



North Western  
Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority

Annual Plan

2025/26

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## Foreword



[Chair's Foreword to be included]

*Phil Capper, Chair*



## Our Vision

NWIFCA's vision is a collective one adopted by all IFCA's:

*“To lead, champion and manage a sustainable marine environment and inshore fisheries, by successfully securing the right balance between social, environmental and economic benefits to ensure healthy seas, sustainable fisheries and a viable industry.”*



## Introduction

NWIFCA is the lead statutory regulator under the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 (MaCAA) responsible for the sustainable use of sea fisheries resources within our district and the protection of the marine environment from any potentially harmful fisheries activities. The Authority's statutory duties are defined in MaCAA, which include the requirement for us to prepare an annual plan setting out our main objectives and priorities for the year ahead; this is that plan for 2025/26. It sets out NWIFCA's main performance targets and priorities to deliver in the forthcoming fiscal year, and demonstrates how we will continue to implement and improve our inshore fisheries management whilst also contributing towards the operational implementation of the UK Government's marine and fisheries policies.

## Our Functions

NWIFCA is responsible for managing the exploitation of sea fisheries resources within our district, which includes all animals and plants which habitually live in the sea. In delivering this function, the Authority is required to ensure that all fisheries exploitation and development taking place within the district is sustainable, and that stakeholders' socio-economic needs are balanced with the requirement for strong marine environmental protection.

The Authority's principal regulatory functions relate to the enforcement of minimum conservation reference sizes (MCRSs) for certain species, fishing gear restrictions, restricted fishing areas, opening and closing of certain shellfisheries, and the management of fisheries for the protection of marine protected areas (MPAs)<sup>1</sup>. Alongside our enforcement responsibilities, our scientific work continually furthers our collective understanding of the district's main fisheries and how our inshore marine environment is responding to any fishing activity pressures. This enables us to implement sound adaptative fisheries management processes and flex our approach depending on the environmental circumstances at play.

To support the delivery of our fisheries management functions, the Authority can make byelaws to address local and regional fisheries and associated marine environmental management issues. This also extends to the ability to make emergency byelaws to address the most urgent fisheries matters.

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<sup>1</sup> MPAs include the international designations of Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), protecting habitats, and Special Protection Areas (SPAs), protecting birds, known collectively as European Marine Sites (EMSs), along with national designations known as Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs) and Highly Protected Marine Areas (HPMAs).

## The District



NWIFCA's district encompasses the entire coastline (approximately 500 miles) of North West England, from the Scottish border at the northern extent to the Welsh border in the south, as well as our coastal councils' landwards areas, and inshore coastal waters out to six nautical miles. NWIFCA is unique in that we are the only IFCA which does not share a jurisdictional border with any other IFCA.

Our district is one of diversity and contrast, with highly dynamic and ecologically productive marine environments existing alongside varying coastal communities, from the relatively low-density coastal populations of Cumbria in the north, to the more populated areas of Lancashire, Merseyside, and Cheshire. Within the district are many significant inshore marine environments, demonstrable by the fact that almost the entire North West's coastal waters are designated as an MPA of one form or another. Our estuarine and intertidal environments within the Solway Firth, Morecambe Bay, and the Duddon, Wyre, Ribble, Mersey, and Dee Estuaries are some of the most biologically diverse in the country and yield some significant commercial and recreational fisheries. Individually and collectively, these marine environments and fisheries are managed by the Authority to ensure they are maintained, and where necessary improved, for the benefit of all our current and future stakeholders.



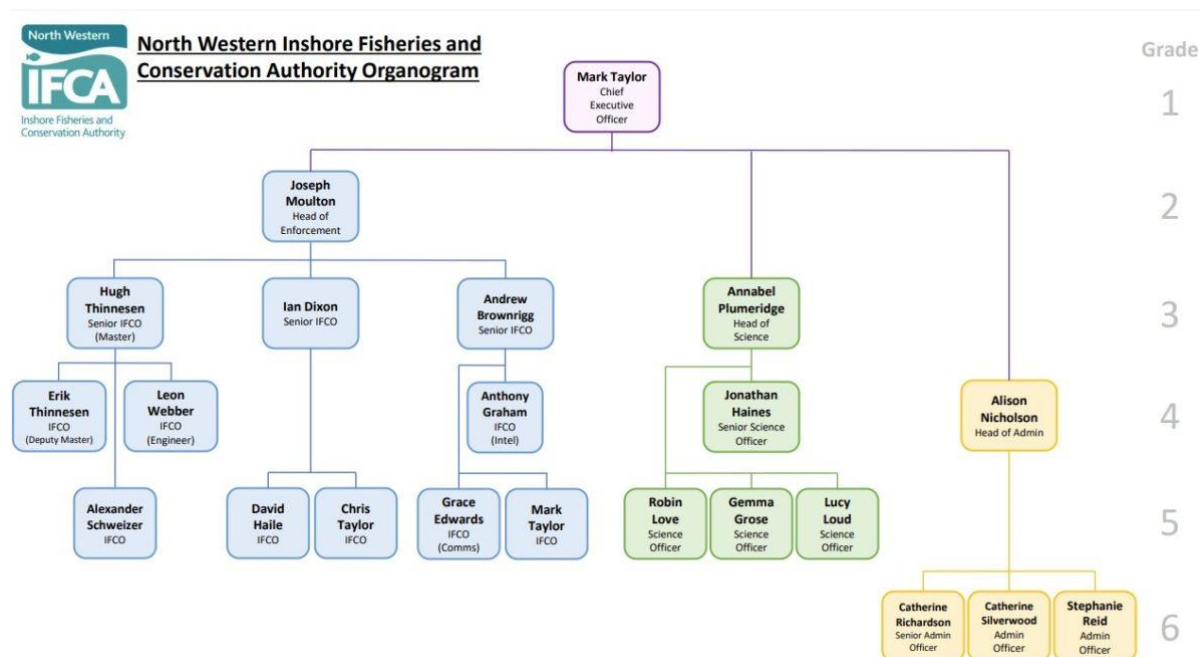


## Our Structure

### Staff

NWIFCA has 22 members of staff working across three distinct teams: Enforcement, Science and Administration. Overseen by our Chief Executive Officer (CEO), each team has a senior manager responsible for the delivery of their teams' day-to-day duties.

During 2024/25, the Authority implemented an organisational restructuring, which included the creation of an entirely new team, the Administration Team, as well as the implementation of a six-grade structure with associated new line management chains and a new middle-management level. Our new organogram is shown below.



Our Enforcement Team, led by Joseph Moulton, handles the operational delivery of our fisheries regulation. This centres on helping our regulated stakeholders remain compliant with the raft of legislation that we are statutorily responsible for. The team of 12 Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Officers (IFCOs) provides guidance and education to our fishing industry stakeholders and other relevant groups to enable their compliance and, as a last resort, takes enforcement action against any non-compliance that has the potential to be of significant detriment to the North West's inshore fisheries or wider marine environment.

Annabel Plumeridge leads our Science Team, who deliver all our fisheries scientific research and monitoring work across the district. This team of five technical specialists regularly devises and applies a variety of bespoke survey methodologies to assess the state of our various fisheries and associated marine environments, and works closely with key partner organisations to maximise the scope of our scientific understanding. With ever-changing marine ecosystems and habitats, their work is never dull, and they



are constantly innovating and adapting their approaches to deliver the best evidence base upon which the Authority can make informed, sound decisions.

