full committee and TSB meetings will be gradually transferred over to our Administration Officers over the course of the year.</p> <p>Papers for meetings will be sent to members at least one week prior to the meeting, and draft minutes will be sent out within six weeks.</p> <p>All relevant Authority meeting dates, papers and minutes will be published on our website.</p> | Head of Administration | Met |
| SC4E: Through the Annual Report, demonstrate how marine, land and water management mechanisms in the district have worked responsively and effectively together. | The 2024/25 Annual Report will include for the first time an assessment of how our marine management measures have interacted with associated land and water management. We will work closely with relevant partner organisations (e.g. MMO, NE and EA) to help demonstrate this. | CEO Head of Science | Working towards |

Success Criterion 5

IFCAs make the best use of evidence to deliver their objectives.

| Indicator | Workstream Objective | Lead Officer(s) | Intended Outcome |
|---|---|------------------------|------------------|
| SC5A: Demonstrate progress towards identifying our evidence needs by publishing a research plan. | A separate research plan for 2024/25 will be produced and published on our website. | Head of Science | Working towards |
| SC5B: Publish a research report that demonstrates how evidence has supported decision making. | A research report for 2024/25 will be published on our website by November 2025. | Head of Science | Met |
| SC5C: Contribution towards TAG and national evidence needs will be recorded in our Annual Report. | Our Science Team will continue to contribute towards TAG and relevant actions and outcomes will be recorded in the Annual Report for this year. | CEO Head of Science | Met |







**North Western Inshore Fisheries
and Conservation Authority**

**1 Preston Street
Carnforth
Lancashire
LA5 9BY**

**Tel: 01524 727970
Email: office@nw-ifca.gov.uk**

www.nw-ifca.gov.uk