

**MINUTES OF THE GENERAL COMMITTEE MEETING**  
**HELD AT DEFRA, LION HOUSE, ALNWICK**  
**ON MONDAY 22<sup>ND</sup> JULY 2019 AT 1PM**

**PRESENT: NIFCA Members:**

Mr L Weller (Chair), Mr F Armstrong (FA), Mrs E Cartie (EC), Mrs L Dunn (LD), Mr P Gray (PG), Mr D Herriott (DH), Mr S Lowe (SL), Mr G Renner-Thompson, Mr A B Ritchie (SR) and Dr C Scott (CS).

Also in attendance from NIFCA included Chief Executive Officer Mr M H Hardy (CEO), Chief IFCO Mr A B Browne (AB) and the NIFCA Administrative Officer Mrs E Stiles (ES).

**3.1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE, DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND CONFIRMATION OF CHAIR**

Apologies for absence were received from Mr B Burdis (BB), Ms W Pattison (WP), Mr M Kitching (MK), Mr I Thomas (IT), Mr G Roughead (GR), Mr J Stephenson (JS), Mr P Rippon (PR) and Mrs C Seymour (CSe).

SL declared a possible interest due to his work with the Northumberland River's Trust.

**3.2 DRAFT MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS QUARTERLY MEETING HELD ON 29 APRIL 2019 AND MATTERS ARISING THEREFROM**

These minutes were received by the meeting and accepted as an accurate record.

Matters arising:

The CEO noted that the annual audit took place on 30<sup>th</sup> May and passed with a "clean bill of health".

The CEO also explained that since JC's resignation last quarter, recruitment has been underway, and the job has been offered to and accepted by Paul Ridley who will start on 12<sup>th</sup> August. He noted that NIFCA has been 2 Officers short for some time now and the remaining IFCOs have done a fantastic job of covering the shortfall.

Regarding the case of 69 undersize lobsters, AB confirmed that both the skipper and owner were prosecuted, and on 19<sup>th</sup> July the North Tyneside Magistrates Court imposed financial penalties totalling £2,380 and £2,770 respectively. The CEO commented that this is a good result in terms of the message it sends regarding undersize and berried lobsters, which will be publicised by NIFCA and sent to local media to raise awareness about the importance of compliance with fisheries regulations.

**3.3 MEETINGS ATTENDED THROUGHOUT THE QUARTER**

This report was received and accepted by the meeting.

**3.4 CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT ON FIRST QUARTER OF NIFCA 2019-20**

This report was received with thanks. The CEO noted that the Naming Ceremony for the new NIFCA cabin RIB "Robert Arckless MBE" will take place on Thursday; he

commented that this is an excellent piece of kit and will enhance the capability of our IFCOs throughout the district.

The CEO reported that the Berwick to St Mary's MCZ designation was announced during this quarter, highlighting the need to for education regarding the impact on and protection of the eider duck. He added that local MP, Anne-Marie Trevelyan has also raised concerns in Parliament regarding the protection of puffins and it is hoped that he, the Chair and Vice Chair can meet with her in the next quarter to discuss the IFCA remit.

The CEO confirmed that the Annual Report will be written during the next quarter. Consultations are also planned to commence in the period following this meeting. He then gave thanks again to the Officers for their hard work in the last quarter for working "above and beyond" to ensure the required work has been done and especially with regards to the University's MSFD project. This was seconded by the Chair who noted that the Authority is greatly appreciative of all of the work being carried out by Officers, particularly at a time when there have been fewer numbers than usual.

### **3.5 MCZ REPORT**

The CEO suggested that this item is combined with item 3.6 (byelaw review) to aid the discussion regarding upcoming consultations. This was agreed by the members.

