

MINUTES OF THE GENERAL COMMITTEE MEETING
HELD AT THE LINSKILL CENTRE, NORTH SHIELDS
ON MONDAY 28TH OCTOBER 2019 AT 1PM

PRESENT: NIFCA Members:

Mr L Weller (Chair), Ms W Pattison (WP), Mr F Armstrong (FA), Mrs E Cartie (EC), Mrs L Dunn (LD), Mr D Herriott (DH), Dr M Kitching (MK), Mr S Lowe (SL), Mr P Rippon (PR), Mr A B Ritchie (SR), Mr G Roughead (GR), Mrs C Seymour (CSe), Dr C Scott (CSc), Mr J Stephenson (JiS) and Mr I Thomas (IT).

Visitors to the meeting were local fishers Mr M Bould (MB), Mr B Douglas (BD) and Mr K Henderson (KH). The meeting was also joined by Mr N Brodin (NB) from the Marine Nature Partnership, Mr G Howarth (GH) from EDF and Mr B O'Connell (BOC) from the Northumberland Gazette.

Also in attendance from NIFCA were the Chief Executive Officer Mr M H Hardy (CEO), Chief IFCO Mr A B Browne (AB), EIFCO Ms A Aitken, Research Assistant Mr A Boon (ABoon), IFCO/Engineer Mr P Ridley (PRid) and the NIFCA Administrative Officer Mrs E Stiles (ES).

3.1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies:

Apologies for absence were received from Mr B Burdis (BB), Mr P Gray (PG), Professor N Polunin (NP) and Mr G Renner-Thompson (GRT).

Declarations of Interest:

None given.

Welcome from the Chair:

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. He explained that AB is retiring with very best wishes in March 2020 and gave his sincere thanks to AB for everything he has done during his time with the Authority, commenting that he will be a huge miss to members and Officers alike.

The Chair noted that there have been a few changes in staff recently, with a couple of changes still to come in the near future. JG retired last quarter following a period of ill-health after 24 years with the Authority; he leaves with sincere thanks and every best wish for his future health and retirement. PRid has joined the team as the new IFCO/Engineer and has settled into the team very well. Natalie Wallace (NW) will be leaving the Authority next Wednesday to join the Environment Agency and every best wish for her future career goes with her from the membership; and finally, congratulations were extended to Admin Officer ES will be going on maternity leave for 12 months from February 2020. MH, ES and WP are undertaking recruitment for ES's temporary maternity cover with interviews taking place in the next couple of weeks.

3.2 MARINE NATURE PARTNERSHIP PRESENTATION BY NICK BRODIN

NB was welcomed to the meeting to give a presentation about the work of the Marine Nature Partnership (MNP), which was received with thanks. NB then invited the meeting to ask any questions they may have.

The Chair asked if there was any development regarding a new MCZ for puffins following queries from Anne-Marie Trevelyan, MP? NB explained that it is not on the cards at the moment as there is already an SPA designated for their protection, reflecting the significance of this area which is inhabited by the species in numbers of international importance. JiS noted the MCZ which was introduced to protect Eider ducks and commented that it is important to be aware of the high levels of predation of chicks by gulls and the focus of their protection not being solely upon fishing. This was agreed by NB who said there are several issues affecting their protection, including predation from other species as well as interaction and disturbance to their habitat. SR asked what action the MNP are planning to take about this to which NB confirmed that there are management plans in place for the species and their environment. SL explained that the AONB is reviewing their management plan and it is a concern that these different designations and protections interact effectively together; does supporting this to be achieved fall into the remit of the MNP? NB agreed and confirmed that this is something which the MNP work to achieve.

The Chair thanked NB for his attendance at the meeting and for his ongoing support to our Officers and team.

At this point, Mrs C Seymour (CSE) and Mr G Roughead (GR) joined the meeting.

3.3 EDF AND V-NOTCHING

GH from EDF was welcomed to the meeting. The Chair confirmed that some questions covering the key concerns of some members were sent to EDF prior to the meeting and GH is now able to answer some of these queries. For clarity of those in attendance, the Chair went through each question asked of EDF: -

What promotion of the project will be undertaken by EDF and will it be for sign off by NIFCA? GH explained that promotion of this project would be undertaken by EDF in partnership with NIFCA who would get a final decision on how their public appearance is used.

Has EDF given money to a public funded body in the past? GH explained that he does not believe it has.

What kind of report will be required from NIFCA and how frequently? GH explained that a progress report on the project would be excellent and quarterly or 6-monthly would be sufficient, depending on progress and availability for NIFCA.

