

34 MEETING OF THE TECHNICAL, SCIENCE AND BYELAW SUB-COMMITTEE ON THURSDAY
29TH MAY 2025 AT TRUCKHAVEN, CARNFORTH 10AM

PRESENT MEMBERS

Mr. T. Jones	Chair	MMO Appointee
Mr. S. Brown	Vice Chair	MMO Appointee
Mr. B. Leigh		MMO Appointee
Mr. G. Pidduck		MMO Appointee
Mr. N. Baxter		MMO Appointee
Mr. K. Thompson		MMO Appointee
Mr. J. Parr		MMO Appointee
Mr. J. Turner		Environment Agency
Mr. L. Stainton		MMO Appointee
Mr. L. Browning		Natural England

NWIFCA OFFICERS ATTENDING

J. Moulton (Head of Enforcement), A. Plumeridge (Head of Science), R. Love (Science Officer), S. Reid (Admin Officer).

OTHERS PRESENT

M. Rowlings, S. Ward, D. Coward

35 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Mr. R. Benson, Mr. S. Johnston

36 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS (Agenda Item 1)

The Chair extended a welcome to all members present and to Mr. J. Parr who was attending on behalf of the MMO North West Team.

The Chair welcomed all other members of industry and explained that they would be invited to ask questions or make comments but requested that they introduce themselves before speaking.

The Chair reminded members to sign the attendance register and complete declarations of interest slips if required. The Chair requested that if members had a pecuniary interest in an item, please could they inform members of the nature of the interest.

37 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (Agenda Item 2)

Mr. Stainton declared an interest in Item 5.

Mr. Pidduck declared an interest in Item 7.

Mr. Leigh declared an interest in Item 5.

38 MINUTES OF TSB MEETING 11TH February 2025 (Agenda Item 3)

The minutes were accepted as a true and accurate record.

39 MATTERS ARISING FROM MINUTES (Agenda Item 4)

Mr. Leigh drew attention to page three, minute 29. He noted that the resolution, 'with a view period' should be amended to 'with a review period'.

Proposed: Mr. Thompson, Seconded: Mr. Pidduck

40 BASS ENTITLEMENTS (Agenda Item 5)

The HOE referred to Report 1 and the supporting documents. He explained that the Agenda Item was a mechanism to enable the Authority to implement a process, through which stakeholders can access the ability to retain bass from commercial intertidal nets. The policy sets out the process which the Authority will adopt in order to decide which 26 fishers will have access to the bass entitlement.

Mr. Stainton asked for more detail on the difference between significant and insignificant in relation to unspent convictions for bass-related offences. The HOE referred to the information in brackets in the annex which explains that a significant unspent conviction would be a person who had been issued a FAP or had been prosecuted for a bass-related offence. Mr. Leigh raised a number of issues around there being no mention of a closed season and the impact it would have on bass who are spawning. He raised further concerns around a lack of restrictions on the length and type of nets. The HOE responded stating that the voting focus was on the process of allocating the bass entitlements rather than the flexible permit conditions. However, the flexible permits conditions would allow the Authority to change regulations quickly if required. Mr. Browning supported Mr. Leigh's concerns. Mr. Brown suggested the Authority consult with experts in the field of netting when drawing up the technical aspects of the flexible permit conditions. Mr. Stainton felt that due to the diversity of the district it would be very difficult to create specific flexible permit conditions. The HOE reminded members that the Byelaw had been created and approved by the Authority, including the flexible permit conditions.

Members raised concerns around the requirement of applicants being able to 'Demonstrate routes to markets for bass, preferably within the district'. The HOE explained that the rationale behind this requirement was the applicant being able to demonstrate how they could contribute towards the local economy, benefitting local coastal communities. Mr. Capper questioned how it would be scored during the application process. It was stated that the scoring process had not yet been decided. The HOE stated that the criteria was linked to information set out by MACCA but he would take feedback back to the CEO. Mr. Browning and Mr. Baxter added that a fisher would just need to show that they have a route to market within in the district, however it would be used at the fishers discretion.