The Authority's Administration Team provides all the necessary administrative support to our two operational teams and our CEO. Managed by Alison Nicholson, they deliver our finance and HR functions, organise our various committee meetings, manage and maintain all our assets, including estates, vessels and vehicles, run our fisheries permit schemes, and process all our enforcement and fisheries data.



## Assets

NWIFCA deploys a number of specialist operational assets in order to fulfil all our responsibilities. Our main patrol vessel, North Western Protector, is based in the north of the district in Whitehaven. A former windfarm vessel, commissioned by the Authority in 2018, she is a 20.5m aluminium catamaran with a specification that enables us to deliver our enforcement and scientific work across the district. She has twin Man 1,100hp 12-cylinder 1,200rpm engines that power her Ultra-Dynamics UJ575 waterjets, giving her a cruising speed of 23 knots. She employs a 'mother-daughter' system with a small, stern-launched rigid inflatable boat (RIB) used to transport officers across to nearby fishing vessels for inspection. She is capable of lifting fixed fishing nets and pots for inspection, as well as deploying specialist scientific equipment for underwater surveys. As a twin-hulled catamaran, she can also 'dry out' on intertidal areas on low tides to enable officers to conduct scientific or enforcement work on foot.



Completing our seagoing fleet are two RIBs, Protector Gamma in the central part of the district, ordinarily based in Barrow, and Bay Protector in Liverpool covering the southern area. These craft provide us with further capabilities to deliver proactive and reactive enforcement and scientific work, enabling responsive operational coverage across the entire North West.

As well as our vessels, we also have two drones and a fleet of all-terrain vehicles (ATVs, or 'quad bikes'), pick-up trucks and vans to enable officers to travel throughout the district and deploy their specialist equipment wherever needed.

## Members

The Authority's overall governance and strategic direction comes from its committee of members. Our full committee has thirty members as defined in The North Western Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Order 2010 ('the Order'), made up of 10 councillors appointed by our nine constituent councils, seventeen voluntary members appointed by the Marine Management Organisation (MMO), and three statutory appointees representing the MMO, Natural England (NE) and the Environment Agency (EA).



### Council Members

Cllr. S. Brookes	Blackpool Borough Council
Cllr. H. Deynem	Cheshire West and Chester Council
Cllr. A. Markley	Cumberland Council
Cllr. B. Woolfall	Halton Borough Council
Cllr. S. Clarke	Lancashire County Council
Cllr. J. Parr	Lancashire County Council
Cllr. P. Norris	Liverpool City Council

Cllr. C. Richards	Sefton Metropolitan Borough Council
Cllr. J. Boak	Westmorland and Furness Council
Cllr. G. Davies	Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council

#### MMO Appointees

Mr. P. Capper (Chair)	Marine Environment
Mr. B. Leigh (Vice Chair)	Recreational Fisheries
Mr. N. Baxter	Marine Environment
Mr. R. Benson	Commercial Fisheries
Mr. S. Brown	Recreational Fisheries
Ms. G. de Jong Cleyndert	Marine Environment
Mr. R. Donnan	Commercial Fisheries
Mr. W. Friend	Recreational Fisheries
Mr. T. Jones	Commercial Fisheries
Mr. R. Lomax	Recreational Fisheries
Mr. G. Pidduck	Commercial Fisheries
Mr. L. Stainton	Recreational Fisheries
Mr. K. Thompson	Commercial Fisheries
Dr. M. Tupper	Marine Environment
Mr. D. Williams	Recreational Fisheries

#### Statutory Appointees

Mr. L. Browning	NE
Mr. S. Johnston	MMO
Mr. J. Turner	EA



## Finances

IFCAs' operating budgets are derived from levies paid to them by each of their constituent councils. For NWIFCA, the percentage of the total levy which each council pays is defined within the Order and is as follows:

- Blackpool Borough Council	1.65%
- Cheshire West and Chester Council	7.30%
- Cumberland Council	20.47%
- Halton Borough Council	2.22%
- Lancashire County Council	33.14%
- Liverpool City Council	4.26%
- Sefton Metropolitan Borough Council	5.09%
- Westmorland and Furness Council	20.47%
- Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council	5.40%

At a meeting of the Authority's full committee in December 2024, our total levy for 2025/26 was agreed and set at £1,855,358. This was split between the nine constituent councils as follows:

- Blackpool Borough Council	£30,613
- Cheshire West and Chester Council	£135,441
- Cumberland Council	£379,792
- Halton Borough Council	£41,189
- Lancashire County Council	£614,866
- Liverpool City Council	£79,038
- Sefton Metropolitan Borough Council	£94,438
- Westmorland and Furness Council	£379,792
- Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council	£100,189

This year's operating budget represented an increase of 6% (£105,084) on 2024/25. This increase was sought on top of last year's unprecedented 21% levy increase due to more accurate budgetary forecasting being put in place, which allowed the CEO, Head of Admin and the Authority's accountants to more accurately forecast 2025/26 expenditure. It also accounted for missed anticipated increased expenditure from last year around areas such as insurance and professional services. £1,855,358 was agreed so as to enable the Authority to continue to deliver our performance targets and objectives as set out in this Annual Plan.

The breakdown of this year's operating budget into our various budgetary headings and sub-headings is shown in the table below.

EXPENDITURE		
Budget Heading	Budget Sub-Heading	Amount
Employees	<i>Gross Pay</i>	£863,725
	<i>Unsocial Hours</i>	£45,000
	<i>Employer's NI</i>	£119,809
	<i>Employer's Pension</i>	£172,658
	<i>Expenses</i>	£18,000
	<i>Training</i>	£43,000
	<i>Recruitment</i>	£3,500
	<i>Equipment and Uniform</i>	£27,500
Estates	<i>Estates Maintenance and Repairs</i>	£40,000
	<i>Utilities</i>	£26,000
	<i>Rents</i>	£100,150
	<i>Rates</i>	£30,000
	<i>Sundries</i>	£8,000
Transport	<i>Fuel and Oil</i>	£65,000
	<i>Transport Maintenance and Repairs</i>	£55,000
	<i>Road Tax</i>	£4,500
Capital Asset Replacement Fund		£71,500
Corporate	<i>Pension Fund (Ex-Staff)</i>	£8,616
	<i>Professional Services</i>	£77,000
	<i>Insurance</i>	£89,400
	<i>General Admin</i>	£13,000
	<i>IT</i>	£40,000
	<i>Members' Expenses</i>	£3,000
	<i>Events</i>	£9,500
	<i>Hotels</i>	£6,500
TOTAL GROSS EXPENDITURE		£1,940,358
INCOME		
Permit Fees		£85,000
TOTAL INCOME		£85,000
TOTAL NET EXPENDITURE		£1,855,358

## Main Objectives and Priorities

This section of the Annual Plan defines our main objectives and priorities for the year ahead. It comes before a section on the IFCAs' success criteria and how NWIFCA aims to work towards or meet these this year. However, the objectives laid out in that section do not entirely encompass what we wish to achieve over the next 12 months and so this section describes our primary objectives and priorities for 2025/26.

