

DRAFT MINUTES OF THE GENERAL COMMITTEE MEETING
HELD BY MICROSOFT TEAMS ON MONDAY 26TH
OCTOBER 2020 AT 2PM

PRESENT: NIFCA Members:

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

The meeting was also joined by Bex Lynam (The Wildlife Trusts), Mr N Brodin (MNP), 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 M Southerton (MS), Lead IFCO Alex Aitken (AA), Senior IFCO Mr A Boon (AB), Environmental IFCO Beth Harvey and the NIFCA Administrative Officer Miss K Smart (KS).

3.1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies:

Apologies for absence were received from Mr P Gray (PG), and Mr G Roughead (GR).

Declarations of Interest:

A declaration of interest was received from SL for working under the Northumberland Rivers Trust on several projects across Northumberland including private estates and as the co-ordinator for the Northumberland Catchment Partnership which may bring him into areas of common interest.

Welcome from the Chair:

The Chair welcomed everyone to the guests joining the public meeting.

3.2 DRAFT MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS QUARTERLY MEETING HELD ON 27 JULY 2020 AND MATTERS ARISING THEREFROM.

These minutes were accepted as an accurate record of the meeting.

Regarding the Quarterly Meeting Papers (p42/ 3.6) the CEO explained the package of information to the MMO and Defra had not been sent but the Authority anticipate the package will be sent in the next week, following the making of the byelaw at the last Quarterly Meeting and the Statutory Consultation which has taken place in the meantime. The CEO confirmed there will be a further report at the next Quarterly Meeting.

The CEO confirmed with the meeting attendees that the Authority have implemented the new Authority Vehicle Scheme for officers to use the Authority vehicles rather than their own. The CEO added the Authority is awaiting one of the new vehicles, but staff are using the Ford Ranger for the interim.

The CEO explained the Minimum Conservation Reference Size Byelaw was extended by Defra beyond the initial 12 months and the Authority expects the byelaw to be made permanent before February 2021 (must be within 6 month of the extension).

The CEO welcomed BH to NIFCA who joined the office in August as an Environmental IFCO and is settling in very well.

3.3 MEETINGS ATTENDED THROUGHOUT THE QUARTER

The Chair noted the list of meetings and asked if there were any questions and there were none.

3.4 CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT ON SECOND QUARTER OF NIFCA 2020-21

The CEO explained two errors were to be noted in the report 'with equities for the three defendants' should read 'with acquittals for the three defendants' and the Brexit Report is said to be in the Epitome but it was in the Watch Meeting Papers. Chair thanked the CEO for his report.

3.5 NEWCASTLE UNIVERSITY PROJECTS

The CEO noted that AA wrote the project report on this occasion. AA said the report was adapted from the July Quarterly Meeting with a few updates on the project timescales. The CEO thanked AA for the report.

3.6 BYELAW UPDATE INCLUDING MAKING NEW NIFCA BYELAW 2 RE DREDGING

The CEO explained the new byelaw 2 was scheduled to be made at the general meeting today but recently NIFCA received a letter from the Anglo-Scottish Fishermen's Association raising an objection to the byelaw changes and proposed alternative byelaw changes. Since then, NIFCA have received two more objections. NIFCA officers have not had an opportunity to look at the objections in detail to make recommendation. The CEO suggested two options: 1) NIFCA discount the objections put forward and proceed to make the byelaw as planned or 2) delay the byelaw submission to allow time to consider the objections. If the byelaw was made, statutory consultation would cost approximately £5,000 on advertising with an increased risk (due to the recent objections) that the byelaw would not be approved in its current form. If the byelaw was deferred, the position could be considered further and there was no reasonable prospect of it causing harm to the fisheries or environment (no dredging activity was taking place in the NIFCA district). The CEO noted that although the objections came in late, it was a deadline set by NIFCA and not a legal requirement. The CEO explained this was put to the Watch Committee earlier today and there were no objections for NIFCA to postpone the byelaw submission until January 2021. The Chair gave his support for the byelaw to be postponed until the next Quarterly Meeting.

