

NWIFCA Quarterly Meeting:

19th March 2026

REPORT NO.
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CEO QUARTERLY REPORT

26TH NOVEMBER 2025 – 9TH MARCH 2026

Purpose: For members' information.

Recommendations: The report is received.

1. Authority Committees

A meeting of the Technical, Science and Byelaw Sub-Committee (TSB) was held on 10th February. This was an in-depth meeting with discussions on management in relation to Byelaw 3 (Cockle and Mussel Hand-Gathering Permit) and Byelaw 4 (Potting Permit). With regards to the latter, it was agreed to reopen applications for whelk permits, with a maximum of 2,500 new pots to be permitted, of no more than 500 per vessel. For Byelaw 3, the sub-committee approved the adoption of a Minimum Use Policy for our cockle and mussel permit holders, which will be implemented for the 2026/27 season. This will see a small sub-group of TSB members deciding annually whether to set a minimum use threshold (by days) for permit holders, and if so, what that threshold shall be. Permit holders not meeting that threshold will not be eligible to renew their permit for the following season. There will be an appeals process as part of this policy.

I am delighted to welcome Matthew Burdekin as our newest member of the Authority. Matthew is a former NWIFCA IFCO and brings a wealth of experience from his time with us, his other previous roles and in his current role working for Lancaster Port Commission. We still hold two Marine Management Organisation (MMO) appointee vacancies. We were recently informed that our councillor for Wirral Council, Cllr. Davies has vacated his position, and we therefore await appointment of a new Wirral councillor. I thank Cllr. Davies for his input during his time with the Authority.

2. Finances

The Authority's Financial Report for Quarter 3 of 2025/26 is provided in a separate report to this meeting and will be discussed under the relevant agenda item.

Following the agreement of the budget for 2026/27 at the previous meeting, we have issued letters to all nine constituent councils informing them of the 4.4% agreed increase and their levy amount for next year. It is incumbent on me to inform members that our largest levy-paying council, Lancashire County Council, have queried the 2026/27 levy, citing concerns about the above-inflation increase. I have responded to Lancashire County Council explaining our governance process and how this levy increase was agreed upon, as well as providing them with relevant meeting papers and reports for them to pass on to their Cabinet Minister who signs off on this and who was queried the increase. At the time of writing, we have not heard back from them, but I will of course keep members informed accordingly.

We have now received the outstanding amounts of Defra RDEL funding for 2025/26, totalling £143,125. This is to support our work around marine protected area (MPA) management, marine licensing and the management of the Allonby Bay Highly Protected Marine Area (HPMA) and was on top of the £50,000 for fisheries management plans (FMPs) received earlier in the year.

The Association of IFCAs (AIFCA) has submitted a funding bid to Defra on the behalf of all ten IFCAs for the Government's Spending Review period 2026-29. If successful, this bid would amount to £255,888 per year for NWIFCA for this three-year period¹ (£767,664 total).

Regardless of the outcome of this AIFCA bid, we now have enough money in our RDEL fund to continue to fund our RDEL-funded Administration Officer post for the next eight to nine years. This is why we were able to commit to turning this post permanent. If the AIFCA bid for the next three years is successful, I will bring recommendations to our Finance and Personnel Sub-Committee (F&P) at the appropriate juncture with regards to how we might spend this additional funding.

3. Estates

We have now moved our Whitehaven-based staff to our new office in the Gordon Thomson House (the 'Fish Hall') across the other side of the harbour. The new office has been refurbished to a modern standard we are situated next door to our MMO colleagues there. We have retained occupation of Duncan Square, and I have no progress to report on reaching a resolution with Cumberland Council regarding ownership of that property; I have chased them again for an update. In the meantime, it will be used for ongoing storage.

Following the refurbishment of the new Whitehaven office, we will be next be refurbishing the Head Office in Carnforth following the decision to allow the break clause there to lapse and therefore renew the lease for a further four years. The office needs modernisation and better utilisation of floorspace and this project will involve relocation of the staff meeting room to the attic, with the current meeting room replaced by a new communal space and kitchen, and the Admin Office being opened up to provide them more space and storage.

We are exploring the relocation of our Carnforth lock-up and have found a much more suitable property in the town. Further details around the lease need to be finalised before I decide on whether to relocate there.