### Operational

#### North Western Protector

With newer crew members now becoming well established, 2025/26 will see North Western Protector continue to operate at full capacity. We will deliver at least 40 fisheries protection patrols over the year and aim to conduct upwards of 20 fishing vessel boardings and 30 closings. We will also conduct at least 10 patrols of the newly designated Allonby Bay HPMA and look to continue to support NE in their monitoring work for the site and MMO in the control and enforcement of the site.

Furthermore, North Western Protector will continue to deliver our at-sea scientific work across the district, and will conduct at least five research trips over the course of the year.

With a new set of standard operating procedures developed, our Senior IFCO (Master), Hugh Thinnesen, IFCO (Deputy Master), Erik Thinnesen, and IFCO (Engineer) Leon Webber, will work with crew and our senior managers to embed these procedures into normal operational practice. This will include the implementation of pre-patrol plans and post-patrol reports, giving the Authority a greater ability to evidence and report on the fisheries enforcement and survey value North Western Protector brings.

*Lead Officer: Head of Enforcement*

#### Vessel Replacement Strategy

In 2024/25, it was identified that the Authority needs to begin planning for the eventual replacement of North Western Protector. As such, our Head of Enforcement and CEO began drafting a vessel replacement strategy, setting out what the Authority might replace North Western Protector with, when it might replace it and how it could finance this. In addition, this strategy included proposals for the replacement of both our RIBs. At the beginning of 2025/26, officers will present these proposals to members for their consideration, with a view to then finalising a plan for the replacement of our three seagoing assets over the coming years.

*Lead Officer: CEO*

## Drones

Following on from the previous year, officers will continue to utilise the Authority's two unmanned aerial vehicles ('drones') for survey and enforcement work.

### *Enforcement*

With all the necessary policies and procedures now in place, staff will look to develop operational confidence in flying drones at a variety of sites and look to be reactive to intelligence and risk where required. Flights will be tasked from our bi-weekly tasking and coordination group (TCG) meetings where required under operational plans.

Staff will continue to retain logs of their hours to maintain the competency of two hours' flying in every three-month period, as well as maintenance and flight logs for the purpose of servicing at the required times. Staff development of confidence is a key consideration for the coming year. The Enforcement Team's specific objectives are as follows:

- Complete 20 flights across the district
- Broaden the team's knowledge of take-off and landing sites
- Produce pre-defined operational plans for these sites across the district
- Explore beyond visual line of sight certification to give the ability to use more of the operational capability of the drone.





## Science

The district has several large blue mussel (*Mytilus edulis*) beds which are important for the local fishing industry and to protected bird species. It is therefore important that accurate assessments are undertaken to monitor these beds and ensure any permitted fishing activity does not undermine their protection as an important bird food resource. Currently, all mussel beds are surveyed on foot with associated challenges regarding access, safety and resourcing. The main aim for the Science Team's drone is to improve our capacity and accuracy in mussel bed surveying. The technology offers many opportunities to improve our current understanding of the mussel beds and build up a more comprehensive and standardised dataset. However, achieving this goal is complex, and requires officers to develop skillsets in new software and survey techniques, as well as explore novel approaches to data analysis. To achieve full competency in surveying and analysis to this level may take several years. Therefore, the objective for 2025/26 is to build upon last year's progress, and move towards upskilling Science Officers to undertake the appropriate analysis as follows:

- Complete training in relevant 3D model reconstruction software
- Undertake a full survey of one mussel bed using the drone and analyse using software to develop 3D structural images of the bed, with this survey ground-truthed by standard officer surveys to assess accuracy
- Develop a survey and analysis standard operating procedure
- Train a second pilot to increase survey capacity to two
- Explore further research and software analysis that can be applied to survey data and improve our understanding of the mussel bed.

*Lead Officers: Heads of Enforcement and Science*

## Operational Stats

When out on patrol, officers collect a significant amount of data every year regarding fisheries activity sightings and inspections. IFCA's are the only organisations that collect this form of data with regards to non-vessel based activities, intertidal fishing and recreational fishers, which are often data-poor sectors. This information is particularly valuable to both the Authority and other organisations, for building a picture of the activities across the district, identifying changes, undertaking fisheries assessments (e.g. MCZ assessments or Habitats Regulations Assessments [HRAs]) and informing our decision making.

Historically, much of this data has been collected by officers and logged into spreadsheets post-patrol. However, there is now the technology available to streamline this process, making both the collection, storing, and analysis of data more efficient. Therefore, 2025/26 will see a joint project between the Enforcement and Science Teams to introduce a new method of recording operational stats. A new application will be

trialled that allows the Enforcement Team use of live maps and recording of sightings in real-time on a phone or tablet. The data can then be directly transferred to a database, where the Science Team can access this for analysis or transfer onto other mapping software. This process would bypass the need for staff to manually enter data into databases each month, and removes human error associated with this.

The objective for 2025/26 is to develop and implement this new *in situ*, digital recording of IFCOs' operational observations and stats, along with a new database for efficiently storing and analysing this data.

*Lead Officers: Heads of Enforcement and Science*

### Office Moves

The intention for this year is to further explore options for a new property to replace our current Head Office at Carnforth. Whilst it affords us the necessary floorspace, it is not ideal in terms of its layout, age, state of repair and surrounding infrastructure. To that end, we are aiming to move to a new Head Office, remaining within the Lancaster district or surrounding area. Further exploration of appropriate options will be made this year, and if a suitable property is found, the process of relocating will be commenced. Alongside moving the Head Office, a new lock-up facility for our vehicles based at Carnforth will also need to be sought.

NWIFCA and its predecessor organisation has been based out of our current Whitehaven office for several decades now. With the growth and development of the Authority, and of the number of staff based there, the Whitehaven office is no longer suitable for our operational and staffing requirements. We wish to remain in Whitehaven due to its strategic location, and have found a suitable property in the area. The owner of this property is currently going through a planning application with the local council, after which time, we would look to formalise an agreement on the necessary modifications, with a view to work being undertaken, a lease being taken up and the move initiated. Timeframes for any potential move are subject to numerous factors outside of the Authority's control but progress is expected in the coming 12 months.

*Lead Officer: CEO*

## Science

### Research Plan

We have a number of research priorities for 2025/26 to support our fisheries and marine environmental management work. However, as it is a requirement under IFCA Success Criterion 5, a separate Research Plan will be developed and published which will lay out our objectives and priorities in this area. In the meantime, our individual research priorities for 2025/26 are set out below.

*Lead Officer: Head of Science*

### Whitebait Filter Nets

In 2024/25 Byelaw 7 – Fixed Nets was made by the Authority and is awaiting confirmation by Defra. The introduction of this byelaw will, in effect, introduce a ban on whitebait fishing until evidence can demonstrate a sustainable fishery could be permitted in the future. Therefore, further research is needed to understand the whitebait fishery, its extent and impact across the district.

To develop our understanding in this area, this year, Science Officers will undertake a literature review of small-mesh net fishing in estuarine environments and its potential impacts on different species, along with an assessment of the current and historical state of such fishing in the district. This work will then help determine whether further research (e.g. small-mesh surveys) is required in the future to inform management decisions on whether whitebait filter netting could be authorised under Byelaw 7.