Why is the offer regarding v-notching? GH explained that this was because managers had previously been approached by NIFCA asking for funding for the v-notching programme and with further research from EDF in the local area, it was considered to be a good opportunity for a project in Northumberland to enhance sustainability.

Where does the money come from and do NIFCA have to front the cost of the project before receiving the funding? GH explained that the funding will be given directly to NIFCA who will be able to use it to fund the project from the start. He added that the money comes from a separate pot which has been put on hold for use by NIFCA for a local project. SL noted that a Community Fund project leaves an obligation upon the organisation accepting it, but it seems this is not the same. He asked if there will be anything to prevent the Authority from sharing the data it collects and the Chair added to this, asking if the Authority would own the data? GH confirmed that this is not coming from the Community Fund and so no

obligations are upon NIFCA in this way. The data collected will be owned entirely by NIFCA and it will be down to their discretion how the data is then used and shared. AA explained that Officers would continue to collect data onboard local vessels alongside the lobster stock assessment and crab project.

There being no further questions from the Authority, the Chair opened questions to the meeting.

IT asked if the planned works at Druridge Bay were still going to be undertaken, to which GH explained that these works are currently on hold. SR asked if the project was to go ahead whether there would be any penalties for fishers who landed v-notched males?; the CEO confirmed that it is currently an offence to land any v-notched or mutilated lobster which would still be the case throughout the duration of this project. FA asked how NIFCA would measure the success of this project to which the CEO explained that the Authority would be putting stocks back into the sea after they had already been landed and sold so the measure would be how stocks continue to develop in the years following the project. MK asked if there is any current evidence that the stocks are imbalanced in favour of females to which ABoon confirmed that it is simply anecdotal evidence from local fishers. MB explained that due to the berried hen ban current local catch has changed in ratio of what is being caught; more females are being returned and so the ratio has become imbalanced in favour of more males being landed.

EC asked if the anticipated cost of this project includes that of Officer time? The CEO explained that the Officers are already carrying out projects onboard local fishing vessels and this project would supplement the work they are already doing. He added that if this project was accepted, an agreement would be drawn up between NIFCA and EDF regarding terms of the project including a timescale which can be up to 3-years, but this is again at the discretion of NIFCA.

The Chair noted that the Authority wrote to the industry about this to get their view and asked about the responses. The CEO explained that the Authority sent out 62 emails and 21 letters to shellfish permit holders (totalling 83) and received 5 responses. The CEO gave thanks to the fishers who responded to this questionnaire and also to those who have attended the Authority meeting today.

KH commented that he believes there are more windfarms to come from EDF in this area because there is a lot of monitoring taking place up and down the country; he feels that EDF has an ulterior motive and will be expecting support from NIFCA on future bids regarding windfarms in the district. GH explained that the Princess Royal does carry out bird surveys for EDF to check on the windfarm's impact on certain species and confirmed that EDF have no plans for future windfarms on this stretch of coast. The Chair asked KH if he felt that the project itself would be beneficial to which KH said that it is hard to say but overall, yes it could be beneficial to the stocks. MB explained however that to use scientific rationale to deal with the "unbalance of the population" seems rash and rushed. He noted that we currently have a very successful industry in Northumberland although some fishers have seen up to a 20% cut to their income following the berried hen ban. If NIFCA start to introduce v-notching to males, and others follow suit, the fishers are likely to eventually see another impact. MB noted that this money which is now being offered by EDF was initially sought for a very successful conservation project for v-notching females, which was of course stopped following the national ban. The Chair gave thanks to MB for his input and also confirmed that NIFCA has been firmly against the national ban on berried hens when this was consulted upon and did respond at the time.

SR commented that he objects to this proposal as it seems to be an unnecessary level of extra work for fishers. AA explained that the majority of responses from fishers were positive or advisory. Concerns included additional burden on fishers and some responses reflected on the difficult political climate at this point in time.

PR asked if the concern is regarding a publicly funded body taking money from a private organisation, could the project not be better managed through a third party, such as the MNP? NB said that he would have to check with his team which is overall funded by NCC. GR commented that he feels it is important to get to a final decision on this project today; this was agreed by WP. The Chair confirmed that GRT emailed NIFCA to say he believes the Authority should accept the money, noting that NCC accepts funding from private companies and he does not feel that the reputation of NIFCA and EDF would be linked if the project proceeded. The CEO added that NP also feels there will be no negative impact from EDF and NIFCA working together. SL explained that when NCC takes money from private companies, it is because they have a planning obligation, which NIFCA does not have.

