1. <u>AT A MEETING OF THE NORTH WESTERN INSHORE AND CONSERVATION AUTHORITY HELD AT TRUCKHAVEN, CARNFORTH, 26TH JUNE 2025</u>

<u>PRESENT – MEMBERS</u>

Mr. P. Capper	Chair	MMO Appointee
Mr. B. Leigh	Vice Chair	MMO Appointee
Cllr. A. Markley		Cumberland Council
Cllr. T. Bloomer		Westmorland and Furness Council
Cllr. S. Brookes		Blackpool Council
Cllr. P. Norris		Liverpool City Council
Cllr. A. Jones		Lancashire County Council
Cllr. H. Deynem		Cheshire West & Chester Council
Mr. L. Browning		Natural England
Mr. S. Johnston		MMO
Mr. N. Baxter		MMO Appointee
Mr. S. Brown		MMO Appointee
Mr. L. Stainton		MMO Appointee
Mr. R. Lomax		MMO Appointee
Mr. T. Jones		MMO Appointee
Mr. W. Friend		MMO Appointee
Ms. G. de Jong Cleyndert		MMO Appointee

<u>IN ATTENDANCE</u>

Mr. M. Rowlings
Mr. D. Coward
Mr. H. Evans
Ms. S. Isles

<u>NWIFCA OFFICERS ATTENDING</u>

M. Taylor	CEO
A. Plumeridge	Head of Science
C. Silverwood	Admin Officer

<u>APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE</u>

Cllr. C. Richards	Sefton Council
Cllr. B. Woolfall	Halton Council
Cllr. G. Davies	Wirral Council
Cllr. D. Shaw	Lancashire County Council
Mr. J. Turner	Environment Agency
Mr. G. Pidduck	MMO Appointee
Mr. K. Thompson	MMO Appointee

2. <u>APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR (AGENDA ITEM 1)</u>

CEO welcomed everyone to the meeting and moved to the first item on the agenda.

There was only one nomination for the position of Chair and that was to reappoint Mr. P. Capper. This was proposed by Mr. T. Jones and seconded by Mr. S. Brown.

Mr. P. Capper was unanimously re-elected to stand as Chair

RESOLVED

3. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS (AGENDA ITEM 2)

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting including Cllr. T. Bloomer, representing Westmorland and Furness Council and Cllr. A. Jones representing Lancashire County Council.

The Chair requested that thank you letters were sent to Cllr. S. Clarke, Cllr, J. Parr and Cllr. J. Boak and Mr. R. Donnan.

The Chair also reminded members to sign the attendance register and declare any items of interest.

4. APPOINTMENT OF VICE CHAIR (AGENDA ITEM 3)

There was only one nomination for the position of Vice-Chair and that was Mr. B. Leigh. This was proposed by Mr. T. Jones and seconded by Mr. P. Capper.

Mr. B. Leigh was unanimously re-elected to stand as vice-chair.

RESOLVED

5. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (AGENDA ITEM 4)

No declarations of interests were made at this time.

6. MINUTES OF AUTHORITY MEETING 20TH MARCH 2025 (AGENDA ITEM 5)

Mr. S. Johnston noted that his name is spelt incorrectly.

RESOLUTION: THE MINUTES BE APPROVED WITH THE NOTED AMENDMENTS

Proposed: Cllr. H. Deynem, Seconded: Cllr. P. Norris
14 in Favour, 0 Against, 1 Abstained

RESOLVED

7. MATTERS ARISING (AGENDA ITEM 6)

There were no matters arising.

8. FINANCIAL REPORT (AGENDA ITEM 7)

The CEO presented the report on behalf of our accountants. The nine constituent councils have all paid their levies, permit income is slightly down from what was expected. Miscellaneous income this year includes partnership work with Natural England and HMRC rebates.

The employees' budget was in line with what was anticipated. The estate budget is slightly under as the Whitehaven and Carnforth office moves have not occurred. Transport costs are over budget predominately due to maintenance costs on North Western Protector (NWP).