*Lead Officer: Head of Science*

### Wirral Netting

In previous years we have had concerns raised, with associated media attention, relating to the wash up of smooth-hound (*Mustelus spp.*) and cetaceans on beaches along the Wirral coast. Individuals have claimed this to be caused by gill netting in the area, however, there is still little evidence to support this, or provide evidence of any alternative causes. This year, Science Officers will conduct a review on the state of gill netting on the Wirral to build a picture of the current state of the fishery, those involved, key areas and potential impacts this activity is having. It will also look to identify potential causes of these wash-ups, from which a research strategy will be derived. The aim is to then undertake in-field surveys alongside industry the following year, to identify catch composition and determine the interaction of this fishery with smooth-hound and cetaceans.

*Lead Officer: Head of Science*

## Brown Shrimp Study

Last year, officers conducted a study looking into the current, and historic, status of the North West's brown shrimp (*Crangon crangon*) fishery. The study was initiated after industry members raised concerns about the decline in both the size and number of shrimps over the past decade. It identified several potential research avenues and knowledge gaps that require addressing to help understand the cause of these declines. Key areas identified were around a lack of landings data for inshore fishers, limited recent data on population, size, sex and age, and limited research into the cause of observed declines.

Following on from this report, the 2025/26 plan will be to develop a research project that will address some of the outstanding knowledge gaps. Initial focus will involve developing a joint industry project collecting samples across the district to understand baseline sex ratio, age and size of shrimps. Officers will also engage with academic bodies to develop work surrounding questions regarding the possible causes for declines identified by stakeholders (e.g. water temperature, water quality, chemical pollutants, predator population increases, habitat change).





## Academic Partnerships



Despite adding an additional Science Officer to our ranks last year, and whilst we continue to deliver our statutory requirements in this area, it is apparent that we do not have the resources to do everything we would *like* to do across our fisheries and marine environmental scientific work. Therefore, in 2025/26, we will look to explore the potential for furthering developing our relationships with academic institutions in the North West, to see if there are opportunities to support one another in specific scientific projects and provide the Authority with an even greater evidence base from which to make its environmental management decisions. This will include exploring opportunities for further collaboration with the various universities we have already established good links with, including the North West institutions of Lancaster University, University of Liverpool and University of Salford, as well as Bangor University in North Wales.

*Lead Officer: Head of Science*

## Enforcement

### Coastal Patrols

To maintain a continued presence throughout the coastal areas of the district, IFCOs will conduct over 750 coastal patrols over the course of the year. These will be a combination of intelligence-led and routine patrols to areas of high coastal fisheries activity, and will include those on foot, in vehicles or on ATVs.



Where there is intelligence raised through bi-weekly TCG meetings highlighting risk to compliance, staff will be tasked in these areas and outputs fed back to the TCG to record developments. Incidents will be recorded on our intelligence database for escalations to senior managers for decisions on the appropriate level of sanction based on any relevant evidence.

Joint working is a continued focus for the coming year with assisting the MMO across the North West, operational patrols with the EA in estuarine areas and multi-agency led intertidal shellfisheries with partners such as the Police, Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority and Environmental Health departments.

*Lead Officer: Head of Enforcement*

## RIB Patrols

NWIFCA always aims to retain an at sea presence through the district and to contribute towards this, we will aim to undertake 20 RIB patrols in 2025/26. As with coastal patrols, these will be a combination of intelligence-led and routine patrols and will include the conducting of 30 fishing vessel boardings and 30 closings.

As with the development of standard operating procedures for Northern Western Protector, Head of Enforcement and Senior IFCOs will develop similar procedures for the two RIBs, Protector Gamma and Bay Protector. These will assist in developing operational procedures which not only form the basis for safe operation but support the efficient collection of patrol data to further reporting.

Upskilling staff, building confidence and resilience within the Enforcement Team is a crucial goal for the coming year. Furthermore, relevant officers will be going through the necessary training to assist with the transition to the new national regulation (Work Boat Code 3), completing courses such as the small ships navigation and radar course. In addition to formal training, in-house training is planned with experienced staff working with colleagues to increase their sea time and associated experience.

*Lead Officer: Head of Enforcement*





## Administration

### Quarterly Reviews

To help monitor the performance of our Administrative Team's functions, our Head of Admin has developed a suite of key areas for continuous assessment. These include:

- administration of our various byelaw permit regimes
- management of members and meetings
- budgetary management
- maintenance of assets
- HR
  - o performance
  - o development
  - o absence
  - o staff survey
  - o grievances
  - o disciplinaries

A new assessment process will be implemented in 2025/26, with associated reporting to the CEO and members for their consideration and direction.

*Lead Officer: Head of Administration*





## Fisheries

### Cockle FMP

Toward the end of last year, officers finalised the development of our first district-specific fisheries management plan (FMP), which will focus on one of our largest and most economically significant fisheries, common cockle (*Cerastoderma edule*). This year, we will consult on it with stakeholders, before bringing it to our members for agreement. Thereafter, we will start to look at implementing the FMP in time for our 2026/27 season. We will consider how the national Cockle FMP needs to be factored into our own district version, and also how ours can inform the national plan, which we will continue to contribute technical expertise towards.



The FMP will set out management principles for our cockle beds across the district, and will focus on things such as survey schedules, biomass and maturity assessments, thresholds for opening, appropriate use of total allowable catches, effort restrictions, economic conditions, cold weather closures and bird food modelling. Ultimately, it will provide a meaningful framework from which officers, members and stakeholders can work to understand how we will manage our cockle fisheries year-on-year and over the longer-term.

*Lead Officer: Head of Science*

### Cockle Season

In 2024/25, the Authority trialled an early opening of the cockle fishery season for beds in Morecambe Bay, with a view to fisheries commencing in July rather than September and closing in February rather than April. However, due to less than favourable biomass, members chose not to open any beds earlier and those that were opened did so from September onwards as in previous years.

For the coming year, we will look to trial this early opening again, which will again be subject to the conditions found on the relevant beds during surveys conducted in the early spring.

*Lead Officer: Head of Science*

### Netting Byelaw

Last year, the Authority made its new Netting Byelaw and submitted it to the MMO for quality assurance. This byelaw will implement a flexible permit scheme for commercial and recreational fixed net fishers, whether operating from a vessel or shore-based. It will legitimise this important fishery and provide consistent regulation across the entire district, whilst enabling the Authority to react quickly to changing circumstances so as to better manage netting for the benefit of affected species, local communities and fishers themselves.

After the MMO's quality assurance process, the byelaw will be submitted to Defra for confirmation. We would hope to have it confirmed and implemented within this reporting period, but to some extent, this is dependent on external factors within MMO and Defra, and so this cannot be guaranteed.

*Lead Officer: CEO*

### Byelaw 3 – Cockles and Mussels Permit Byelaw

In 2024/25, members agreed a broad basis for the implementation of a 'use it or lose it' scheme for Byelaw 3 permit holders. This was on the principle that permitted fishers who do not routinely fish for cockles and / or mussels will not necessarily be eligible to renew their permit during the renewal period. Vacated permits will be offered to those at the top of the waiting list, ensuring that the maximum socio-economic benefit is being realised from the Byelaw 3 permit regime.