4. Vessels and Vehicles

We have now gone out to tender on a new ~10m catamaran patrol and survey vessel. The tender will close in the coming weeks. We will then review submissions, with a view to generating a shortlist for further dialogue with selected boatyards, including visits. Our Vessel Task and Finish Group, which includes four officers and four members, continues to lead on the decision-making process here.

Over the winter period, the North Western Protector crew have been working to draw up a plan for proposed improvement works to the vessel. Subsequently, this has been reviewed and approved by me, and Head of Enforcement, Joe Moulton, and the crew are now in the process of collating final quotes to inform selection of suppliers for various works. This project will involve two periods of dry dock; one in Workington in the coming months, which will focus on the installation of new trim tabs, along with other works, and then an extended period out of the water in the autumn / winter, potentially somewhere further afield, where works will include installation of new jet drive steering cylinders. Due process continues for such procurement, with jobs over £10,000 requiring three quotes, and individual jobs over £50,000 being sent to the Chair for additional scrutiny and approval.

¹ £53,696 per annum for FMP development and implementation.

£53,696 per annum for MPA management.

£53,696 per annum for marine licensing.

£94,800 per annum for management of Allonby Bay HPMA.

5. Communications and Engagement

With the previous decision to have our Carnforth-based IFCO (Intel), Anthony Graham focus solely on delivering our Intel Officer role, with him stepping back from frontline IFCO duties, I have been reviewing the IFCO provision from our Carnforth Office. With Anthony no longer acting as an IFCO from Carnforth, this left our IFCO (Comms), Grace Edwards as our sole IFCO resource for the office. With her role also being dual, it was deemed there would not be capacity going forward for her to continue to deliver the Comms Officer role alongside her routine IFCO duties. As such, her role will be recast from the beginning of 2026/27 to being solely an IFCO. This of course means that we will need to reallocate our Comms Officer duties within the Executive, and the Senior Management Team (SMT) have concluded that the most logical place for this to sit is within the Administration Team. As such, in the coming weeks, we will be commencing an internal recruitment exercise to appoint one of our Admin Officers to take on a dual Comms Officer role, with the job title Senior Administration Officer (Comms). This will involve a promotion from Grade 6 to Grade 5, as I have job evaluated the new role and it falls within this higher grade bracket.

During this reporting period there have been several consultations launched, ongoing and / or closed.

- Byelaw 3 Minimum Use Policy consultation
 - o This consultation opened on 21st October and ran for 11 weeks until 5th January. It was intended to gather views from stakeholders on the Authority's proposals to implement minimum use thresholds for Byelaw 3 permit holders for the hand-gathering of mussels and / or cockles. The results of this consultation informed some amendments to the policy, which was then adopted at the TSB meeting of 10th February.
- Wirral Netting and Angling call for evidence
 - o This was to invite information from anglers and netters in the Wirral and Mersey Estuary area regarding the recent spate of reports of wash-ups of marine life in the area, in particular smooth-hound. This call for evidence was open until early January, but we had no responses. The Science Team have conducted further work to assess how we might involve local fishers in this study. I have approved the provision to offer fishers £150 to support us with assessing catch composition in their nets.
- Cockle FMP consultation
 - o This has been a significant consultation on our draft Cockle FMP, with stakeholders invited to share their views on the proposed management therein. The consultation was launched in November and has been extended by a month to now close at the end of March. Our Head of Science, Anna Plumeridge will be leading on the assessment of these consultation responses to inform any amendments to the draft FMP with a view to a finalised draft being brought to TSB in May 2026 for consideration.
- Byelaw 10 (Mobile Nets) consultation
 - o An initial, informal consultation to get stakeholders' views on what approaches they would and would not like to see us take in the drafting of our new mobile nets byelaw. This ran for two months, closing mid-January, and the responses have been used to inform the initial draft byelaw, which Joe is working on.
- Byelaw 3 Cockle Season
 - o Following this season's trial early opening, early closure (July to February, instead of September to April), stakeholders have been consulted on as to whether they would wish to see this trial season made permanent, revery back to the original season, or some alternative. The consultation closed in February, and the results will inform the recommendation which officers will bring to an Extraordinary General Meeting of the TSB, which will follow today's full Authority meeting.