Concerns were raised by members around 'evidence of sales of fish caught in intertidal nets set within the district from the past five years' due to restrictions which had been in place since 2017. Mr. Browning suggested adding a question in the application process about intertidal net fishing evidence pre 2017.

Mr. Leigh suggested that the recommendation should be amended to reflect concerns around the criteria and the application form. Mr. Capper supported this and recommended that the elected group of members, which would form the Bass Entitlement Panel, could work with Officers on the scoring criteria and the application form. The HOE stated he would feedback to the CEO, who would then amend the application form and this would be fed back the Bass Entitlement Panel.

The Chair asked for more information around the geographical concentration of bass entitlements. The HOE gave more information on how the process would help to support coastal communities. Some members felt that the distribution process set out in the papers could lead to one area having 20 Bass Permits which seems excessive and unfairly spread. The HOE said this would be feedback.

Discussion took place around the bass entitlement being classed as by-catch and not linked to a quota. The by-catch referred to in this process is linked to it being part of a national scheme rather than per net.

In regards to Recommendation 2, members felt that all Authority members should have the opportunity to nomination themselves to sit on the Bass Entitlement Panel. Members felt that the panel should consist of five people and three out of the five people should attend each Bass Entitlement Panel meeting. Mr. Leigh suggested that Authority members who have no prejudicial interest could nominate themselves via email. Recommendation 2 was not accepted, and Mr. Capper proposed a new recommendation.

RESOLUTION: TO APPROVE IN PRINCIPLE THE POLICY AND PROCESS AS PER THE ATTACHED PAPER WITH THE REQUIREMENT TO REFINE THE QUESTIONS AND SCORING CRITERIA.

Proposed: Mr. Capper, Seconded: Mr. Thompson, 8 in favour, 2 abstention, Carried

RESOLUTION: TO SEEK NOMINATIONS, BY EMAIL, FROM AUTHORITY MEMBERS AND FIVE WILL BE SELECTED

7 in favour, 3 abstentions, Carried.

41 SURVEY AND INSPECTION SCIENCE REPORT (Agenda Item 6)

The HOS referred to the Survey and Inspection Science Report. An overview was given to the mussel surveys and inspections which had taken place and the findings from each bed. Discussion took place around the use of the drone for inspections and the interest it attracted from birds, in particular oystercatchers. Mr. Browning enquired about the wading birds' response to the drone. The HOS explained that it was SSO Haines who was present, so she had limited information. She stated that gulls were not interested with the drone, however oystercatchers swarmed the drone, likely due to it being close to breeding season. Mr. Browning felt that the information provided supports the expected behaviour

during breeding season. Mr. Browning asked for more information on the algae smothering on Foulney and if it was linked to the dry weather or the water quality. Mr. Pidduck said the algae returned every year and was linked to daylight hours, water temperature and air temperature. Mr. Pidduck enquired about the patch of mussels which is currently being tested by Environmental Health. The HOS said that due to this area not being classified before it is subject to 10 samples which would take 10 weeks. It is outwith the Authority's remit, therefore it cannot influence the process.

The HOS referred back to the report and gave an overview of cockle surveys which had taken place in the last quarter. From the April surveys in Morecambe Bay, the surveys showed that there are 8,016 tonnes of cockle in total in Morecambe Bay. Furthermore, 6,001 tonnes of the cockle is size and just over 2,015 tonnes is undersize.

The HOS drew attention to the recommendation proposed and explained that although it states Monday to Friday this could be amended. However, due to quantity of sized cockle being very close to the previous closure threshold, it is recommended it is only open for five days per week. The other beds in Morecambe Bay will be resurveyed in July and reviewed at the August TSB. If the Authority votes to open Pilling in July, all cockle beds in Morecambe Bay will close at the end of February as agreed in consultation with stakeholders.

Discussion took place around the opening of cockle beds in September. The HOS showed the members an additional area of Flookburgh which would be included in the July survey. Mr. Pidduck raised concerns around opening Pilling in July as this would cause Flookburgh to close as it moves into being a Class A Cockle fishery. He felt that if all beds were open in September, it would create a more even distribution of fishers. The HOS disagreed with this, as it has been evidenced that fishers predominately move to where the buyers are, and to the cockle bed which offers the best price per kilogram for the cockles.

