

TSB Meeting (Zoom)
12 May 2020 10:00 a.m.

AGENDA
ITEM
7

Corona virus working restrictions

Purpose of Report: Information on working under virus restrictions

Recommendation: Receive the report

Background

1. Preparations for possible restrictions and home working were commenced in mid-February 2020. All Officers were instructed to consider if they could work at home and what additional equipment they would need to work remotely. All Officers were provided with remote access software for their computers instructions on its use and training as required.

Start of Restrictions and immediate actions

2. Restrictions commenced in full on 23 March 2020
3. Government guidance was implemented including:
 - a. All officers were instructed to commence home working if possible from 23 March
 - b. An isolation rule imposed for vulnerable officers or their families
 - c. Shore and sea patrols were suspended
 - d. Survey and sampling was suspended
 - e. The NWIFCA meeting on 19 March was cancelled
 - f. One named officer was assigned to work in the Carnforth and Whitehaven offices regularly to receive and send post, issue permits and handle important administration.

Urgent actions completed by end April

4. The Health and Safety policy and all risk assessments were reviewed to identify work which could be continue and how it could be done within government guidelines designed to reduce spread of the virus.
5. Officers able to continue working were identified and new work programmes agreed.
6. Weekly manager meetings were instigated from 15 April to review health and wellbeing of officers, monitor continuing work and discuss current issues across all teams.
7. Review shellfish sampling for local Authorities (essential to maintain shellfish bed classifications) and consider if sampling could continue at all locations.

Communications

8. Defra instigated monthly meetings with IFCA Chief Officers COG from 2 April.
9. IFCA Chief Officers Group commenced weekly meetings 1April,

Online meetings

10. From the start of restrictions all internal, external, statutory and public face to face meetings were cancelled. All meetings listed in the continuing work above and below are being held by phone or online using tele or video conferencing. The main software platforms in use are Zoom and skype. The Authority has procured a business license for Zoom which is already being used frequently. It is a very effective and powerful tool for continuing routine internal business and meetings with partner bodies.

On 4 April the Government enacted a new SI enabling Local Authorities, their committees, joint committees and outside bodies including IFCA to continue business using online meetings. Under the provisions of this SI, which was circulated to members, the NWIFCA plans to hold an online TSB meeting 12 May. The agenda, Minutes of the February meeting and some papers have been sent out. More will follow with this paper.

11. Many Council bodies and Committees including IFCA are required to provide public access to statutory meetings. The SI shows the importance attached to this provision to ensure the public can join meetings effectively and participate in Authority meetings when appropriate under standing orders.
12. Councils and other IFCA are as rapidly as possible considering how the requirements for public access to statutory meetings can be met when meetings take place on line. Members should be aware that for IFCA will limited resources and access to IT technical expertise this is a significant additional burden on holding meetings. To date at the time of writing no IFCA has held a statutory meeting with public access on line. Even Local Authorities are moving relatively slowly to develop on line meetings with only urgent meetings such as planning committees taking place on line.
13. I have not yet determined if and how public access to meetings is best provided but will investigate further for future meetings. Zoom software has provision for meetings to be 'live-streamed' on line so that viewers can watch and hear the meeting on screen as it takes place. They may also be able to make written comments on line. For the May 12 TSB, this facility will be investigate and tested. Public questions and comments will not be answered during the meeting.
14. We understand that online meetings do not allow everyone to attend and could cause some to feel disenfranchised leading to complaints. Some people do not have computer or the expertise to use one, Some do not have access to the internet. The limitations of technology may reduce the quality and detail of debate. Discussions may take longer to allow everyone to participate and be frustrating. There needs to be a secure system for recording votes. Unwanted intrusion into meetings could become a problem if the meeting details are published widely or on line.
15. IFCA Chief Officers as a group have discussed dealing with urgent statutory business on line and the risk of legal challenge if stakeholders are prevented from attending meetings because they are held online. For IFCA the main urgent matters of most interest to the fishing industry, most likely to attract attention and give rise to challenge are fishery management items such as the opening and closing of fisheries, the making of byelaws and decisions on other fishery management regulations.
16. All Chief Officers agreed that their advice to members would be to reduce meetings to essential matters only until it is clear that members and public are content with meetings taking place on line and do not feel disenfranchised by this latest intrusion of technology into daily working. In particular all COs agreed they would advise members against making byelaws at online meetings because the hurdles we have to jump to enact a byelaw are already so many and high. Providing another potentially easy route to challenge a byelaw because it was made at an online meeting and the freedom to comment and discuss the byelaw was curtailed, appears unwise.

17. I have no doubt that on line meetings are likely to become regular and routine over coming months and years because they are so convenient. They meet other global sustainability objectives by reducing travel and they may potentially save much time and increase personal freedom from the burdens of work. These potential benefits indicate Authority should encourage and develop the use of online meetings

National continuing work coordinated by COG

18. Comparison of active fisheries in IFCA Districts and exchanging experience to develop best practice.
19. Liaison with Defra and MMO and provide regular updates
20. Preparation of national working protocols covering key areas of work common to all IFCA
21. Reporting fisheries intelligence to Defra
22. Reporting disposition of assets (IFCA vessels and Officers) to Defra weekly
23. Monitoring development of responses to COVID nationally and regionally.
24. Continuing non virus related work with MMO such as Member appointments and the national data sharing agreement

Continuing NWIFCA work programmes

25. Following sign off of risk assessments by managers and within government guidelines on efforts to reduce spread of the virus, the following NWIFCA work is continuing:

18 Enforcement Team

- a. Review & risk assessment of safe working procedures and equipment to protect officer health
- b. Shore patrols in the Dee, Mersey and south of the District.
- c. Shore patrols from Carnforth
- d. Shore patrols in Barrow area
- e. Shore patrols in North of the District
- f. Collection, collation and national reporting of intelligence collected on patrols
- g. Reduced enforcement including some joint enforcement with partner bodies such as MMO.
- h. monitoring of St Bees Voluntary Code of Conduct Netting Closure.

26. Science team

- a. Sampling of shellfish beds on behalf of Council environmental health services to maintain shellfish classifications.
- b. Scientific survey of shellfish beds for possible fisheries through 2020

- c. virtual meetings of TAG to develop an online resource - IFCA Science, Research and Environment Officer training package
- d. weekly science team meetings
- e. TAG representation at meeting of Defra Blue Carbon Working Group
- f. communications with BMWG via email
- g. communications with MMO and Natural England over MMO fisheries assessment of Shell Flat SAC
- h. completion of MMO consultation on North West Marine Plan

27. Administration

- a. Communication with NWIFCA Authority members
- b. Preparation for TSB meeting on line on 12 May
- c. Updates to website
- d. Issue of fishing permits
- e. Office administration in Carnforth & Whitehaven
- f. General administration in all areas of work including answering phone queries and processing mail
- g. All finance & HR processes including payroll, paying suppliers, issuing invoices, pensions, budgeting, monthly reconciliations, year end, VAT returns
- h. Ordering equipment and supplies for NWIFCA
- i. Vehicle administration & maintenance
- j. Vessel maintenance
- k. National co-ordination with other IFCA's, MMO, Defra
- l. IT co-ordination and setting up of virtual meetings
- m. Management meetings, team meetings, staff welfare
- n. Recruitment to short list stage

CEO NWIFCA

7 May 2020