

NWIFCA Annual General Meeting: 18th June 2026

REPORT NO.
3

CEO QUARTERLY REPORT

10TH MARCH – 8TH JUNE 2026

Purpose: For members' information.

Recommendations: The report is received.

1. Authority Committees

An Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM) of the Technical, Science and Byelaw Sub-Committee (TSB) was held on 19th March immediately following the last Full Authority meeting. At this EGM, members agreed to return the cockle open season to September to April, following the early open / close season trial of July to February for the 2024/25 season. TSB also met on 5th May where the main point of business was the adoption of the Authority's new Cockle Fisheries Management Plan.

The Authority's Finance & Personnel Sub-Committee (F&P) met on 27th May. Members agreed to the Authority recruiting a new fixed-term Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Officer (IFCO) into our Liverpool office, but with the postholder to immediately commence a secondment with Natural Resources Wales (NRW) until July 2028. This will be to allow NRW to cover their recently vacated Dee Estuary Cockle Officer post. The secondment and fixed-term contract will end with the expiry of the current Dee Estuary Cockle Fishery Regulating Order and the position would only be made permanent if the Authority's joint application with NRW for a new Regulating Order is successful. In this way, the post will be cost neutral to the Authority's funding councils, with the post funded by NRW during the secondment, and only made permanent if the Authority can fund the post via licence fees from the new Regulating Order. Recruitment for this post will commence in the coming weeks.

I am delighted to welcome Councillor Cherry Povall as our newest member of the Authority, representing Wirral Council.

As an Executive, we have now commenced a review of our current Constitution. This was instigated by our Administration Team, who have the most day-to-day experience of the Constitution through their clerking roles. I have now taken their initial proposals and am working up a new draft Constitution. This will then be shared with senior officers for feedback, before being brought to members for consideration, suggested amendments and, ultimately, adoption. There will be adequate opportunity for all members to scrutinise the changes being proposed, as well as offer their own suggested changes, as it is important that the entire process of updating our Constitution is guided by members themselves.

2. Finances

The Authority's End-of-Year Financial Report for 2025/26 is provided in a separate report to this meeting and will be discussed under the relevant agenda item.

After a protracted delay, Lancashire County Council eventually paid its statutory levy of £642,121 on 29th May, two months after the invoice deadline, and almost five months after they had been notified of their 2026/27 levy.

Following a successful Spending Review 2026-29 bid by the Association of IFCAs (AIFCA), we are due to receive the following amounts of Defra RDEL funding for 2026/27:

- £52,256 for marine protected area (MPA) management
- £30,000 for marine licensing
- £92,256 for Allonby Bay Highly Protected Marine Area (HPMA).

Members may note that missing from this is anticipated RDEL funding for fisheries management plans (FMPs) work, which we have been in receipt of for the last few years. Defra recently notified AIFCA that they would be withdrawing the planned funding from the Authority, along with Isles of Scilly IFCA, as neither is currently acting as an IFCA lead / central point of contact for any FMPs currently in development. AIFCA are making representations to Defra regarding this decision, on our—and indeed all IFCAs’—behalf, but we should not expect to receive this additional £52,256 this year and we will have to plan accordingly. Prior to the receipt of the outstanding 2026/27 RDEL funds listed above, I will be discussing proposals with senior officers as to how we might defray this additional funding and will then bring an appropriate recommendation to F&P for those members to consider. The removal of the previously approved £52,256 FMP funding demonstrates our financial prudence in not defraying anticipated RDEL funding ahead of being in receipt of it.

3. Estates

Staff in Whitehaven are settling in well to our new office in the Fish Hall. With regards our pre-existing office at Duncan Square, Cumberland Council have now confirmed that they are content for the Authority to approach the Land Registry to register the transfer of ownership to us. I have thus instructed our solicitors to do so and am awaiting the outcome of this. Once the Authority’s ownership of Duncan Square has been confirmed, I will discuss with relevant officers what the Executive’s position is on the property and then bring a recommendation to F&P as to what to do with it, namely whether to keep it or sell it.

We are currently exploring other quotes for the proposed refurbishment of the Head Office in Carnforth.

We have now taken on a new lock-up property on the Keer Park Industrial Estate in Carnforth, which is much more suitable than our pre-existing property on Kellet Road.