The CEO referred to the papers for both agenda items and the new method of consultation which has been researched and designed by the team, which is exciting for NIFCA, making consultations more interactive and far reaching to the community than we have previously achieved. He confirmed that there are two areas for consultation: Coquet to St Marys' MCZ management and the 2019 Byelaw Review. The CEO outlined the plan for each of these consultations as follows: -

Coquet to St Marys MCZ:

- Complete prohibition of dredging in the MCZ (as previously agreed by the Committee)
- Regarding a requirement for light gear re. trawling as also previously agreed by the Committee, this could be best dealt with by granting a permit for mobile gear based on track record and "Grandfather rights"
- Monitoring and control plans will continue, including the mud area in the north east of the MCZ, as previously outlined to the Committee and confirmed in the paper for this meeting.

Byelaw Review:

Dredging:

- Prohibition of dredging in the 0-3nm of the district
- OR consider prohibition of dredging in whole district (although Officers are less keen on this)

Trawling:

- Introduce a permit to trawl in the 3-6nm of the district (as well as the 0-3nm area)

The CEO confirmed that he would like to move to consultation as soon as possible. He noted that there are some small gaps in the byelaws which also need to be fixed during

the byelaw review, including our ability to alter the cost of permits, which can be considered further at the October Quarterly Meeting.

The Chair noted that a dredge prohibition in the whole of the district is less favoured by Officers than a prohibition in the 0-3 nm and asked NW if there was an evidential basis for this. NW confirmed that there is some research which has been done in other areas about such a ban but ideally, more research would be carried out locally before making this decision. She confirmed that this can be done but it will take time and resource.

The Chair queried how such a ban would be received by the industry; he noted that there have been some complaints by local potters of gear conflict between themselves and dredgers recently and he commented that a ban would probably be well received by the potters. He asked SR, DH and FA how they believe a complete ban on dredging in the whole of the district would be received by the industry and all three members agreed that the response from local fishers would likely be favourable.

The Chair then asked if there were any further comments and if what had been outlined was agreed by the Committee to proceed to consultation and that was confirmed without any member dissent.

### **3.6 BYELAW REVIEW 2019 UPDATE**

As discussed above at 3.5.

### **3.7 REPORT ON PROGRESS OF PROJECTS DURING THE FIRST QUARTER OF 2019-20 INCLUDING A PAPER ON PROJECTS WITH NEWCASTLE UNIVERSITY**

The CEO confirmed that the report to the last quarterly meeting still holds strong in this quarter, noting the continuation of the University's MSFD project. NW confirmed that this includes taking mud samples in areas of high, medium and low fishing activity to analyse the impact. CSc added that this project is also looking into the impact of different types of fishing activity including potting and mobile gear; she noted that this is an excellent way to get on the ground evidence which will be an excellent support when deciding upon management.

In response to a query from the Chair, the CEO confirmed that the HPMAs (Highly Protected Marine Areas) review is being led by Richard Benyon, MP who it is understood will be holding meetings with different IFCA's as part of the process to establish 5 areas nationally where this designation can be introduced; he added that this could lead to certain fishing areas being closed. The Chair commented that he could imagine Northumberland being one of these areas, but this has not yet been established.

The CEO confirmed that the periwinkle project is underway and samples are being gathered from wholesalers. He also noted for the meeting that the Authority are considering the introduction of a code of conduct for hand gathering. The Chair asked if there is a legal definition regarding periwinkles which allow people to collect and sell without a permit which is different to the definition for general hand gathering? NW confirmed that this is something which the Environmental team will research.

Regarding Blyth Harbour consultation, NW confirmed that the consultation area is only a few hundred metres away from the mussel bed and there is concern that deepening the area by dredging may increase the risk of sediment smothering the mussels. Following the Authority's response, the Harbour have confirmed that they will be putting

down beds to prevent this. The Chair gave his thanks to the Environmental team for their attention on this matter.

At this point, NP joined the meeting.

NP confirmed that no MSc students are taking up projects within the NIFCA district this year, but noted that if anyone has any particular projects they would like to see carried out in the district to please let him know and this can be discussed as a potential student study.