In addition to this, members approved a handover scheme for fishers giving up their permits, whereby they could nominate an individual to take up their permit instead. This would be on the basis of being able to demonstrate a direct familial relationship between the permit holder and nominee and may include requirements for the nominee to be below a certain age, to maximise opportunities for local young people.

Further work needs to be undertaken in early 2025/26 to develop the details of these policies to then take to stakeholders for consultation and members for final approval, with a view to implementation in time for the 2026/27 season.

*Lead Officer: CEO*

## Byelaw 4 – Potting Permit Byelaw

In 2024/25, our Science Team carried out further research into the size of sexual maturity of common whelk (*Buccinum undatum*) throughout the district. This work was undertaken to inform the ultimate MCRS for whelk as prescribed in Byelaw 4 and involved working with permit holders to collect samples for analysis. The work led to the Authority agreeing an MCRS of 65mm at the end of 2024/25 and this will be implemented in 2025/26.

The next stage of the Authority's work around the district's whelk potting fishery is to undertake a review of the Byelaw as we approach the three-year review period. This work will involve assessing any further demand for Byelaw 4 permits borne out of the MCRS decision and what the optimum fishing effort capacity of the whelk fishery might be. Determining an optimum fishing effort will be difficult for whelk given there are many difficulties with determine stock assessments at this time. However, it is important for us to explore how we would derive an overall pot limit for the district, which can then be used to firm up our decision-making processes for which vessels receive a permit, and for how many pots. Further work is needed this year to help the Authority arrive at an appropriate effort management system for the whelk fishery.

*Lead Officer: Head of Science*

## Dee Cockle Fishery Regulating Order

NWIFCA is working with Natural Resources Wales (NRW) to plan for the eventual replacement of the current Regulating Order for the Dee Estuary Cockle Fishery, which expires in 2028. Currently, the Authority has no direct involvement in the management of this fishery; this is done solely by NRW. However, in 2024, our members voted to pursue a new joint Regulating Order with NRW, with a view to retaining consistency in the fishery's management, and ensuring continuity across both sides of the English-Welsh border which runs through the middle of the Estuary. This year, senior officers will continue to work closely with NRW to develop the application for a new Regulating Order, along with all other necessary documentation, such as an Impact Assessment and proposed FMP. We will also begin the process of consulting with stakeholders on how a new Regulating Order might look.

*Lead Officer: CEO*

## Marine Environment

### Allonby Bay HPMA

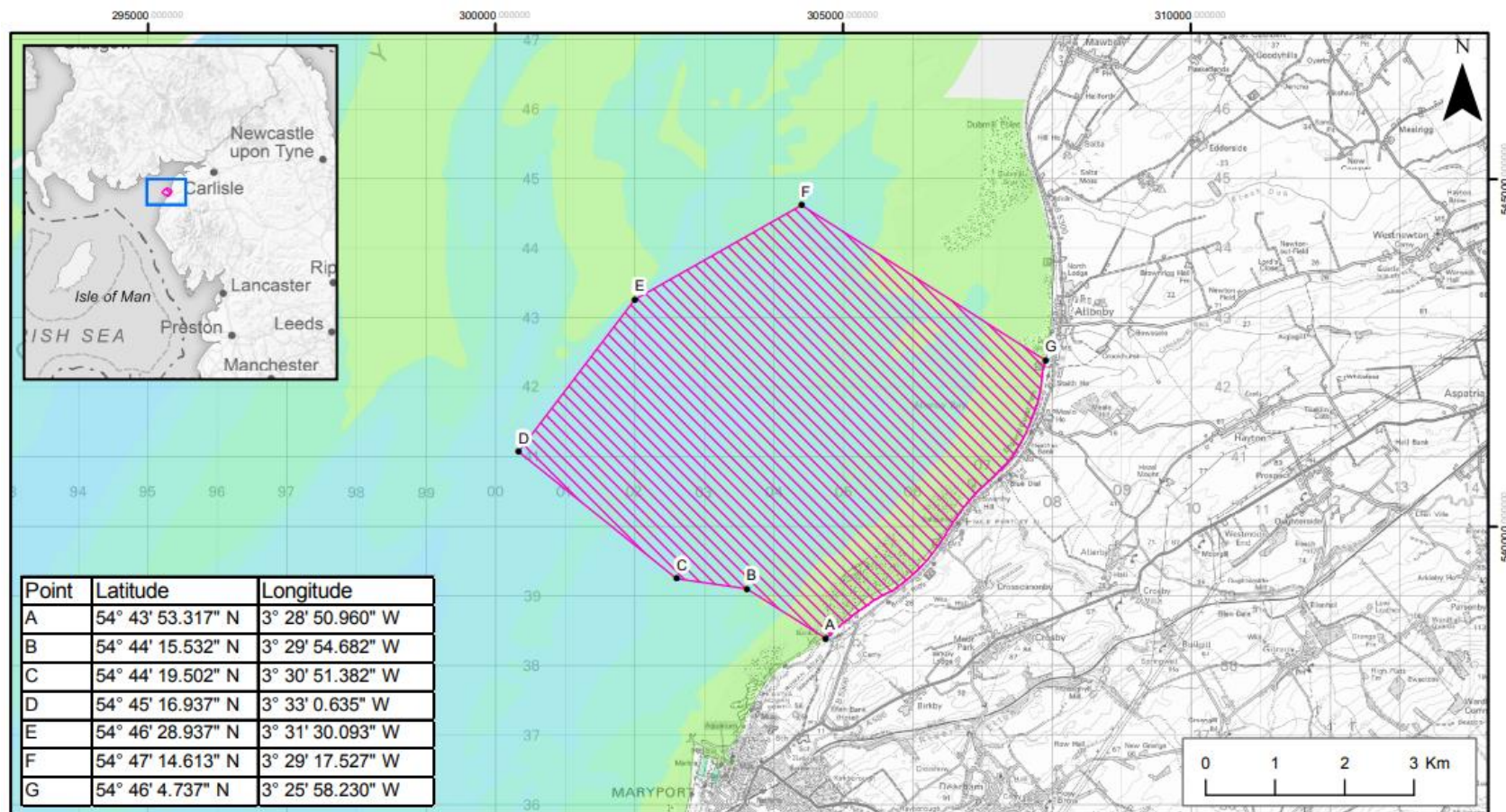
Back in July 2023, Defra designated the UK's first three HPMAs, with the new Allonby Bay HPMA off the Cumbrian coast being the only inshore one, designated for its biodiverse subtidal and seabed habitats. Since then, we have been working closely with our strategic partners at the MMO and NE to develop an effective byelaw and monitoring regime respectively.

We are hoping that the MMO byelaw for the HPMA will be made within this reporting period, and thereafter, we will commence our compliance assurance and enforcement responsibilities towards it. In the meantime, we will continue our work publicising the HPMA, both through our communications work and via officers on the ground so that, when the byelaw is implemented, we have maximised awareness of the HPMA and the associated restrictions on activities therein. To support this, we will conduct at least six at-sea patrols within the HPMA and at least 10 shore-based patrols along its landward boundary.

In addition to delivering our statutory enforcement duties for the HPMA, we also want to continue working closely with NE to support them in delivering their own duties around monitoring the environmental impact of the HPMA. In 2024/25, we assisted NE with their monitoring work, helping them develop a bespoke monitoring methodology and then working with them onboard North Western Protector to conduct several potting surveys in and around the HPMA. This year, we will look to revisit this work and, where other operational priorities allow, repeat and refine these surveys with NE.