4. Vessels and Vehicles

We have completed the initial tender process for the first of our two new ~10m vessels and have selected Swiftcat Boats based in Essex. Our Head of Enforcement Joe will be presenting a separate paper on this matter, with a view to gaining members’ approval to proceed with this purchase. My thanks go to Phil Capper, Trevor Jones, Laurence Browning and Cllr. Norris for their involvement in the Vessel Task and Finish Group that was stood up to support officers through this decision-making process.

North Western Protector has recently undergone a period of maintenance and significant upgrades whilst in dry dock in Workington. Joe will provide more detail on this in his Head of Enforcement Report. A second period of dry dock is still anticipated for later in the year for further improvements.

5. Communications and Engagement

Following the decision to reposition our Communications Officer role, I can confirm that our Administration Officer Catherine Silverwood was successful in applying for this role and since 1st April has therefore been working in her new role as Senior Administration Officer (Comms).

During this reporting period, our comms work has focussed on publishing online content regarding important fisheries updates, but also Catherine has been keen to collate information to generate more content on the interesting work the Authority is carrying out, particularly in our operational settings. In the coming months, members can expect to see more content of this nature on our website and Facebook page. She has also been producing a new Comms Calendar and is in the process of reviewing our Comms and Engagement Strategy.

At the request of members at the last Full Authority meeting, we have relaunched our Call for Evidence from anglers fishing on the Wirral and Formby coasts for more information regarding smooth-hound. Any information received will inform our research project looking at smooth-hound bycatch from fixed net fisheries in the area.

6. HR

I have referenced the change to our comms functions and the agreement for a new fixed-term IFCO in previous sections.

We held our quarterly face-to-face team meeting in Barrow on 13th March.

Our Head of Science, Anna has been leading a small group of officers to develop a set of organisational values for the Authority's Executive. The intention here is to provide a mutually agreed set of core values that all staff should be expected to demonstrate, and which will help shape future performance reviews alongside day-to-day performance against team and individual objectives. This group will be presenting their suggested values to all staff at our next quarterly face-to-face meeting in Liverpool on 12th June with a view to agreeing their adoption going forward.

All officers' end of year reviews for 2025/26 were carried out by the end of April, and the Senior Management Team met in early May to review all officers' performance objectives for 2026/27, with some slight calibration and amendments made to some objectives, to foster consistency, fairness and alignment with this year's Annual Plan.

At our next face-to-face quarterly meeting in Liverpool on 12th June, our IFCO (Deputy Master) Erik Thinnesen will be presented with a gift and plaque in acknowledgement of 25 years' service with the Authority and its predecessor Sea Fisheries Committee. This is an outstanding achievement, and I am sure members will join me in thanking Erik for his many years of dedicated service.

7. Admin

In the Appendix to this report, I have again included stats on various key performance indicators (KPIs) that our Head of Administration, Alison Nicholson has developed so that we can monitor performance against several different priority workstreams. As this is still a new reporting initiative for the Authority, I would welcome any feedback members might have on the information provided and whether the level of detail is appropriate.

Following persistent suggestions from Alison, I have been successful in persuading other IFCA's to establish a new IFCA-wide Admin Group, where admin officers from across the IFCA's can get together and liaise on issues of mutual concern. The inaugural meeting of this group was held on 21st May and Alison will represent the Authority on this group going forward. We are both hopeful it will yield benefits across several areas, including avoiding duplication of effort and potential cost savings through collective purchasing power on certain items / services.

We have now fully embedded our new statutory Data Protection Officer (DPO) role, which is being provided by Blackpool Council. The DPO has already conducted an initial thorough audit of our data protection and GDPR-related processes, which generated several recommendations, which he has been liaising with Alison and me to implement.

8. Fisheries

Following my update at the last meeting regarding Byelaw 7 (Netting Byelaw) I have been in further discussions with Defra colleagues regarding the progress—or rather lack thereof—of it being confirmed by the Secretary of State. As previously mentioned, this is due to a shore-based bass netting review that Defra had been undertaking. This review was focussed on a permitted fishery in the North Eastern IFCA's district, and Defra's finding from this raised some concerns about the sustainability of the fishery there. As such, they have been reconsidering the appropriateness of our facilitating the issuance of up to 26 bass entitlements to retain bass bycatch in commercial shore-set nets in our district via Byelaw 7. Conversations have centred around my concerns with the entire byelaw being delayed because of this one issue and my trying to suggest some solutions for expediting this process. At the time of writing, I am awaiting a written request from Defra's Marine & Fisheries Deputy Director for further information on how the Authority proposes to sustainably manage this fishery, if Defra were to confirm the byelaw in its current form.