### **3.8 RECREATIONAL ACTIVITY**

AB confirmed that there are around 170 recreational permit holders at the moment all of which have been issued with escape gaps this year. He confirmed that divers are starting to become more active in the district, as is usual at this time of the year, and noted that Officers are carrying out more inspections in the evenings and at weekends to accommodate this additional activity. AB noted that anglers are now entering the mackerel season and added that the ANLRS bins are now being placed and used throughout the district. Finally, AB confirmed that there is more activity from shore gatherers, noting that Officers are carrying out more inspections and issuing warnings where necessary.

The Chair asked if there had been an improvement regarding dog walkers and other recreational activity in Long-Nanny, to which GRT said that he has not heard much back about this. NW explained that NIFCA still has a good relationship with the wardens there who have confirmed that they have already had some nesting terns at the site. She explained that wardens are staying overnight at the site and the nesting area has been cordoned off to support reduced disruption, although the area is still being disturbed somewhat by jet skis on the beach. GRT confirmed that jet-ski disturbance has been noted by the AONB who are looking into this. SL commented that he feels that the jet-skis will have an impact and noted that it is also particularly bad at Blyth; he believes the issue is being caused by part-time/one-off users of jet-skis rather than those who do it regularly as a sport or hobby.

### **3.9 RISK MATRIX**

The CEO confirmed that this is now on the website and in the back of the annual plan. He explained that the matrix is reviewed twice yearly by himself, AB, MS, ES and JuS with the last review carried out in March. He confirmed that a couple of risks were added, particularly regarding communications and social media, but none are considered to be a particularly high risk. This document will be next reviewed in September and if members have any questions or suggestions for alteration, please get in touch. The Chair commented that this is a very important piece of work and will be the first document we would turn to in a crisis; he gave his thanks for the work put into this.

### **3.10 EDF ENERGY V-NOTCHING PROPOSAL**

The Chair confirmed that the proposal seems to be more simplified and on the surface there seems to be good reason to support it, but noted he is still concerned about the potential conflict of interest which could arise from a publicly funded body taking money from a commercial company. DH noted from the report that “no other IFCA indicated that they would foresee any issue or inappropriateness with such a project” and said he felt the proposal should be accepted. The Chair explained that no other IFCA has accepted commercial funding before so we would be the first; he said that this is more

of a moral decision. EC asked if there was an indication from EDF how often we would be required to report to them on the project to which the CEO said that they will simply want a final report and that element of the project does not appear to be a big commitment. A Boon added that EDF have given such funding to other projects nationally and locally, including Lifeboats and the Tall-ships Festival.

The CEO noted that there has recently been some negative publicity regarding EDF at Hinkley point but added he does not feel that this should affect the NIFCA decision. The Chair questioned how the local fishers would feel about us doing this, to which A.Boon explained that while he has not discussed this project with them, some fishers he has worked with on the crab stock assessment project have indicated they would welcome v-notching being reintroduced in Northumberland. The CEO said that this question could be asked directly to the fishers if Members felt this to be beneficial, to which SR said that this would be essential. The Chair added that an informal conversation with local fishers would be the best approach rather than a formal consultation process.

EC asked if there is a deadline by which NIFCA have to respond; A Boon explained that EDF have indicated this funding is earmarked for NIFCA, but it would be beneficial to give our response to their offer soon. SL noted that the money appears to be coming directly from EDF rather than the Community Foundation to which A Boon explained that EDF have confirmed the funding is from a part of the Community Foundation but from a separate pot most likely accessed by Charities or the voluntary sector. SL commented that he is concerned that we may be preventing money going to such charitable and voluntary organisations and thus the local community; A Boon noted that EDF decided some time ago that they wanted to earmark some money for fisheries which is why they are now approaching NIFCA in this way. SL said that he worries that in accepting this funding, NIFCA may end up being seen to support a future EDF project further down the line which we have not strictly given our consent to support; our report could be presented in such a way which suggests NIFCA supports an EDF project. He explained that a similar incident occurred for NWT a few years ago where they were said to be supporting a scheme they had not agreed to simply by talking with a company. He said that NIFCA should be careful moving forward. EC commented that motivation for giving this funding appears to be down to gaining positive publicity rather than improving the local community.