*Lead Officer: Head of Science*





### Allonby Bay Highly Protected Marine Area

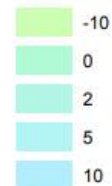
HPMA boundary

• HPMA coordinates

--- 6N Limit

----- 12N Territorial seas limit

### UKHO Depth Areas (metres)



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Map Projection: British National Grid  
Boundary Coordinates Projection: WGS84

## Communications

### Stakeholder Engagement Events

Over the course of this 12 months, NWIFCA will be looking to proactively engage with its primary stakeholders by holding a series of events. Last year, face-to-face events open to our Byelaw 3 (cockle and mussel) stakeholders were held at two locations in the district with good engagement from these focussed events. This year, we will look to focus our engagement on specific stakeholder groups again, namely fishers affected by our Byelaw 3, Byelaw 4 (commercial potting vessel operators) and the new netting byelaw (any relevant commercial and recreational netters). We will communicate directly with these core groups, consult on the most appropriate means of future engagement and look to establish a recurrent regime of events whereby stakeholders' key issues can be discussed, concerns raised, and ideas shared.

We will hold at least three stakeholder engagement events over the course of 2025/26.

*Lead Officer: CEO*

### Website

Having refreshed our website in 2024/25, reviewing its layout, navigability, aesthetics, and content, we will look to add to it this year in terms of it providing visitors with more information about the work the Authority is doing. This will include case studies of specific projects officers have worked on, allowing stakeholders and members of the public to better understand the variety of work we do, and recognise the efforts of our hardworking staff.

*Lead Officer: CEO*

## Governance

### Constitution Review

It is now over three years since NWIFCA's Constitution was reviewed and updated. This year, staff will begin the process of a formal, comprehensive review with an internal assessment of its appropriateness and operability. We will then look to establish a working group of members to develop a new Constitution to ensure it is reflective of a modern, responsive environmental regulator, whilst retaining the necessary governance structure which provides assurance to Defra, our local councils, stakeholders and the wider public that we are exercising our duties appropriately.

*Lead Officer: CEO*



### Risk Register

An organisational risk register will be drafted and submitted to members for approval. This will act as a means by which there can be increased accountability on the Authority's CEO, its senior management team and members. The risk register will highlight key organisational risks, as well as opportunities, and set out a clear action plan for how such risks will be mitigated or opportunities leveraged.

A final version of this risk register will be published on our website by the end of the year.

*Lead Officer: CEO*



## Staff

### Performance and Development

Last year, the Authority implemented a formal performance management system to ensure all staff's performance and development can be planned, monitored and evaluated. This year, we will look to develop on this by working with a digital HR provider to better record and evaluate performance and development.

In addition, we will introduce an internal training calendar, setting out a schedule of training and development work that will be delivered over the course of the year by experienced officers, in order to help everyone develop and keep their skills and experience up to date. This year's operating budget includes a £43,000 for training and a clear set of development objectives focussed on the needs of individuals, teams and the Authority overall will help ensure this budget is spent and used appropriately. There will be specific training for all staff, or select groups, on the following:

- Permit database
- Risks Assessments and Manual Handling
- Further Workboat Code 3 training for seagoing officers
- Drone operating and associated data analysis
- Development of Science Team officers to further RIB helming capabilities

We will also be developing a clear induction policy and procedures for new starters joining the Authority. As 2025/26 begins, we do not hold any vacancies and so do not anticipate any immediate recruitment, which will mean that we can use this period to develop a more structured induction process for new starters joining the Authority in the future, making this bespoke for whether they are joining the Enforcement, Science or Administration Team.

*Lead Officer: CEO*

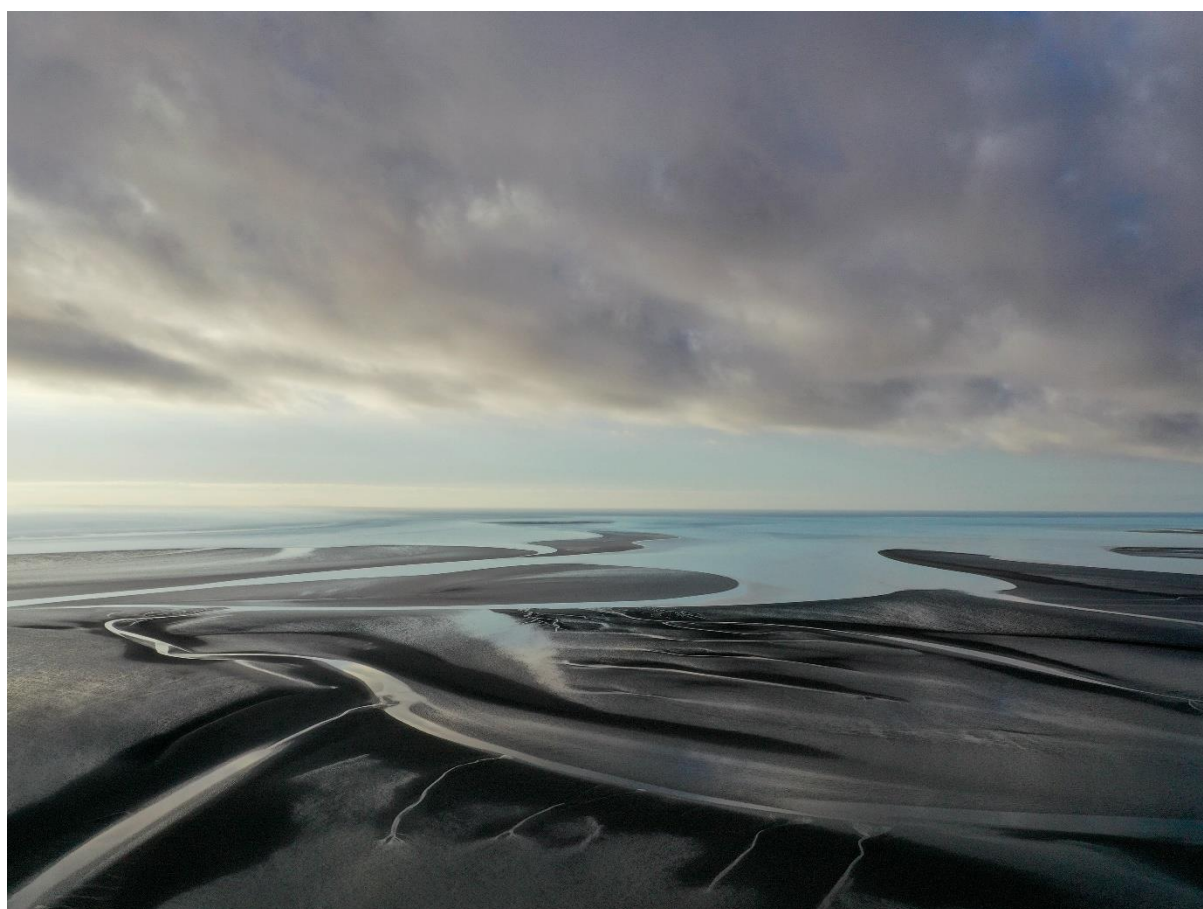




## IFCAs' Success Criteria

This section sets out the five national IFCA success criteria and how NWIFCA intends to deliver against these in 2025/26. In the tables below, we outline specific actions we will take this year to help us work towards or meet each success criterion.