The accountants now include asset depreciation. Corporate expenditure is over budget due to the increase in insurance costs. Cllr. P. Norris enquired if the vessel and vehicle depreciation should be included in the fixed assets valuation and not in expenditure. The CEO agreed that he would like the vessel and vehicle depreciation moving out of expenditure. Discussion took place around the value of NWP.

Cllr. H. Deynem asked for clarification on the overspend in the corporate expenditure. The CEO responded that a broker was used for the insurance and adequate insurance is now in place. The fees for the AIFCA had been missed off when budgeting for 2024/25 back at the end of 2023, however with the use of Xero there is now a much better understanding of budget.

THE REPORT WAS RECEIVED

9. APPOINTMENT OF TSB SUB-COMMITTEE (AGENDA ITEM 8)

Seven MMO appointees can sit on the Technical, Science and Byelaw committee, the remaining three members are made up of our statutory members. Mr. P. Capper and Mr. B. Leigh will sit on the TSB as ex-officio members as they have been appointed as Chair and Vice-Chair.

All nominated MMO members were appointed to the TSB. The TSB members are: Mr. T. Jones, Mr. S. Brown, Mr. K Thompson, Mr. L. Stainton, Mr. N. Baxter, Mr. G. Pidduck and Miss. G. De Jong Cleyndert.

Proposed: Mr. B. Leigh, Seconded: Cllr. P. Norris
All in favour.

RESOLVED

Mr. B. Leigh clarified that the Authority could increase the numbers on the TSB and the option is available to co-opt members who have expertise in a subject that might be before TSB for consideration. CEO clarified that the TSB can be made up of both MMO members and councillors.

10. TSB SUMMARY 29 MARCH 2025 (AGENDA ITEM 9)

Mr. L. Stainton declared an interest in Byelaw 7, intertidal nets and bass entitlements.

Mr. T. Jones provided a verbal summary of the TSB meeting held on 29 March 2025 focusing on the bass entitlement. 26 entitlements will be allocated to individuals through an anonymous process which will be decided by three members of the TSB.

The CEO provided a verbal update on the 26 bass and explained that the bass entitlement is for shore-set nets under the new netting byelaw. The process must be robust and transparent. There will be up to five members on the panel, however, there have only been two responses to sit on the panel so far. The panel can be made up of all members and councillors not just members of the TSB. The criteria and a scoring method needs to be finalised by the panel and the CEO.

The application process for the netting byelaw permits will be launched soon so as to give an idea of numbers and level of income. The byelaw has not been confirmed yet. Mr. B. Leigh suggested that it would be sensible at this stage to invite an expression of interest as opposed to an application form.

The Admin Team would receive and anonymise the applications. The panel would then score the applicants, create a league table and a waiting list. The process could be done over Teams with email liaison and possibly face to face meetings. There has been a ban on bass for the last six years, so we have purposefully moved away from track records.

Mr. L. Stainton queried if the permits would be held indefinitely or issued every year. The CEO responded by explaining that it would be an annual renewal process, anything else would create uncertainty. There cannot be an appeals process as there are only 26 nets allowed to retain bass as a bycatch. This emphasises the need to get it right the first time.

Cllr. S. Brookes asked if provision had been made with regards to the passing on or inheritance of permits. The CEO responded that we could look at a ‘use it or lose it’ policy and a potential handover scheme where you can nominate someone to keep it in the local communities. However, it would probably not be appropriate at this stage, but we can see how it works with Byelaw 3.

Discussion took place around catch limits, the use of the flexible permit conditions, recreational non-vessel-based fishers, regulating buyers and recreational fishers selling their catches. Mr. B. Leigh expressed his concern around the absence of a specific limitation on the number of bass retained. However, the flexible permit conditions allow the Authority to impose restrictions on the number of bass taken at any point in the future.

The CEO clarified that the permit is to retain bass as a bycatch not to target bass. The CEO explained that the byelaw will allow the authority to collect data on commercial and recreational shore-based nets. The data collected will facilitate better fishery management decisions, including catch limitations.