In the first few months of 2026, we have held three separate face-to-face stakeholder engagement events with our Byelaw 3 fishermen. These were in Wallasey on 14th January, Grange-over-Sands on 16th January, and Rhydymwyn in North Wales on 4th March. These events were very well attended and were an extremely useful opportunity for officers to hear the views of our cockle and mussel fishermen, as well as discuss various important issues. The events also served as an opportunity for stakeholders to provide in-person responses to the various relevant consultations listed above, rather than having to do so online. I extend my thanks to members Phil Capper (Chair), Cllr. Norris and Steve Brown who all attended at least one of these meetings to support officers and talk to stakeholders.

6. HR

I have referenced the change to our comms functions in the previous section.

Following the decision at last November's F&P meeting, our RDEL-funded Admin Officer, Stephanie Reid and our Science Officer (H&S), Robin Love, were informed that they were being made permanent, and they have had new contracts issued accordingly. From April, the Science Officer (H&S) post will be council levy-funded, as per the agreements at November's F&P and December's full Authority, whilst Steph's Admin Officer post will remain RDEL-funded, again, as agreed.

The Executive had its quarterly face-to-face team meeting and Christmas luncheon in Carnforth on 18th December.

Our Head of Science, Anna returned from her four-month annual leave / sabbatical period on 2nd March. Senior Science Officer, Jonathan Haines was appointed as Acting Head of Science for this four-month period and did an excellent job; I extend my thanks to him for his efforts during this period, as well as to the rest of the Science Team who all continued to work diligently during Anna's absence.

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.

8. Byelaws

Having submitted Byelaw 7 (Netting Byelaw) to Defra for confirmation on 2nd October, we heard little from them in the following months. However, in the new year, Defra were in touch and raised an issue regarding an ongoing review they were conducting into shore-based bass netting. This review has the potential to affect the Netting Byelaw in that the byelaw makes provision for an entitlement to retain bass as a by-catch in commercial shore-set intertidal nets. Pending the results of Defra's review, the continued provision for these bass entitlements remains uncertain. Joe and I have been in discussions with Defra to discuss potential next steps, and I have sent an email to them confirming our concerns around the ongoing delay to this byelaw, the potential for the bass entitlements to be removed, and a steer on the Authority's potential preferred options. Defra are considering this email and will hopefully get back to me soon. In the meantime, the outcome of their review remains unclear and so we are unsure as to whether there will be ministerial appetite for the bass entitlements to remain in the byelaw.

I am pleased to be able to inform members that our joint application for the new Dee Estuary Cockle Fishery Regulating Order was submitted to Defra and Welsh Government in January. Discussions between ourselves and Natural Resources Wales (NRW) as applicants, and WG and Defra continue, as we provide further information to them and we begin to develop the proposed FMP that will form the

basis for the Order. Following a meeting between me, Joe and NRW colleagues in North Wales on 9th February, we have agreed the broad principles for transitional management of the fishery under the new Order and how licence fees will be set and apportioned.

We have now agreed a memorandum of understanding with the MMO for the monitoring and enforcement of the forthcoming fishing and anchoring byelaws in Allonby Bay HPMA. The two byelaws are still with Defra and have not yet been submitted to ministers for confirmation, so timeframes as to when these will come into force are still unclear, but it is unlikely to be until late 2026 at the earliest.

Updates on other byelaw-related form part of other sections of this report.

9. External Engagement / Other CEO Work

I attended AIFCA Members' Forums on 2nd December and 3rd March along with our Chair, Phil, as well as the AIFCA Directors' Meeting on 3rd March, all online.

I attended the MMO's Regional Fisheries Group online on 2nd December.

Joe and I held an online meeting with Welsh Government Fisheries counterparts on 7th January to discuss ongoing intel and operational issues with the Three Rivers and Burry Inlet cockle fisheries in South Wales.

Along with other IFCA colleagues, I attended an online Defra briefing on FMP implementation on 12th January.

I attended an online meeting with the North West Coastal Forum on 13th January to discuss a potential trial for more sub-regional focus for marine planning in the North West.

I attended Byelaw 3 stakeholder events with cockle and mussel fishermen on 14th January (Wallasey), 16th January (Grange-over-Sands) and 4th March (Rhydymwyn).

