

NWIFCA COMMUNICATIONS AND ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

NWIFCA Engagement Objectives

1. DEFRA has developed a set of Success Criteria (SC) for all IFCA's which the NWIFCA has incorporated into its Annual Plan. Several of these depend on high levels of engagement with stakeholders in order to be successful:
 - **Success Criteria 4** 'The NWIFCA works in Partnership and is engaged with its stakeholders': *The NWIFCA will work across boundaries, engaging effectively with local and central government, other government bodies, other delivery bodies, industry and other NGOs, recreational users and individuals in the work that it does. Through this partnership approach to working, the NWIFCA will deliver the socio-economic and environmental outcomes it is charged with delivering under the Marine and Coastal Access Act*
 - **Success Criteria 7** 'IFCA's are recognised and heard' both require effective strategies of communication and engagement in order to be met: *Each IFCA, and IFCA authorities as a group, have a vision and plan for future management of inshore fisheries and conservation. This will help them to be a recognised "brand", managing their public voice so that they are respected and trusted for the expertise they offer.*
2. Under these Success Criteria, there are specific high-level objectives (HLO), outlining targets for the NWIFCA to meet in order to fulfil the success criteria:
 - (4b) By April 2012, develop a stakeholder engagement and communication strategy with corresponding plans that:
 - demonstrate transparency and a balanced approach to dealing with key stakeholders; and
 - enable consideration of stakeholder views when making decisions
 - (4c) By April 2014, review stakeholder engagement and communication strategy/plans and implement any necessary improvements by April 2015.
 - (7a) By April 2012, demonstrate ability to effectively engage with Local and Central Government and key partner organisations at a national level, to the benefit of IFCA's as a whole.
 - (7b) By April 2013, develop a strategy and corresponding action plan for promotion of the work of the NWIFCA and the benefits that it offers to the local community, and demonstrate implementation of the action plan by April 2015.
3. This strategy outlines the ways in which the NWIFCA will fulfil HLO (4b). It assesses the current engagement strategies employed by the Authority, highlighting the needs for improvement and development, and sets out the ways the NWIFCA will implement them.

NWIFCA Stakeholders

4. Stakeholders can be defined as an individual or group who can affect, or be affected by, the Authority's actions. NWIFCA's stakeholders are diverse and range from government regulatory bodies to local NGO groups and from large commercial users to individual recreational anglers.
5. Stakeholder groups within the North West district can be summarised below:

Stakeholder Groups	Key Stakeholders
Coastal Commercial Users	Fishing Industry Hand and Boat based, Aggregate Extraction, Renewable Energies, Non Renewable Energies, Cables, Transport Links
Coastal Recreational Users	Anglers, Watersports, Boat users, Walkers/Ramblers, Equestrian groups, birdwatchers, etc.
Conservation Groups/Organisations	RSPB, Wildlife Trust, Local and Area Groups, Conservation Management Groups
Coastal Partnerships	North West Coastal Forum, Morecambe Bay Partnership, Duddon Estuary Partnership, Wirral Coastal Partnership, Sefton Coast Partnership
Other regulatory Bodies	JNCC, GLA, EA Wales, CCW, SEPA, DEFRA, FSA, Marine Scotland, SNH, Crown Estates
Delivery Partners	MMO, NE, CEFAS, EA
Local Authorities	Cumbria, Blackpool, Lancashire, Halton, Wirral, Sefton, Cheshire, Liverpool, Preston, Wyre, Fylde, Barrow, South Lakeland, Allerdale, Copeland, Carlisle
Media	Local/National newspapers, TV, Radio,
General Public	Local Communities, Tourists, Local Land Owners
NWIFCA Committee Members	
Staff	

Principles

6. In order to deliver the best possible service and effectively meet the success criteria, the Authority has developed five principles that underpin all engagement activities the NWIFCA are involved in. The NWIFCA will:
- be **proportionate** both for the group being consulted/consulting and to the purpose of the engagement
 - be **open, transparent and focused** with our stakeholders, being clear how their views will be used and what they may influence
 - be **consistent and joined up** ensuring no group has undue influence or access, but that engagement is tailored to the commitments and interests of the audience
 - **support and promote improvement** by sharing findings with other stakeholders and to improve engagement where required
 - be **accountable and cost effective**, using the necessary resources and time to make a difference, and properly evaluating findings

Stakeholder Engagement

7. The NWIFCA recognises the importance of undertaking general stakeholder engagement, communication and consultation (SC & HLO 4(b), 4(c), 6(b), 7(b)). We intend to:
- develop the interaction with and involvement of the fishing community and include them in any relevant decision making processes, and assistance in management and research programmes;
 - maintain the current open and equitable management process resulting in self compliance with legislation and agreed management measures;
 - provide fisheries data and proposed management measures to all relevant stakeholders.

