

# NWIFCA Annual General Meeting: 26<sup>th</sup> June 2025

**REPORT NO.  
3**

## CEO QUARTERLY REPORT

8<sup>TH</sup> MARCH – 17<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 2025

**Purpose:** For members' information.

**Recommendations:** The report is received.

### **1. Authority Committees**

A meeting of the Finance and Personnel Sub-Committee (F&P) was held on 15<sup>th</sup> May to discuss the funding for office moves and the Authority potentially match-funding a PhD at Bangor University to look at cockle larval dispersal in the district. An £80,00 ring-fenced fund was retained to fund both prospective office moves for Carnforth and Whitehaven, and F&P members agreed to fund the PhD at £12,000 per year for the next four years. Further detail on the office moves is provided below, whilst Head of Science Anna will update on the PhD in her Science Report.

A meeting of the Technical, Science and Byelaw Sub-Committee (TSB) was held on 29<sup>th</sup> May. At this meeting, two main agenda items were discussed: the application process for bass entitlements to be issued under the new Netting Byelaw (Byelaw 7) and the proposed early opening of the Pilling cockle fishery. TSB Chair Trevor Jones will update members verbally at the AGM.

After the recent local elections, Cllrs. Stephen Clarke and Jean Parr both lost their seats on Lancashire County Council. I thank them both for their years of support and engagement with the Authority and wish them well in their future endeavours. I am pleased to welcome Cllrs. Alice Jones and David Shaw as our new members for Lancashire County Council. In addition, Cllr. Jenny Boak has stood down as the representative for Westmorland and Furness Council and is replaced by Cllr. Tim Bloomer who I also welcome onto the Authority.

### **2. Finances**

The Authority's End-of-Year Financial Report for 2024/25 is provided in a separate report to this meeting and will be discussed under the relevant agenda item.

At the time of writing, IFCAs are still awaiting the outcome of the government's Spending Review in terms of the prospects for any future funding from Defra. Defra has settled its funding arrangements with Treasury and faces real-terms reductions of 0.7%, but this is yet to filter down to IFCAs in terms of how this might affect any potential future central funding. As highlighted to members at the last Full Authority Meeting, Defra have already indicated that no future CDEL funding will be available to IFCAs to support the replacement of capital assets, namely vessels, whilst the prospect for future RDEL funding for resource uplift / project work is dependent on the outcome of the Spending Review. We have also been informed that the government intends to route all future annual New Burdens funding for our six councils who receive it through local government via the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). It remains to be seen how, if at all, this will affect what funding these six councils will get in the future to contribute towards their annual Authority levies.

### **3. Estates**

The proposed move of our Whitehaven Office has fallen through after the prospective new owner of the premises on Marlborough Street pulled out of the sale. This means we are back at the stage of searching for a new premises to replace our Duncan Square office. The senior Whitehaven Officer, Senior IFCO (Master) Hugh Thinnesen and I have viewed a potential property in the Fish Hall next door to the Marine Management Organisation (MMO) there, but we are awaiting further details on the potential to reconfigure the office space to make it more open plan.

No further progress has been made with Cumberland Council on discussions around ownership of Duncan Square. This is despite their acknowledging receipt of our letter inviting discussions and confirmation that their Group Lawyer has picked up the case on their side. Internal discussions are being had within Cumberland Council, and I am awaiting a response from them to set up a meeting to discuss next steps.

Following the F&P meeting on 15<sup>th</sup> May, in which it was agreed to ring-fence £80,000 of reserves for office moves and pursue a potential new Head Office in Lancaster, I received confirmation of additional service charges for a potential office at Lancaster Business Park, which rendered the move financially unviable under our current budget. I will continue to explore other options to replace our current office in Carnforth, and, failing any suitable alternatives, will consider whether to propose to members an uplift in our Rents budget for 2026/27 to fund the potential move to the office at Lancaster Business Park.