On 15th January, Joe and I travelled to Edinburgh for a meeting between northern IFCAs and representatives from the Scottish Regional Inshore Fisheries Groups (RIFGs). The meeting was organised by AIFCA colleagues with the support of the Blue Marine Foundation and the Scottish-based Sustainable Inshore Fisheries Trust. The meeting was very useful and enlightening and has helped with developing contacts with our Scottish counterparts. Joe is looking to arrange a meeting with the Chair of the North West RIFG to discuss their plans for fisheries in the Solway Firth, in particular cockles.

I chaired a third meeting of the newly formed North West Fisheries Community of Practice on 22nd January. This is an initiative setup by the North West Marine Ecosystems (NWME) initiative and has looked to establish an information sharing group for individuals and organisations involved in marine fisheries research in the North West. The initiative has been slow to get off the ground, and I have shared other ideas with NWME colleagues on how this might gain better traction going forward, as I believe there is potential value in the concept.

Over 28th and 29th January I attended the annual Coastal Futures Conference in London. This event brings together stakeholders and organisation involved in coastal management across the UK. It again proved to be an excellent opportunity to learn more about wider work in the coastal / inshore environment and for networking.

The following week, I attended the National Symposium on Inshore and Small-Scale Fisheries in Newcastle, 4th-5th February. This event was a follow-up to events held in Whitby and Poole in 2024 and was organised by the newly created Inshore and Small-Scale Fisheries Consortium (ISSF), which is made up of various organisations, including AIFCA. The symposium attempted to bring together consensus on the key issues facing the inshore fishing industry in the UK, and, more importantly, what the priority solutions were. The ISSF will then be taking these solutions to Defra for further discussion on how central government can better support smaller-scale fisheries going forward and address the

widespread declines in this part of the industry. I was heartened to see strong representation from the North West inshore fishing industry in attendance in Newcastle.

Along with colleagues from the MMO, I participated in an interview of a prospective Kent & Essex IFCA member on 11th February.

I attended an online meeting of the IFCAs' Chief Officer Group (COG) on 12th February.

I went to Northumberland IFCA's office on 18th February for a meeting with colleagues from the other northern IFCAs, AIFCA, Defra and the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (Cefas) on the Coastal Health Programme. This is a programme of work being led by Cefas with the aim of providing a framework for how central government and local authorities (including IFCAs) plan for, and respond to, significant marine environmental mortality events that are not under the remit of regional standing environment groups (*i.e.* because they are not caused by any form of pollution event). This work was stimulated by the mass crab mortality events seen in the North East in recent years.

On 23rd February I visited Whitehaven colleagues in our new office there, along with Alison and Joe.

Mark Taylor, North Western IFCA CEO, 9th March 2026.

Appendix I – Selected NWIFCA Admin Team Stats (Q3 2025/26)

KPI	Actuals	Max.	RAG	Previous Quarter's RAG
BYELAWS				
<i>Byelaw 3 (Cockle and Mussel)</i>				
Permit holders using database	125	150	G	A
Permit renewals	NA	150	NA	NA
New permits	NA	NA	NA	NA
Waiting list number (of which under 18)	162 (15)	NA	NA	NA
Late / no returns	21	NA	G	G
<i>Byelaw 4 (Potting)</i>				
Permit renewals	10	NA	NA	NA
New permits	2	NA	NA	NA
Late / no returns	6	NA	G	G
AUTHORITY				
<i>Full Authority</i>				
Vacancies	3	30	A	A
Councillors' attendance	6	10	G	G
MMO appointees' attendance	8	14	A	A
Statutory members' attendance	3	2	A	G
<i>TSB</i>				
MMO appointees' attendance	6	7	G	G

Statutory members' attendance	2	3	A	G
<i>Ex-officio</i> members' attendance	1	2	A	A
ASSETS				
Vehicle checks conducted	20	20	G	G
Monthly kit checks	34	54	R	A
HR				
TOIL days taken	59	NA	G	G
Sick leave days	26	NA	A	A
Carers' leave days	0	NA	G	G
Volunteer days	0	NA	NA	NA
Unsocial hours	815	NA	TBC ²	NA
Outstanding grievances	0	NA	G	G
Outstanding disciplinaries	0	NA	G	G

² New metric. Need to start monitoring this over an extended period to see what is normal / to be expected.