To support the delivery of the national IFCA vision, IFCAs work to a set of success criteria matched with corresponding high-level objectives. The vision, success criteria and high-level objectives are designed to assist in the creation of a shared understanding of the collective aims and objectives of all 10 IFCAs, and focus service delivery towards achievement of the national vision. These national IFCA performance criteria also link directly to the UK Marine Policy Statement.



The following five success criteria have been agreed and adopted nationally by all IFCA's:

**Success Criterion 1:** IFCA's are recognised and heard, balancing the economic needs of their fisheries whilst working in partnership and engaging with stakeholders.

IFCA's will be visible, respected, and trusted regulators within coastal communities and will maintain and deliver strategies to communicate their vision and duties effectively. IFCA's will engage with policy makers, industry, non-governmental organisations, recreational and commercial users and other regulators. They will work jointly and collaboratively with partner organisations across boundaries, participate in and contribute to the development and implementation of regional and national marine policy, including the marine planning regime, and take long-term strategic decisions and manage risks effectively. IFCA's may maintain a national body to coordinate the activities of authorities that are party to arrangements.

**Success Criterion 2:** IFCA's implement a fair, effective and proportionate enforcement regime.

The IFCA enforcement regime is risk-based, makes appropriate use of intelligence, meets legislative standards and complies with the Regulators Code. It should make effective use of the resources available to regulators, complement and align, if possible, with the regimes in adjacent IFCA districts and management by other organisations including the MMO and EA. Consistency and fairness are important, regulatory compliance is promoted, and enforcement action is carried out by trained, professional officers working to clear standards of conduct.

**Success Criterion 3:** IFCA's use evidence based and appropriate measures to manage the sustainable exploitation of sea fisheries resources and deliver marine environmental protection within their districts.

The IFCA's were created as statutory inshore regulators by MaCAA. They are relevant authorities for implementing international environmental commitments including the Birds, Habitats, Water and Marine Strategy Framework Directives and make an important contribution to securing a network of well-managed MPAs. FMPs identify local management measures which should be based on evidence, timely, subject to appropriate consultation and in step with national initiatives and priorities. IFCA's should balance the socio-economic benefits of exploiting sea fisheries resources with the need to protect the environment. They should make a contribution to sustainable development.

**Success Criterion 4:** IFCA's have appropriate governance in place and staff are trained and professional.

IFCAs are statutory authorities and sit within the local government family. Authority members may be either general members or local councillors. They comply with Codes of Conduct and the Standing Orders that apply to meetings of local government committees. General members are appointed on merit, through open competition and for a fixed term. They are subject to annual performance appraisals. IFCAs are funded by levy, charged to their member councils. Funding originates in local taxation. IFCAs are accountable for their use of public resources and should ensure that a proper auditing regime provides confidence in their commitments and spend of public money. They should make effective use of their resources, including staff and assets. IFCAs have a statutory obligation to prepare and publish Annual Plans and Annual Reports.

**Success Criterion 5:** IFCAs make the best use of evidence to deliver their objectives.

IFCAs are statutory regulators for their districts. Decision-making should be based on evidence. All IFCAs are supported by officers who pool their expertise and share best practice through a Technical Advisory Group (TAG). Programmes of research activity and monitoring are planned, developed, and updated in consultation with partners. These programmes inform management decisions and support justification for additional research and evidence gathering.

## Success Criterion 1

IFCAs are recognised and heard, balancing the economic needs of the fishery whilst working in partnership and engaging with stakeholders.

Indicator	Workstream Objective	Lead Officer(s)	Intended Outcome
SC1A: Maintain a database of stakeholder contacts that has been reviewed and updated.	Our stakeholder database will be reviewed and updated accordingly and will be integrated into the permit and stakeholder database.	CEO Head of Enforcement	Met
SC1B: Complete a review of our communication strategy and implementation plan.	A new communications strategy will be created, focusing on how we will leverage different communication methods and approaches for different purposes and towards different stakeholder groups.  Our social media platforms will be reviewed and updated to ensure we are maximising our reach and impact across our stakeholders and the wider public.	CEO	Met
SC1C: Review our website monthly.	A new regime of regular website reviews will be implemented, to ensure it is up-to-date and reflects our current regulatory position.	CEO	Met
SC1D: Review our website and ensure it meets the objectives of our communications strategy.	The website will be restructured and modified to ensure it remains engaging to visitors and traffic is optimised. This will include the use of new, higher quality and more representative images and more interactive features, along with case studies of officers' work to highlight significant achievements.		Met
SC1E: Review all our Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) and have a clear plan in place to update them where necessary.	All extant MoUs will be reviewed to ensure they are concurrent and fit-for-purpose.  New MoUs will be drafted collaboratively and will ensure that NWIFCA can leverage partner organisations' expertise and assets, provide our expertise and assets appropriately whilst not impinging on our ability to deliver our statutory objectives.	CEO Head of Enforcement Head of Science	Met



<p>SC1F: Participate appropriately, proportionately and at the right level of delegation in regional and national fisheries and conservation activity.</p>	<p>Participation in regional and national forums will be reviewed and new opportunities for further participation identified.</p> <p>We will continue to participate in, and contribute towards, the MMO's Regional Fisheries Group for the North West.</p> <p>We will continue to contribute to the development of wider IFCA policies and procedures via the IFCAs' Chief Officer Group, National Inshore Marine Enforcement Group (NIMEG) and TAG.</p> <p>We will continue to contribute to the development of national marine and fisheries policy via Defra's Marine and Fisheries Chief Officer Group.</p> <p>We will continue to act as the primary technical advisor to the Association of IFCA (AIFCA) in the development and implementation of Defra's national Cockle FMP.</p>	<p>CEO Head of Enforcement Head of Science</p>	<p>Met</p>
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## Success Criterion 2

IFCAs implement a fair, effective and proportionate enforcement regime.

Indicator	Workstream Objective	Lead Officer(s)	Intended Outcome
SC2A: Ensure our enforcement risk register and strategy are published and available on our website.	Our Compliance and Enforcement Strategy was originally drafted in 2012 and, whilst it has been intermittently updated, is in need of a wholesale review. This review will be conducted this year, and any significant proposed changes will be brought to the committee and, where appropriate, consulted on with our stakeholders.  We do not currently have an enforcement risk register or similar. This will be created this year.  Our vessel and survey plans will be reviewed and updated accordingly.	Head of Enforcement	Working towards
SC2B: Work with other regulators to achieve consistent quality, application, and enforcement of management measures.	This year, NWIFCA will continue to foster our relationships with partner organisations, in particular MMO, NE and EA. Wherever possible, new opportunities for partnership working with other regulators and non-regulatory organisations will be sought to help support our work.	CEO Head of Enforcement Head of Science	Met
SC2C: Compile records of enforcement activity in a standard format, provide them to NIMEG and publish on our website.	We need to improve the timeliness within which we record our inspection and enforcement activity, to ensure records are available to our partner organisations (namely MMO) and publicly to our stakeholders. Inspection and enforcement records will be uploaded on the national system within one week of the activity / action taking place, and onto our website within one month.  We will continue to supply enforcement statistics to NIMEG to support the IFCAs' national enforcement work.	Head of Enforcement Head of Administration	Working towards
SC2D: Adopt the national code of conduct for IFCOs, review annually and publish on website.	We will review our current code of conduct for IFCOs to ensure it is up-to-date and relevant and, once this is complete, publish it on our website, as it currently is not on there.	Head of Enforcement	Met