8. Stakeholders will be invited to provide input to the fisheries and environmental management decisions and the development of measures, agreements and byelaws, via written response or attendance at arranged discussion meetings.
9. In order to achieve the 5 principles, a clear and coherent engagement plan is required (high level objective 4b). This plan will review the current engagement methods the NWIFCA employs towards external stakeholders and set out clear plans for using them in the future. A communications strategy for staff will be created separately.

Review of Current NWIFCA Engagement Strategies

Website

10. **Current state:** A website was designed for the formation of the NWIFCA in April 2011. It has a news section updated with information for fishermen, as well as other relevant fisheries and conservation news from around the region. Currently, there is very little information around the website on anything other than byelaws and minimum fish sizes. No detailed information exists about the work of the science team and there is little to engage non-fishing visitors.
11. **Needs:** A strategy to ensure that the website is regularly reviewed, allowing fresh content to be developed to engage a wider stakeholder audience than simply fishermen in the region.

Consultations

12. Public consultations are mandated by Byelaw 13a to consult on management decisions regarding cockle and mussel fisheries. However, they are generally performed on an ad-hoc individual basis and no formal standard policy exists to guide the process.
13. **Needs:** A full consultation strategy that addresses the selection of which stakeholders to consult, the method of consultation and the method of analysis.

Meetings with the Public and Industry

14. At present, the only regular meetings that the public can attend are the NWIFCA quarterly meetings. However, they are not allowed to ask questions, unless they have gained prior approval from the chairman (authorisation contained in the Standing Orders). Other meetings are occasionally held in response to issues as they arise. No regular meetings are held for sections of the fishing industry.
15. **Needs:** Regular engagement meeting should be organised across the district, giving members of the public the opportunity to ask questions and have issues addressed in a more informal format. Meetings should also be held on a regular basis with members of the fishing industry to consult and liaise over management issues in key areas of the district.

Press Releases

16. Press releases are regularly issued to media regarding fishery decisions and prosecutions, etc. However, no standard format for writing them and subsequent dissemination exists.
17. **Needs:** A standard template to fill in for press releases and a protocol explaining how they should be disseminated.

Posters, Notices & Display Boards

18. Notice boards around the district are kept up-to-date with the latest fishery information across the district by the IFCOs. Regular checks are made to ensure they are present and haven't been defaced. Basic information boards and posters detail the role of the IFCA and main activities
19. **Needs:** More information display boards need to be developed, including information on specific fishing activities, such as cockles and mussels, in the district as well as specific conservation issues/goals in the area (MCZs).

Annual Plan and Annual Report

20. The NWIFCA's Annual Plan is published annually, communicating the NWIFCA work programme for the coming year to 'Officers, members, wider customers and stakeholders and the general public. It provides an overview of the functions of the Authority and its priorities for the coming year.' It highlights the work the NWIFCA plans to undertake and how it aims to achieve its objectives. The Annual Report is also published annually and details the work done and fisheries reports over the previous year.
21. **Needs:** Continue publishing annually and ensure that they are well publicised.

Liaison with Partner Agencies and Regulatory Bodies

22. The NWIFCA liaises with partner agencies Natural England, the Environment Agency, CEFAS and the MMO, through Memorandums of Understanding (MOU) that have been agreed between all IFCA at an England wide-level. Defra have recommended the national MOUS also provide for the local agreements and it has been agreed by the NWIFCA that the Annual Plan will form the local action plans to the MOUs. This is reviewed annually prior to the publishing of the Annual Plan. Relationships with other important agencies, such as the Gangmasters Licensing Authority (GLA), Environmental Health Services (EHS) and local councils, are also outlined in the Annual Plan.
23. Multi-agency liaison groups exist between regulatory bodies responsible for specific areas of the district, such as Morecambe Bay or the Ribble Estuary, and meet on an irregular basis when required.
24. **Needs:** Continue annual review of the Annual Plan providing the local action plan for MOUs with partner agencies. Maintain relationships between regulatory bodies and continue attending liaison meetings.