Mr. Thompson felt the proposal should state the reasons for why the fishery is proposed to be opened one tide a day, Monday to Friday. Mr. Capper asked the HOS to explain how one tide a day for five days would help to conserve the stock levels. The HOS responded by explaining that limiting fishing to five days would help to reduce the effort on the fishery and would give the Authority more time to analyse catch return data.

Members felt that the fishers should have the opportunity to voice their opinions before a recommendation is presented to the TSB as this would help to ensure that their opinions are considered. The HOS agreed with this point and said this was commented upon in the fisheries management plan which she is producing. However, there are occasions when time constraints make consulting with stakeholders before a meeting difficult.

The Chair invited members of industry to share their opinions on the recommendation. Mr. Coward expressed that having Flookburgh open for five days a week had worked well because it had helped to preserve stock levels. Mr. Ward felt that the Pilling fishery should be opened every day, both tides, to help with the transportation of the stock. He enquired

if plans had been made to reduce issues surrounding traffic and parking at Pilling during an open fishery. The HOE said that this is something which needs to be explored further.

RESOLUTION A: TO RECEIVE THE REPORT AND RELATED SURVEY AND INSPECTION NOTES

Proposed: Mr. Leigh, Seconded: Mr. Stainton, all in favour, Carried

RESOLUTION B: THE PILLING COCKLE BED TO OPEN AS OF JULY 1ST 2025 TO FEBRUARY 28TH 2026, ONE TIDE A DAY, FIVE DAYS OUT OF SEVEN.

Proposed: Mr. Leigh, Seconded: Mr. Brown, 7 in favour, 1 abstention, Carried.

RESOLUTION C: THE ALDINGHAM AND NEWBIGGIN, LEVEN, FLOOKBURGH AND MIDDLETON COCKLE BEDS REMAIN CLOSED AND REVIEWED AT AUGUST TSB

Proposed: Mr. Capper, Seconded: Mr. Leigh, 7 in favour, 1 abstention, Carried.

42 SCIENCE REPORT (Agenda Item 7)

The HOS referred to the Science Report and talked members through key areas. Mr. Thompson enquired on the process for gaining a dispensation and if any do not get approved. The HOS explained that an application form is submitted along with a short HRA. There have been a few cases when the dispensation has not been granted.

Discussion took place around the tagging of lobster work which was carried out with Natural England. HOS discussed where the lobsters were caught and the bait which was used. The members thanked the HOS for presenting the report.

43 DATE OF NEXT MEETING (Agenda Item 8)

The date of the next meeting was set at Tuesday 5th August.

Discussion took place around if this date gave the science team enough time to produce survey reports. The HOS explained that it would give the science team enough time however if a consultation with stakeholders was require, it would only allow stakeholders one week to respond.

44 AOB (Agenda Item 9)

Mr. Capper referred to an email circulated by Mr. Leigh with regards to the deposit of radioactive materials in the River Ribble. Mr. Capper invited Mr. Turner from the Environment Agency to give further information on this. Mr. Turner explained that there are very strict environmental permit conditions on Springfields Fuels. The permit is based on detailed technical assessments and are designed to ensure that any discharges of radioactive substances, including uranium, do not pose an unacceptable risk to people or the environment. The legal limits in Springfields' environmental permit control the radioactivity of discharges, rather than the total mass of uranium, in line with international standards and best practice for radioactive substances. HRAs and studies have been

completed exploring the impact on wildlife. Mr. Turner said he would send the information from the Environment Agency to the office so it could be circulated to TSB members. Mr. Browning enquired if there were any permit conditions on the discharge of heavy metals. Mr. Turner said he would find out and respond to Mr. Browning. The HOE asked if there was radiological monitoring of shellfish in the Ribble. Mr. Turner explained that the report which would be circulated contained links to other reports.

Mr. Ward referred back to the resolution made on the Pilling cockle fishery. He enquired if they would be told which five days the fishery was open or if the fishers could choose the five days. The HOE said that five days would be stated in the flexible permit conditions and there would be a consultation with stakeholders.

The Chair thanked everyone for attending – meeting closed at 13:25.