NP asked the Chair for further information on the byelaw objections and to confirm there was no evidence of dredging in the district. The Chair confirmed there was no dredging activity in the district this year. The CEO said the objections received were similar and had suggested the 0-3nm would remain, 3-6nm would not be prohibited and there would be a reduction in the number of dredgers in the district.

BL asked the Chair if NIFCA would consider partial closures within the 3-6 nm area rather than prohibition of all or no area of the district. The Chair replied that all options would be considered, included seasonal closures, and asked BL to get in touch with any other considerations.

A vote was taken, and members unanimously approved to investigate the objections further.

3.7 RECREATIONAL ACTIVITY

MS said it had been a busy summer with increased recreational activity. The increased activity was possibly due to people being furloughed and/or the public had taken holidays in the UK rather than abroad. The CEO added that the Authority had increased attention where the recreational activity interacted with the Authority remit, and a report will be available at the next Technical & Scientific Meeting. The CEO acknowledged this was a developing area where intertidal activity needed to be addressed.

CSc questioned if there would be a method to quantify the increased activity based on historical data. MS answered, it could be seen in the Authority's enforcement outputs but it has been difficult checking individuals earlier in the quarter due to social distancing restrictions with some activity recorded from observational patrols. The reported outputs are categorised by activity: hand gathering, bait digging, cleeking, recreational permit fishing, angling from shore and boat. CSc noted the importance of thinking about the whole suite of activities and not just recreational fishing activities, including the footprint of such activities and future issues that may need consideration. CSc commented that quantitative data would be useful when thinking about the management and pressure along the Northumberland coast. The Chair agreed it was an important point and MS will investigate this further.

SL agreed with CSc and noted data collection for all activity could be difficult. For example, night activity is not captured within the data set. SL suggested activity could be looked at in terms of disturbance levels and questioned if the resources are available to complete data collection. SL confirmed he was in favour with CSc but acknowledged it will be difficult to produce.

WP highlighted the Coastal Summit led by the Northumberland County Council is on the 11th November at 5 pm, and available to the public to watch via YouTube.

3.8 RISK ASSESSMENT

The CEO noted there was nothing to add to the risk assessment and no questions were raised.

3.9 CORRESPONDENCE

Regarding item 7 Conservation of Seals Act 1970, the CEO noted since writing the brief, Fisheries Minister Victoria Prentis answered a parliamentary question earlier this month where she said the government have tabled amendments to the Fisheries Bill that would make it illegal to kill seals intentionally or recklessly, therefore removing the 'netsman's defence'.

The Chair noted item 11 spear fishing seems to be increasing over the last 6 months and is an area NIFCA is monitoring.

Regarding item 8, SL asked who gave notice to the Authority of restoration map development because the MMO and EA have produced something similar which may be of use. The CEO confirmed the Authority will check who sent the notification and be in touch with SL.

3.10 SUMMARY REPORTS OF WATCH AND FINANCE COMMITTEES BY CEO

Finance:

The CEO confirmed that the previous finance meeting minutes were approved without amendment and the Risk Assessment was noted. The Accounts and Budget Report of the last quarter were prepared by JS and accepted with thanks. Regarding the Covid-19 Report, the CEO confirmed all staff to date have remained well and that is partly due to adopting clear and strong policies which the staff have adhered to. The CEO noted a high level of service has and will be maintained whilst restrictions remain in place

Watch:

The CEO confirmed that the previous watch meeting minutes were noted and approved while the technical and scientific meeting minutes were deferred to the next technical and scientific meeting in December. The Chief IFCOs Patrol Vessel Sea Activity and Enforcement Report were accepted. Regarding infringements, the CEO confirmed one individual was convicted for assaulting an IFCO and publicity was sought to communicate that the individual's behaviour was unacceptable. At the Prosecutions Sub-Committee earlier, the Authority agreed to proceed with FAPs in respect of 3 recent transgressions of regulations and a fourth case proceeding to prosecution. The CEO added that regulating authorities must now also consider, the burden on the court system as a result of the pandemic and whether matters can be dealt with by other means while also taking into account an individual's current means to make a balanced decision.