The Chair asked if members wished to vote on this matter today; it was agreed by members to do so. The Chair held a vote on whether to accept the offer in principle, subject to a contract; 3 members voted in favour of accepting the project, 7 voted against. It was therefore agreed to decline the funding offer and the project.

The Chair thanked GH for his time at the meeting and for the offer from EDF and also thanked the members for their ongoing consideration of this project.

3.4 DRAFT MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS QUARTERLY MEETING HELD ON 22 JULY 2019 AND MATTERS ARISING THEREFROM.

These minutes were received by the meeting. Regarding "Trawling" on page 2 the Chair confirmed that the wording regarding "85% of the district" would be removed as it is factually inaccurate. Regarding "jet-skis" on page 4, SL requested the wording to be changed to "commented that he felt" so that it accurately reflects that his comment was an opinion and not a fact or statement.

With these amendments noted, the minutes were accepted as an accurate record of the meeting.

3.5 MEETINGS ATTENDED THROUGHOUT THE QUARTER

This report was received with thanks by the meeting. AA noted that the Authority is planning to start a Working Group with relevant organisations regarding tyres.

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

The CEO confirmed that following the departure of NW, A.Boon's position with NIFCA will become permanent. He also confirmed that the Annual Report has been produced and a final draft will be sent out to members for approval. As an additional section to the Annual Report, the CEO explained that a report regarding member attendance and their financial contribution in time was sent out to members for their approval. He confirmed that the idea is to signify a notional value and thereby a measure of the contribution made by members from the time they give to meetings and a figure of £45 per hour was given as a representative hourly cost.

The Chair commented that he is proud that NIFCA has 3 Officers going to the Advanced IFCO Training Course which will add value to our enforcement capabilities.

He also confirmed that he and the CEO will be presenting to the NCC Scrutiny Committee at the end of the week.

3.7 NIFCA CONSULTATIONS UPDATE

The CEO confirmed that NIFCA have undertaken a lot of consultations in the last quarter and gave his apologies to fishers if this has been a large burden on them. He confirmed that we have received responses from local fishers and reports have now been produced for the Coquet to St Mary's consultation which closed last month; reports for the recently closed consultations are still being written. The CEO confirmed that NIFCA have introduced a new method of consultation which is felt to be an improvement to previous methods but noted that meetings with stakeholders in the district have not been ruled out if they are requested of us. Consultation responses will be anonymised and placed into a report which will go on the NIFCA website. The CEO extended his thanks to the Environmental team for their work in doing this large piece of work.

The CEO confirmed that the Coquet to St Marys consultation received 20 responses of varying views; the trawl consultation received 7 responses and it appeared that some people believed the Authority planned to ban trawling in the district altogether, rather than to ban certain activity. MB explained that there were 4 consultations live at one time so there was a lot for fishers to do and tiredness may have been a contributing factor to the low numbers of responses received in the later released consultations, such as the v-notch project. The Chair asked what a small disc compound is compared to an otter trawl to which MB confirmed that it is a small disc which bounces along the ground and will enter the mud but not hard ground. MB added that he feels that the "grandfather rights" may be a little short sighted economically and perhaps a limitation of permits would be more appropriate; the Chair confirmed that these management details have not yet been finalised and if they are, byelaws are reviewed regularly and can be changed.

3.8 NIFCA EMERGENCY MCERS BYELAW UPDATE

The CEO confirmed that further to the revocation of the EU Regulation which was used to create the national SI regarding MCERS, NIFCA, along with the other east coast IFCA's, created an Emergency Byelaw which was agreed by the Committee in August. Since then, the involved IFCA's have consulted (on a non-statutory basis) on the byelaw each one made, with the aim to make this a permanent byelaw in each district in 2020. Doing this in conjunction with other IFCA's has been a good exercise in joint working and should result in less money being spent in advertising and staff resources. The CEO confirmed that the Authority is looking for approval from the members to move towards making this a permanent byelaw at the January 2020 quarterly meeting; this was agreed by the members.

At this point MB, BD and KH left the meeting.

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

This report was received by the meeting with thanks. The Chair noted that it is excellent to see the number of projects which have been carried out throughout the district. CSc agreed and confirmed that the EMFF funded MSFD project with the University has been a great joint working exercise which will be relevant to NIFCA in the future. Following the closure of the EMFF, the Chair asked if NIFCA will be able to apply to

the new Fisheries Fund to which CSc said she believes that public bodies cannot apply to this fund, but she has asked for clarification on this and will feedback.