The Chair asked if EDF give money to other public bodies? The CEO said that this query can be raised with EDF. NP explained that EDF have given funding to Newcastle University in the past. FA commented that he feels this is simply a “tick-box exercise for EDF” and if we accept the funding, they may take credit for a lot of the work carried out. NP asked if the £30,000 is a one-off payment or an annual fee to which A Boon confirmed we could accept a single £30,000 payment or 3 years of £10,000; this is to be decided by NIFCA. CSc said that there are many levels of complexity to this offer; she noted that there was discussion about potentially accepting the funding for another project and asked if this was considered by EDF. She also suggested that the way forward may be to make it a NIFCA/Newcastle University project instead.

The CEO summarised that the Authority can go back to EDF for further details about the areas concerning members and that feedback can be sought from the industry which was agreed and the Chair noted that this does not have to wait until the next meeting. DH reminded the CEO that JiS felt it was important to correctly communicate to the fishers that the project will involve male lobsters being bought from wholesalers to be v-notched and returned to the sea therefore more lobsters will actually be put into the sea.

The Chair asked if male lobsters tend to predate on other lobsters to which CSc explained that they do, but all lobsters do this and it is not disproportionately balanced towards males being more likely to do this. NW commented that fishers have indicated that female, egg-bearing lobsters are often more aggressive than males.

### **3.11 CORRESPONDENCE**

This report was received with thanks. The Chair noted item 2 regarding the Habitats restoration/creation project and asked if there was now funding available for this to which the CEO explained that this is not certain yet. SL commented that there needs to be more communication between different agencies and sharing of data. This project has been done before and it might be best to flag up now what information has already been gathered and discuss what should be done moving forward.

Regarding Lynemouth beach, LD confirmed that Councillor Sanderson is introducing a Coastal Protection Scheme for the site; the area is to undergo investigation to gather information about the feasibility of this project. SL noted that this is a good solution, although not necessarily the best but it is great news this is being done. He confirmed that this action is only being taken because people were active in raising awareness.

The Chair noted that there has been a drop in cod stocks in Northumberland. He was surprised to read that it has been suggested to reduce the limits of this catch as the codling minimum landing size is very small, questioning if cod reaches maturity by this size. NW commented that she believes the maturity size of cod is larger than the minimum landing size but noted that she will research this.

The Chair commented that the Environmental team are very busy at the moment and gave thanks for their efforts. He also gave thanks to the Northumberland Gazette for continuing to get the message regarding NIFCA out in the local news.

### **3.12 SUMMARY REPORTS OF WATCH AND FINANCE COMMITTEES BY CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

Finance: -

The CEO confirmed that the minutes, budget and financial figures were accepted by the meeting. Regarding staff matters, he noted that ML has settled into his new position very well and we have now successfully recruited Paul Ridley to join the team as the new IFCO/Engineer. The CEO confirmed that the precepts are now ready to be signed by the Chair and Vice Chair and to be sent off to their respective Councils and he noted that approval was given by the members to continue at the rate of chartering St Aidan to the University, as previously agreed, for their work on the MSFD project.

Watch: -

The CEO confirmed that the minutes of previous meetings were accepted; all of these minutes show the wide range and depth of work being carried out by NIFCA at the moment and the staff and Officers are commended for their work. He confirmed that the Sea Activity and Vessel reports were accepted with confirmation that both St Aidan and the new Cabin Rib are working well. The CEO confirmed that the Health and Safety and Infringement reports were accepted by the meeting, commenting that the "L'Ogien" Court case resulted in a £5,370 financial penalty and the "Endeavour" case resulted in a total amount of over £5,100 (split between the Skipper and Owner), both very good results for the Authority and district regarding our efforts to give protection in the long-term to stocks. Regarding membership matters, the CEO noted that members were

updated and including the potential loss of members in 2020 after 10-years' service, and an update was also given on the delay to the national Spending Review (SR19).