The Chair asked the CEO to send another email to the members requesting applications of interest from members to sit on the adjudicating panel.

11. <u>ENFORCEMENT TEAM REPORT (AGENDA ITEM 10)</u>

The CEO delivered the HOE's report.

NWP has been on operational duties during periods of good weather, has been in dry dock for routine maintenance and the issues with the jet drives have been resolved.

The maritime asset procurement strategy was agreed at the last Authority meeting. A vessel task and finish group has been stood up. The HOE, Master of the Vessel and Engineer attended the Seaworks conference in Southampton. The CEO has contacted all officers to ascertain their views on the type and specifications of vessels that they would see as being appropriate for the Authority. Officers will then be invited to scrutinise the current proposed vessels for feedback on whether they are operationally the best thing for the Authority. Earlier consultation with officers should have been undertaken.

The HOE has produced a maritime training programme to evidence a clearer pathway for officers. The Science Team needs resilience, so they are able to take a RIB to sea to undertake survey work.

The HOE and the CEO have, in conjunction with the Master of the Vessel, produced SOPs for NWP including accountability on equipment checks, PPE, pre-patrol plans and post patrol reports.

Discussion took place around the previous requested changes to the open tides at Pilling, moving from five tides a week to 14 tides a week. The Science Team had to re-write and re-submit the Habitats Regulations Assessment which Natural England then has 28 days to respond. Pilling was not fished once this amendment had been made. Mr. M. Rowlings replied by saying that by the time the changes had been introduced the cockles were spawning and it was too late. The local fishers would prefer to fish over the weekend as this is when their orders need to be met. The HOS responded by explaining that when a HRA is written, they must be confident that with the activities being undertaken and with the mitigating measures that will be put in place it is not going to impact the protected features of the site. Conditions can change over time, including geese during a winter fishery.

There was a successful prosecution in early May 2025 for landing and retaining European seabass, resulting in a financial fine.

Cllr. S. Brookes asked for clarity about the ability of NWP to respond with agility following the introduction of the new SOPs. The CEO explained that this was still possible, and the SOPs would not frustrate the crew in going to sea as there is flexibility in the pre-patrol plan. NWP does not have VMS (Vessel Monitoring System) onboard currently, but this is looking to be installed and implemented.

Mr. T. Jones contributed that online safety folders are available. These are online, automated reminders for drills, flares etc and allows conformity with all regulations. Discussion is taking place on suitability of products available and whether to commit to working with other IFCAs. The CEO to ask for an update from the HOE.

The CEO has requested that the Master of the Vessel procures VMS for NWP.

Coffee break taken from 11.30am to 11.40am.

Proposed: Mr. S. Brown, Seconded: Mr. A. Markley,
All in favour.

THE REPORT WAS RECEIVED

12. CEO REPORT (AGENDA ITEM 11)

The CEO provided a summary of the contents of his report. The CEO updated that the office move in Whitehaven has fallen through. Currently exploring the possibility of a move to the Fish Hall. The possible new office for Carnforth had high service charges associated with it and therefore is not feasible under the current 2025/26 budget. The current lease in Carnforth expires in March 2026. The refurbishment of the Liverpool office is nearly complete.

IFCAs will no longer be receiving capital funding from DEFRA for replacing vessels. Two members of staff are employed on revenue funding from DEFRA. There has been no confirmation on the continuation of this funding. New burdens funding will be taken out of DEFRA's control and given to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. The CEO reminded members that the Capital Asset Replacement Fund (CARF) contribution was halved this year to ensure we secured agreement on the 2025/26 budget.

The successful prosecution was proactively communicated through our social media channels, local press and we now have a contact with the BBC in the North West. A new page has been created on the website dedicated to Byelaw 3 news.

The netting byelaw is going through the quality assurance process with the MMO. The MMO have 45 days to respond. The CEO to ask for clarification from the MMO on the quality assurance process. The HOE is working through the current revisions required by the MMO.