I am pleased to be able to inform members that, following the submission of our joint application for the new Dee Estuary Cockle Fishery Regulating Order to Defra and Welsh Government (WG) in January, the respective English and Welsh ministers have both confirmed they are happy for the application to proceed. The next steps include liaising with WG on the drafting of the Regulating Order, finalising the associated draft FMP, and then going out to formal consultation later in 2026.

We are still awaiting the outcome of the two proposed Marine Management Organisation (MMO) byelaws for the Allonby Bay HPMA, one prohibiting all fishing activities and the other prohibiting anchoring. Recent Defra indications were that they were hopeful the two byelaws would be laid before Parliament before summer recess and therefore could be in place by then.

Joe has begun drafting the proposed new Byelaw 10 (Mobile Nets Byelaw). The development of this byelaw is not quite at the stage and pace I would like it to be, but this is due to other priorities across areas such as vessel procurement, health and safety, North Western Protector upgrades *etc.* I hope to have a draft Byelaw 10 for initial consideration by the Byelaw Working Group by late summer / early autumn.

Following discussions with the MMO, we have been successful in persuading them to drop their proposals to ban all forms of bottom-towed gear in the Fylde Marine Conservation Zone and Shell Flat and Lune Deep Special Area of Conservation, for those parts of these two MPAs which fall within our district. Hence, it has been agreed with the MMO that only the elements of these two MPAs which are outside the 6 nautical mile limit will be subject to the prohibitions, with the inshore elements being monitored by the Authority, with appropriate future management through our byelaws as necessary. This change will be confirmed once there has been an official amendment to the MMO's draft byelaw which they consulted on last year.

9. External Engagement / Other CEO Work

Joe and I attended a meeting with our fisheries legal advisor in Hull on 10th March to discuss various matters and receive guidance accordingly.

I attended meetings of the IFCA's Chief Officer Group (COG) on 12th March and 13th May. After two years as the COG Vice-Chair, I have now relinquished this position.

Along with three members of the Science Team, I attended the Institute of Fisheries Management's International Technology in Fisheries Symposium in Liverpool from 14th to 16th April. This was an incredibly interesting and useful event, with several leads taken from it. Following the Symposium, I was able to setup meetings between officers and representatives from other attending organisations on matters such as support with small fish surveys, technical equipment hire for specialist one-off

projects, and the potential development of a cockle DNA testing kit to determine provenance and support compliance.

I attended a meeting of Defra's Marine and Fisheries Chief Officer group (MAFCO) on 28th April.

I attended Mud Rescue training in Flookburgh on 8th May and Safe Working in Water training in Flookburgh and Carlisle on 19th and 20th May (see further details in my Health, Safety and Wellbeing Report).

I attended the annual meeting of the Dee Estuary Cockle Fishery Advisory Group in Rhydymwyn in North Wales on 18th May. The main topics of discussion here were NRW's proposals for this year's fishery on the Dee and the new Regulating Order joint application.

Mark Taylor, North Western IFCA CEO, 8th June 2026.

Appendix I – Selected NWIFCA Admin Team Stats (Q4 2025/26)

KPI	Actuals	Max.	RAG	Previous Quarter's RAG
BYELAWS				
<i>Byelaw 3 (Cockle and Mussel)</i>				
Permit holders using database	121	150	G	G
Permit renewals	142	150	NA	NA
New permits	8	NA	NA	NA
Waiting list number (of which under 18)	167 (15)	NA	NA	NA
Late / no returns	23	NA	G	G
<i>Byelaw 4 (Potting)</i>				
Permit renewals	0	NA	NA	NA
New permits	1	NA	NA	NA
Late / no returns	3	NA	G	G
AUTHORITY				
<i>Full Authority</i>				
Vacancies	3	30	A	A
Councillors' attendance	5	10	A	G
MMO appointees' attendance	9	14	A	A
Statutory members' attendance	1	3	A	A
<i>TSB</i>				
MMO appointees' attendance	13	14	G	G

Statutory members' attendance	3	4	G	A
<i>Ex-officio</i> members' attendance	3	4	G	A
ASSETS				
Vehicle checks conducted	15	20	A	G
Monthly kit checks	40	54	A	R
HR				
TOIL days taken	36	NA	G	G
Sick leave days	9	NA	G	A
Carers' leave days	1	NA	G	G
Volunteer days	0	NA	NA	NA
Unsocial hours	295	NA	G	G
Outstanding grievances	0	NA	G	G
Outstanding disciplinaries	0	NA	G	G