The Vessel Vehicle Equipment and the Health and Safety Report presented a 'clean bill of health'. The Chair provided a membership update with news of two long standing members length of term not being extended past April next year and updated members of the MMO member recruitment campaign. The CEO gave sincere thanks to NP and DH who have provided loyal and vital service to the Authority. Regarding the AIFCA Report, newly appointed Chief Officer Rob Clark held his first Association meeting this month. The MNP Report from Nick Brodin was received with thanks with a focus on the links with NIFCA and areas of common interest. There was a brief Brexit report from the IFCA perspective particularly whether there is a deal or no deal will be important to local inshore fisheries and also confirmed we are giving increasing focus to hand gathering and bait activity and there will be a further report at forthcoming meetings of the authority,

The Chair would like to commend the officers involved in the recent court case for their professionalism and conduct. The Chair thanked NP for his service and contribution to NIFCA. The Chair also thanked DH, who had served 35 years to both the Sea Fisheries Committee and IFCA.

The Chair said the AIFCA Lead Training Officer position is advertised and that there is a vacancy on the NIFCA Watch Committee if any members would like to join.

SL asked which minister had overall responsibility of MMO/IFCAs. Chair thought the minister overall was a balance between Victoria Prentis and George Eustice.

SR commented that contacting Neil Robinson and making him aware of the MMO recruitment campaign will be a good idea because of his links with the fishing industry.

3.11 IFCO REPORTS

3.11.1 Chief IFCO Report

MS confirmed that the report covered the busiest quarter of the year. MS noted lobster catch were not as successful as previous years, but the prices remained buoyant.

Chair thanked MS and asked if NIFCA work with the Northumberland constabulary? MS answered NIFCA do have a good working relationship with the Northumberland constabulary including a Data Sharing Agreement and they are invited to the TCG Meetings, and we have links by Rick Willis and Mark Lynn.

3.11.2. Environmental IFCOs Report for quarter ending 30 September 2020

AA noted a productive and varied quarter in the environmental team. As mentioned earlier, NIFCA welcomed Beth to the team and she had settled in well. The team were pleased to continue working with the potting industry with commencement of surveys on both potting vessels and at wholesalers. Lobster measurements were collected although it is unsure if the data will be assessed next. NIFCA cancelled the AIn estuary fish survey that was planned for September due to Covid-19 restrictions. Unfortunately, no fish surveys were completed in Spring or Autumn. AA asked if there were any further questions.

Chair thanked AA for the report and mentioned an increase in cetacean sightings within the district. SL noted caution should be taken as there may not be a cetacean increase but an increase in recording cetaceans. SL suspected that the overall number is lower because we are seeing the bottlenose dolphins more frequently and other species are not as readily recognised. MK commented there was a clear increase in bottlenose dolphins between 2012 and 2016/17. MK noted the overall population had now plateaued and lower numbers of calves are being born; fewer sightings of white-beaked dolphins mainly because the coast has high numbers of bottlenose dolphins and the white-beaked dolphins have appeared for a much shorter time period compared to the last 10 years. MK added, the North East Cetacean Project are working very closely with the Northumberland constabulary marine unit particularly with intentional disturbance of cetaceans.

3.11.3. Maintenance Report and Engineering Log for quarter ending 30 September 2020 and Cabin RIB Report

MS said this quarter “Robert Arckless” had a main engine service and the vessel was in good condition. The Chair thanked the engineer for his report.

3.12 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The next quarterly meeting of the Authority will take place on Monday 25th January 2021 by Microsoft Teams.

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