The MMO have launched a consultation on a proposed byelaw which will ban bottom-towed fishing gear across a number of Marine Protected Areas in our area. The Authority will draft an informed response. The CEO invites members to submit their own responses separately but are not responding on behalf of the Authority. The consultation opened in June and closes on 1st September.

Cllr. H. Deynem responded to the CEO's comments with regards to CARF payments that Cheshire West and Chester will be furthering the mantra of "achieving more with less" during future budgeting discussions.

Mr. L. Stainton asked if there was an update on the byelaw regarding the Allonby HPMA. Mr. S. Johnston responded on behalf of the MMO explaining that it is still with the Secretary of State but expect the fisheries byelaw to come in towards the end of August or early September and there is no date yet for the anchoring byelaw.

Proposed: Mr. S. Brown, Seconded: Cllr. A. Markley

All in favour.

THE REPORT WAS RECEIVED

13. SCIENCE TEAM REPORT (AGENDA ITEM 12)

The HOS reviewed the quarterly report. Over the last quarter, the science team have completed the early surveys of Morecambe Bay cockle stocks seeing a slight decline in biomass. Pilling has seen size stocks increase, particularly in the area protected from removal last year. The recommendation was that Pilling was open five days a week, one tide a day to limit effort. This was agreed at the TSB in May. Industry was subsequently consulted and the preferred opening days were Monday to Friday. Pilling will open on 1st July 2025.

The HOS has produced a draft Cockle Fisheries Management Plan, specifically looking at the decision-making process, and knowledge gaps that are integral to making better decisions. This work will be presented to the Authority in due course. Work currently underway to address one of the key knowledge gaps identified is the initiation of a PhD. From September 2025, we will be working with a Bangor University PhD student to look at where cockles re-seed from.

In April, the science officers visited the Dee to see how the science surveys were undertaken and whether they could be replicated. Further work is underway to identify practical survey methods for the area in preparation for the new Regulating Order.

Work is progressing on the shrimp research project, Mergin Maps and Marine Conservation Zones assessments were completed. The Natural Capital work relating to the Oral Histories film project is complete, but the project is waiting to be signed off. It will hopefully be screened in the summer. The science team have also presented at Salford University and North West Coastal Forum.

Cllr. P. Norris asked for clarification on the Dee Cockle survey methodology in comparison to NWIFCAs. The HOS clarified that the methodology is similar, but the conditions are very different. The mud is very thick and deep and there are health and safety considerations. They also utilise a smaller quadrat. There is inherent variability in either sample method.

The HOS summarised the achievements of the Science Team in 2024/25, including completing cockle and mussel surveys, side scan surveys, Marine Conservation Zone assessments, shrimp and whelk research projects, responding to consultations and dispensations, training, Byelaw 4 returns, attending external meetings and contributing to the production of policies.

Cllr. S. Brookes commented that he recently attended a Coastal Water Quality Summit, and this resulted in a discussion on the grading of mussels and on water quality in both Morecambe Bay, the Blackpool area and the Menai Strait. Mr. L. Browning mentioned that United Utilities are currently investigating shellfish waters in the designated shellfish areas and wondered if the science team had been consulted.

Proposed: Mr. L. Stainton
All in favour.
THE REPORT WAS RECEIVED

Adjourned for lunch 12.40pm. Meeting recommenced 1.10pm
Cllr. A. Markley and Mr. B. Leigh left the meeting over the lunch break.

14. HEALTH, SAFETY AND WELLBEING REPORT (AGENDA ITEM 13)

The CEO reviewed the Health, Safety and Wellbeing report providing an overview of training, policy review and development, the introduction of the health and safety working group and health and safety statistics.

Mr. R. Love, Science Officer, has been appointed to the role of Health and Safety Competent Person. There will be an operational impact on the Science Team. There will be a commensurate pay rise and training and development support.
The Carnforth office has elevated levels of radon gas. The advice received was that we did not need to take any mitigating actions. A risk assessment was produced and shared with all staff. It is possible to add ventilation in the basement and if we decide to stay in the Carnforth office, it may be something we look at in the future.