### **4. Vessels and Vehicles**

A new Vessel Task and Finish Group has been stood up after agreement at the last Authority Meeting to pursue the Vessel Replacement Strategy put to members. This has been helpful in developing further detail on how best to achieve our strategic objectives for our eventual new seagoing assets. In the first instance, officers will be focussing on the replacement of our smallest RIB, Protector Gamma, with a new craft that can be transported throughout the district. We will then move onto the replacement of Bay Protector and eventually North Western Protector (NWP), whilst continuing to develop and review our strategies for replacement of these vessels.

Joe and I have worked with the crew of NWP to develop new Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for the vessel, which have improved our practices with regards operational efficiency and health and safety, as well as accountability for patrol planning and reporting. This will help better evidence how we utilise our main patrol vessel and what we need in terms of any long-term replacement.

I reiterate the point I made in my last CEO Quarterly Report that future annual operational budgets derived from council levies will need to take into account replacement of *all* our capital assets, including vehicles. Currently, vehicle replacements are being funded through the Capital Asset Replacement Fund (CARF) ringfenced in our reserves, but this is not sustainable in the long-term, particularly considering the potential to use a significant proportion of the CARF to fund vessel replacements in the near future. Vehicle replacement capital costs will need to be incorporated into future budgets, particularly given the news that Defra will no longer be providing CDEL funding and given the fact we halved our CARF contribution this year to ensure we secured agreement on the 2025/26 budget. Such levels of CARF investment are not sustainable over the long-term, and uplifts need to be secured to ensure we have the money in reserves to replace *all* assets when necessary.

### **5. Communications and Engagement**

Comms this quarter have centred on updating stakeholders on the outcomes of our early Morecambe Bay cockle surveys and the subsequent TSB decisions. We also ran some comms via local media and our own platforms to highlight the successful prosecution of a fisher from Barrow who officers found

with 33 illegally caught bass. After his guilty plea, the defendant received fines totalling £2,756. This prosecution, and the subsequent coverage it received, will act as a strong deterrent to others who might be tempted to fish illegally for bass this season.

Our Comms Officer Grace has been developing a bespoke page for our website to cover all comms relating to Byelaw 3 and our cockle and mussel fisheries. This is on the back of feedback received from some stakeholders regarding the sheer quantity of comms we necessarily publish on these fisheries, and it sometimes being difficult to find the relevant information on our website's newsfeed. Having a dedicated webpage will help make relevant information more accessible to relevant stakeholders. This will be published in the coming weeks.

We are also developing a webpage to cover the Dee Estuary Cockle Fishery Regulating Order (DECFRO) as a one-stop shop for stakeholders. Again, this will be published in the coming weeks and will be used as the platform for our initial informal consultations on the Regulating Order.

## **6. HR**

After a review of our Health and Safety policies and responsibilities, the Senior Management Team decided that we needed to appoint an existing member of staff as the Authority's statutory 'Competent Person' for Health and Safety. After an internal recruitment exercise, Science Officer Robin Love was appointed, and he will therefore be taking on this role as part of a dual role with his existing Science Officer duties. Further detail regarding this appointment is provided in my separate Health, Safety and Wellbeing Report.

We held our annual Away Day for staff on 13<sup>th</sup> June, where we held a half-day staff meeting at the Rum Story in Whitehaven, followed by teambuilding activities at Lakes Escapes in Workington.

## **7. Fisheries**

Since my quarterly report for the last Authority meeting, we resubmitted our Netting Byelaw to the MMO for a second round of quality assurance (QA) and have received it back again with some further comments and requests for clarification, all of which are relatively minor and not insurmountable. Joe is currently working through these comments to make the necessary amendments to the Byelaw text and clarifications, with a view to then returning it to the MMO. I will be keen to impress on the MMO that we do not wish to enter into a continual back and forth on the QA process, as some other IFCA's have experienced, and that, as most of the comments and suggested amendments are minor, I would like to see a relatively swift resolution to this stage of the Byelaw making process, so that the Netting Byelaw can then be sent to Defra for Secretary of State confirmation. I have also developed a draft policy for determining which 26 fishers should receive a bass entitlement under our Netting Byelaw Category 2 permits. This was discussed at the last TSB meeting, and it was agreed that five Authority members would form the Bass Entitlement Decision Panel, with some further work to be carried out with these members to agree the final criteria and scoring system for the decision-making process.