SC2E: The code of conduct for IFCOs is reflected in work objectives and annual appraisals for all warranted officers.	Following the review of the code of conduct, IFCOs will be trained on this and reference to it will be made in all IFCOs' future work objectives and performance appraisals.	Head of Enforcement Head of Administration	Working towards
SC2F: Warranted officers attain accreditation and all officers undertake continued professional development (CPD).	<p>Our continued participation in the MMO-led marine enforcement officer accreditation scheme was reviewed in 2024/25 and it was decided we will not continue to participate. This is due to other operational priorities and the improved development of our internal training plans and of IFCA's more generally.</p> <p>A culture of CPD will be maintained to support all staff with developing and expanding their skillsets. A training budget of £43,000 has been allocated for 25/26 and this will be utilised proportionally across the Authority to ensure all staff have access to appropriate CPD opportunities.</p> <p>We will continue to formalise our training routes towards becoming seagoing officers, helming RIBs, operating drones etc. so that all staff, in particular new starters understand the training expectations on them, and opportunities afforded to them.</p> <p>We will continue to contribute towards the national IFCA training programme, primarily through our Heads of Enforcement and Science. Mandatory training for all IFCOs will be delivered to nationally agreed standards. We will look to contribute towards the improvement of a formalised training programme for IFCA Science Officers.</p>	CEO Head of Enforcement Head of Science Head of Administration	Met

### Success Criterion 3

IFCAs use evidence based and appropriate measures to manage the sustainable exploitation of sea fisheries resources and deliver marine environmental protection within their districts.

Indicator	Workstream Objective	Lead Officer(s)	Intended Outcome
SC3A: Record site-specific management considerations for MPAs and report progress to the Authority's committee.	Our MPA Monitoring and Control Plan will be reviewed and updated as necessary. HRAs for new fisheries will be completed and submitted to NE for assessment within two weeks of a decision to open a fishery being made.	Head of Science	Met
SC3B: Data analysis and evidence supporting new management measures will be published on our website.	Data and evidence used in impact assessments, HRAs etc. will continue to be published on our website. Stakeholders will be consulted where appropriate on data and evidence collection methodologies and interpretation, and on any suggested management measures.	Head of Science	Met
SC3C: Management information (e.g. sampling and / or survey results) will be collected periodically after new management measures have been implemented, to demonstrate the effectiveness of the intervention.	Our Science Team will continue to monitor the impacts of new management measures and report these to our Technical, Scientific and Byelaws Sub-Committee (TSB) and full committee as appropriate. Post-implementation surveys will be scheduled and delivered, working with partner organisations where appropriate. Results will demonstrate degree of effectiveness of new measures and inform ongoing fisheries management. They will be reported to the committee and on our website. Inspection and enforcement data will be analysed to provide additional information towards assessment of the effectiveness of new management measures.	Head of Science Head of Enforcement	Working towards
SC3D: Develop a range of criteria-based management options that are explained to stakeholders through the website.	New management measures will be developed after assessment of options against criteria which define objectives.	Head of Science Head of Enforcement	Working towards



SC3E: New management measures selected for development and implementation will be delivered within agreed timescales.	We will seek to define timescales alongside the decision to affirm any new management measures and communicate these timescales to affected stakeholders and on our website, so that they can understand when such measures are likely to be implemented.	CEO Head of Science	Met
SC3F: Include shared agreed objectives and actions from FMPs in its own Annual Plan.	At the beginning of 25/26, no FMPs have yet been implemented. If any FMPs are implemented during this year, we will review them and incorporate relevant measures or considerations into our own management measures.	CEO Head of Science	Met
SC3G: Progress made in relevant FMP areas, including Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY) commitments, will be noted in the Annual Report.	We will continue to act as the primary technical advisor to AIFCA in the development and implementation of Defra's national Cockle FMP.  We will continue to develop, finalise and implement our internal Cockle FMP this year.	CEO Head of Science	Met

## Success Criterion 4

IFCAs have appropriate governance in place and staff are trained and professional.

Indicator	Workstream Objective	Lead Officer(s)	Intended Outcome
SC4A: Publish an Annual Plan on our website setting out the main objectives and priorities for the next financial year; a copy will be sent to the Secretary of State (SoS).	This Annual Plan will be agreed by our committee, published on our website and sent to the SoS by the end of March 2025.	CEO	Met
SC4B: Publish an Annual Report on our website describing activities and performance, and a summary of audited financial information; a copy will be sent to the SoS.	Our Annual Report for 2025/26 will be drafted, agreed with our committee and published on our website and sent to the SoS by the end of November 2026.	CEO	Met
SC4C: All staff will have annual performance management plans in place and receive annual appraisals.	<p>A standardised performance management process for all staff is in place. A new performance management plan form for each staff member is now the basis against which performance is appraised. A new appraisal form will be created. Staff will receive a six-month appraisal, no earlier than 1<sup>st</sup> October and no later than 15<sup>th</sup> November 2025 and will receive a final appraisal for the year no earlier than 1<sup>st</sup> April and no later than 15<sup>th</sup> May 2026.</p> <p>All staff will receive in-house training on the new performance management process, with line managers receiving additional training on the objective setting and appraisal processes.</p>	CEO Head of Administration	Met
SC4D: An efficient secretariat of staff support Authority meetings which are held quarterly and are	Head of Administration will continue to act as clerk for our Finance and Personnel Sub-Committee (F&P), whilst all clerking duties for our full committee and TSB meetings are delegated to our Administration Officers.	Head of Administration	Met

quorate. Meeting documentation will meeting standing orders.	<p>Papers for meetings will be sent to members at least one week prior to the meeting, and draft minutes will be sent out within six weeks.</p> <p>All relevant Authority meeting dates, papers and minutes will be published on our website.</p>		
SC4E: Through the Annual Report, demonstrate how marine, land and water management mechanisms in the district have worked responsively and effectively together.	The 2025/26 Annual Report will include an assessment of how our marine management measures have interacted with associated land and water management. We will work closely with relevant partner organisations (e.g. MMO, NE and EA) to help demonstrate this.	CEO Head of Science	Working towards

## Success Criterion 5

IFCAs make the best use of evidence to deliver their objectives.

Indicator	Workstream Objective	Lead Officer(s)	Intended Outcome
SC5A: Demonstrate progress towards identifying our evidence needs by publishing a research plan.	A separate long-term research plan for 2025/26 and beyond will be produced and published on our website.	Head of Science	Working towards
SC5B: Publish a research report that demonstrates how evidence has supported decision making.	A research report for 2025/26 will be published on our website by November 2026.	Head of Science	Working towards
SC5C: Contribution towards TAG and national evidence needs will be recorded in our Annual Report.	Our Science Team will continue to contribute towards TAG and relevant actions and outcomes will be recorded in the Annual Report for this year.	CEO Head of Science	Met