Communication between NWIFCA Officers and Committee

25. Most direct communication between the committee and NWIFCA officers is serviced primarily by reports authored by officers and presented at Quarterly and sub-committee meetings, where committee members are able to respond. More direct and 'real time' communication exists through the 'Knowledge Hub', a Government on-line facility, where members of closed groups are able to engage in forums and exchange documents. A NWIFCA group, as well as a Technical, Science and Byelaw (TSB) group, has been set up, however this resource is barely used as most members are either unaware of the facility or untrained in how to use it.
26. **Needs:** Training for committee members in how to use the Knowledge Hub and a member of staff assigned to regularly monitor, update and respond to Knowledge Hub activity.

Customer Service and Feedback.

27. A key to being transparent and accountable is having the facility for stakeholders to feedback and in some cases complain, knowing that their complaint will be dealt with

properly. A Customer Service policy, as well as a Customer Complaints policy (see Appendix 2), has been written accepted by the committee and is published on the NWIFCA website.

28. **Needs:** Ensure policy is kept up-to-date.

Implementation of Communication and Engagement Strategies

Website

29. The website content will initially be expanded to include relevant information for a wider range of stakeholders, including details of the work of the science and research team, specific projects the NWIFCA is undertaking, and the conservation responsibilities of the Authority. Once a week a search of relevant news sources will be conducted and relevant articles added to the website. Pertinent NWIFCA news will be added to the website as and when it happens.

Consultations

30. See Appendix 3 for the NWIFCA consultation policy.

Meetings with the Public and Industry

31. Regular quarterly meetings will be set up in each region of the district, Merseyside, Lancashire, Morecambe Bay and Cumbria. These will take on the form of evening drop in meetings, advertised well in advance, through local media, with a short presentation updating on the last 3 months, then a Q&A opportunity. Other partnership agencies (such as the MMO, Natural England) will be invited to attend.
32. Liaison meetings with members of the fishing industry (individuals and associations) will be held at regular intervals throughout the year to discuss management of the fisheries in key areas of the district.

Press Releases

33. Press releases will be produced in a standard format using a template (Appendix 1), containing explanatory notes for editors. Further explanatory notes, such as specific details of a particular fishery, can be added on a case-by-case basis.
34. Dissemination procedure:
- The press release should be assessed for its relevance and decided whether it is of local, district or national importance, and which type of media it is relevant for.
 - A file, 'media contacts.xlsx' at s://communications/media/contacts/media_contacts.xlsx contains the contact details of newspaper, TV and radio news desks across the district. Select the relevant email addresses and copy them into the BCC line an email message.
 - Also consider which committee members should be included, and add all NWIFCA staff.
 - The subject line should begin 'Press Release: *title*'
 - Any embargo terms should also be clearly stated in the email body.
 - The press release should be added to the website.

Posters, notices and display boards.

35. Posters informing the public of important fisheries information will continue to be displayed on notice boards around the district, kept up to date and maintained by the IFCOs. A full set of display materials will be developed for use at conferences and public events, detailing the role of the IFCA, with information on fisheries in the North West and conservation objectives.

Annual Plan

36. The Annual Plan will be published annually in April and made available to the public via the NWIFCA website. It will also be disseminated to members via the Knowledge Hub (see paragraph 24).

Liaison with Partner Agencies and Regulatory Bodies

37. Continue current committee and work programmes.

Communication between NWIFCA Officers and Committee members

38. Reports will continue to be submitted for Committee members at Quarterly meetings. Members will be made aware of the benefits of the Knowledge Hub and given a clear outline on how to use it and engage with other members and officers. An officer will be assigned to check and update information on the Knowledge Hub weekly, as well as monitor and respond to forum threads throughout the week.

Customer Service and Feedback

39. A full customer service policy has been developed and is a separate document of its own (Appendix 2).