### **3.13 IFCO REPORTS**

#### **3.13.1 Chief IFCO Report**

This report was received by the meeting. AB confirmed that Officers have been conducting joint sea patrols with both the MMO and North Eastern IFCA this quarter. He explained that North Eastern IFCA were experiencing issues with their own vessel whilst in the middle of investigating an intel lead so asked for support. AB also noted that St Aidan came out of the water for its annual slipping which went well. He finally confirmed that we will be joined by 2 young people from the Sea Cadets/Girl Guides later this month for a week's work experience, working together with Trinity House, the Marine Management Organisation and Natural England.

The Chair explained that he has received some phone calls from commercial shellfish permit holders regarding scallopers in the district. He queried how much scallops are worth to which A Boon said that they are in the region of £1,000 per bag. AB confirmed that there has been some gear conflict recently between dredgers and potters; he explained that the majority of dredgers are keeping in touch by radio with the potters to avoid entanglement but there have been incidents where gear has been damaged which comes at a cost to the potters. The Chair asked why we are getting dredgers coming into the district from other areas to which PG explained that they are limited by the MMO to a set number of days in which they can fish in a single area (for example, 100 days in the English Channel) so they move around the country. AB also confirmed that North Eastern IFCA introduced a prohibition a few years ago so we are likely experiencing a displacement of effort into Northumberland.

At this point, SR left the meeting.

#### **3.13.2 Environmental Report**

The CEO gave thanks to the environmental team for improving the quality of this report. NW confirmed that the Coquet to St Mary's MCZ management is a big piece of work at the moment for the Environmental team, as is responding to consultations throughout the district. She confirmed that the majority of the Aln Estuary HRAs have now been completed and work continues on the Coquet to St Mary's assessments which includes 110 features which each need to be considered individually; hand gathering/bait digging assessments will follow. The CEO gave thanks to CSc for her invaluable support to the team regarding these assessments.

NW confirmed that the team is considering the situation regarding tyres in the River Aln. She noted that there is currently no commercial activity of this kind taking place in the Aln, but a disturbance to birds by fishing boats continues to be an issue.

#### **3.13.3 Maintenance Report**

The Chair gave thanks to MS who is doing an excellent job in covering this work in the absence of an engineer. He confirmed that MS has identified the need to service the vessel every 250 hours, opposed to every 500 hours as current. It

was also noted that a lot of work is now going into the preparation of Bravo 1 for sale. Regarding the new Cabin Rib naming ceremony on 25<sup>th</sup> July, the CEO confirmed that local media have been invited to a media day on 23<sup>rd</sup> July. He noted that everyone has now been sent their invitations and we look forward to welcoming everyone who is available to attend.

### **3.14 ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

#### **a) Date of next meeting 28 October 2019 at the Linskill Centre, North Shields**

This was noted by the meeting.

#### **b) Prize draw re. returned 2016 NIFCA pot tags**

The Chair confirmed that further to agreement by the members of the Authority last year, there will now be a prize draw to determine the winners of the 5 £100 fuel vouchers for those who returned their old 2016 pot tags. This was a suggestion by the Environmental team to try and encourage the responsible disposal of old tags and to reduce plastics from entering the sea. The Chair picked 5 tags from the “hat” and the following numbers were chosen: -

48 – Roger Stephenson  
88 – Ian Clowe  
89 – Tony Millin  
18 – Roy Elliott  
64 – John Wingfield

The CEO confirmed that each of the winners will be contacted shortly to claim their prize.

#### **c) Seafood Innovation Fund**

FA confirmed that there is currently funding available for the Seafood Innovation Fund. The ethos of this fund is to come up with creative and innovative ideas which could enhance and benefit the fishing community; anyone with an idea can apply to the fund with a detailed proposal of their idea. For more information, please contact FA.

There being no further business, the Chair closed the meeting at 15:15