3.10 RECREATIONAL ACTIVITY

Regarding periwinkles, the Chair noted the ongoing lack of a legal distinction between commercial and recreational use and asked if someone at this point in time would be able to collect periwinkles to sell them? AB said that he believes this would not be permissible. AA noted that more research will continue to be done in this area and confirmed that the University's periwinkle project in the SAC will be of use during this research.

IT asked if there are any ANLRS bins in Amble to which AA confirmed that there is one at the Hatchery but if it is felt it would be better located in the marina, it can be moved.

3.11 RISK MATRIX

The CEO confirmed that he, AB, MS, ES, JuS and NW met to carry out a review of the Risk Assessment Matrix last month. It was agreed at the Finance Committee that the matrix will be placed onto the website for members to view it and to feedback any comments. It was also confirmed by the CEO that a desk-top exercise regarding crisis management will be carried out in the coming months. The Chair gave thanks to the CEO and the rest of the team for their ongoing work in this important area.

3.12 CORRESPONDENCE

This report was received with thanks. Regarding item 7 about IFCA byelaws, the Chair noted that the MMO will no longer recommend to Defra draft IFCA byelaws which require fishers to submit catch return data; this is to try to avoid duplication following the introduction of the MMO's new catch return system. AA explained that this is a national issue with some IFCAs still awaiting a response from the MMO to draft byelaws containing conditions including the submission of catch returns.

The Chair asked if there is any further information regarding item 9; the CEO confirmed that this could possibly affect a future draft Fisheries Bill or even the Conservative Manifesto if it is felt to have some weight.

3.13 SUMMARY REPORTS OF FINANCE AND WATCH COMMITTEES BY CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Finance:

The CEO confirmed that the minutes were approved by the meeting and the Risk Assessment Matrix and Accounts were accepted with thanks. Regarding staff, the CEO confirmed that some staff movement is currently in hand with some changes taking place next year, as mentioned at item 3.1 (above). It was confirmed that the Budget Planning meeting is set to take place on Thursday 12th December at 10am at the NIFCA office in Blyth which will be followed by the Technical and Scientific and HR subcommittee meeting.

The CEO confirmed that the Annual report was noted by the Finance Committee and the final version will be sent out to all members shortly for their approval.

Watch:

The CEO confirmed that the minutes were approved by the meeting. The Chief IFCOs Sea Activity and Vessel/Vehicles reports were accepted as was the Health and Safety

Report. Regarding Infringements, the CEO confirmed that the Authority closed two cases in the last quarter and are now processing a number of pending cases, either for Court or for FAP; the number of pending cases clearly demonstrates the effectiveness of the Authority's intel procedure.

It was confirmed by the CEO that it is hoped that the MMO may extend the memberships of current "cliff-edge members", but this is an ongoing matter yet to be agreed by the MMO. The CEO also confirmed that an update from AB regarding iVMS was received, noting that there is a possibility of using an app on a smart-device to track vessel movements, but the discussion on this remains ongoing.

The Chair gave thanks for those reports and to the members for their ongoing support of NIFCA.

3.14 OFFICERS REPORTS

3.14.1 Chief IFCO Report

This report was received by the meeting. AB confirmed that WP and LD went out on the 'Robert Arckless MBE' last quarter to learn more about the work of our Officers whilst out on patrol. WP commented that this was a fantastic trip which opened her eyes to the commitment and bravery of fishers going out on the water.

3.14.2 Environmental IFCOs Report

This report was received by the meeting. The Chair noted that there has been an increase in the number of pots being used in the district and wondered if this may have something to do with the closure of the salmon fishery. SL explained that he recently saw a presentation by the Environment Agency regarding T and J nets that was very informative and noted that it may be worthwhile for the Committee to also receive this presentation; this was noted by the CEO.

The Chair noted the reduced numbers of pollock being caught in the district; IT commented that this used to be a highly exploited commercial fishery which may have fed into the decline in numbers seen in this area in recent years.

3.14.3 Maintenance Report and Engineering Log

This report was received by the members with thanks. The Chair noted on page 2 the comments regarding the readings from the gear boxes and asked if we are likely to see an issue in the future to which PRid explained the readings are consistent and indicate no problems.

3.15 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The next quarterly meeting of the Authority will take place on Monday 27th January 2020 at the NIFCA office in Blyth.

There being no further business, the Chair closed the meeting at 15:55.