We continue to meet with colleagues at Natural Resources Wales (NRW) to progress the new DECFRO. Defra strongly advised us to carry out an informal consultation prior to submitting our application to them, so we have been liaising with NRW to implement both online and face-to-face consultations. The latter has been delayed as NRW need to appoint an official Welsh language translator for any face-to-face consultations ran in Wales, but we are progressing the online consultation, which should be launched in the coming weeks.

As per our recently adopted new Byelaw Strategy, officers have begun work on developing our new Mobile Net Byelaw. This will commence with the Science Team running an initial informal consultation with fishers in the late summer along with an assessment of the associated evidence. We will then move to drafting the Byelaw, working with the Authority's Byelaw Working Group.

On 9<sup>th</sup> June, the MMO launched a consultation on a proposed byelaw which will ban bottom-towed fishing gear across a suite of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) in English offshore waters, including four within the Irish Sea. Whilst these are focussed on 'offshore' MPAs, three of the four in the Irish Sea have elements within the Authority's district (*i.e.* within six nautical miles, therefore with inshore elements). These are West of Walney Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ), Shell Flat and Lune Deep Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and Fylde MCZ. The MMO are proposing to ban bottom-towed gear across the entirety of all three of these MPAs, along with West of Copeland MCZ, which sits entirely outside of the district. Senior Officers will be working to draft the Authority's response to the consultation, but members may also wish to provide their own responses separately. The consultation runs until 1<sup>st</sup> September.

## **8. External Engagement / Other CEO Work**

I attended an online, Defra-led Focus Group on the Allonby Bay Highly Protected Marine Area (HPMA) on 25<sup>th</sup> March and an online event with local stakeholders the following week on 1<sup>st</sup> April.

I attended Defra's Marine and Fisheries Chief Officer (MAFCO) Group on 1<sup>st</sup> April, where the focus of this meeting was on reinvigorating the group from Defra's side, ensuring appropriate representation from senior Defra officials in their Marine and Fisheries Directorate. The meeting also agreed the establishment of a Defra-IFCA-MMO Implementation Group to look at actioning the recommendations from Defra's recent four-yearly IFCA Conduct and Operations Report. As Vice-Chair of the IFCAs' Chief Officer Group (COG), I was asked to sit on this Implementation Group which had its augural meeting on 14<sup>th</sup> May, where actions were set out for addressing some of the key points in the Report. Another MAFCO meeting was held on 13<sup>th</sup> May where much of the discussion was on future IFCA funding constraints with the impending Spending Review.

At the beginning of April, the MMO held a series of Bass Authorisation Meetings across the North West for licensed fishing vessel owners. I attended one of these meetings in Lytham on 9<sup>th</sup> April where there has healthy discussion between fishers, MMO staff and myself on the future of bass authorisations for the inshore fleet, and how these would interact with our forthcoming Netting Byelaw.

On 13<sup>th</sup> May I attended the inaugural meeting of the new North West Marine Ecosystems (NWME) Steering Group which is looking to replicate a similar successful initiative in the South West to identify opportunities for partnership working in the region to support ecosystem restoration and improvement projects along the North West Coast and in our coastal waters. Authority officer participation in this group will be reviewed, but it is likely that a member of our Science Team will become the long-term representative for the Authority on NWME.

The North West Standing Environment Group (SEG) met on 15<sup>th</sup> May to discuss recent pollution incidents and the learning from these, as well as ensuring local authority representatives were aware of procedures to be followed in the event of a marine pollution incident in their area.

The Dee Estuary Cockle Fishery Advisory Group (DECFAFAG) met in North Wales on 21<sup>st</sup> May where colleagues from NRW updated stakeholders on the proposals for their opening of the Dee cockle beds this season. I also updated stakeholders on the progress made on the new DECFAFRO and gave them an indication of potential costs of the NWIFCA element of a future licence, based on full cost recovery.

*Mark Taylor, North Western IFCA CEO, 17<sup>th</sup> June 2025.*