Cllr. P. Norris queried the nuisance phone calls and access to telephone numbers. The CEO responded that there is no expectation on our officers to answer telephone calls outside of work hours and to give out their telephone numbers.

Cllr. S. Brookes asked if the Authority had a harassment policy. The CEO explained that we had a zero-tolerance policy on abuse. A discussion took place between the officer and senior management, and a decision was made not to take it further. If there were recurring incidences of poor behaviour, the CEO would not hesitate to bring it to the appropriate committee.

Cllr. T. Bloomer left the meeting.

Proposed: Mr. T. Jones, Seconded: Cllr. H. Deynem
All in favour.

THE REPORT WAS RECEIVED

15. DEE ESTUARY COCKLE FISHERY REGULATING ORDER (AGENDA ITEM 14)

The CEO provided a brief summary of the background to the Dee Estuary Cockle Fishery Regulating Order, the location of the Dee Estuary Cockle fishery and the current management of the fishery. Over the last 12 months, the Authority has been in conversation with Natural Resource Wales (NRW), DEFRA and the Welsh Government. The CEO continued by updating the members on the financial considerations with regards to pursuing a regulating order for the Dee Estuary Cockle fishery and the risks associated with the order not being confirmed and the Authority not being able to recover the application costs. The cost to the Authority could potentially be £70,000.

Discussion took place around the number of licences to be issued, the cost of each licence and the recovery of the initial costs, the costs and time implications of a public enquiry, hybrid orders and several orders, the added costs to the Authority. It is increasingly likely there will be an 'air gap' where we revert to national legislation.

Cllr. P. Norris suggested using the interest we accrue from the reserves to cover the costs of applying for the regulating order.

The Chair reiterated the point that if we pursue the order, we will have the opportunity to recover the costs. If the current regulating order expires, it will result in the Authority managing part of the fishery anyway and incurring the associated costs.

Mr. S. Johnston asked for clarification whether the order would extend powers to the IFCOs to enforce the fishery, recommending that further clarification is sought.

Cllr. H. Deynem proposed that the Authority continue to pursue the Regulating Order and mitigate the costs initially with the interest accrued but ultimately recouped through licence fees.

Proposed: Cllr. H. Deynem, Seconded Mr. L. Stainton
In favour 11, Against 0, Abstention 1.

RESOLVED

16. AOB

16.1 Admin Officer proposed that the reports are no longer sent as attachments to emails, suggesting that members are signposted to the documents on the website. The agenda and draft minutes will continue to be emailed with a link to the website. There was general acceptance of this idea, and it will be trialled for the August TSB meeting.

16.2 The CEO consulted the members on whether the Authority should undertake a financial audit annually or biennially. Discussion took place around cost implications and best practice. The decision was made to proceed with annual financial audits.

16.3 The CEO updated members that the Annual Report would be shared via email for comments and finalised at the next quarterly meeting in September.

16.4 The HOS shared information and posters from Bangor University who are currently doing a research project on the herring fishery, requesting for any members to contribute information or to share with any interested parties.

16.5. Mr. S. Brown raised his concerns around the proposed prohibition of bottom trawling by the MMO in some areas in our district. Discussion took place around current and historical fishing activity in the area, areas effected and existing byelaws, the scientific evidence that is available on the detrimental effects of bottom trawled gear, possible exemptions to gear, displacement of effort and that the Authority have both fishery and conservation responsibilities.

Natural England are a statutory consultee for the process and will be submitting a response to the entire consultation which includes MPAs all around the country and not just the North West.

Mr. D. Coward mentioned that there is an active creel fishery in the West of Walney.

Cllr. H. Deynem declared an interest in this item as he is employed by a renewables energy company who manage on and offshore wind farms.

The CEO resolved that members are to submit their own, individual responses to the consultation and confirmed that the Authority would be submitting an informed, factual response. The response will be shared with members.

Meeting closed at 14.50pm.