

13 MEETING OF THE TECHNICAL, SCIENCE AND BYELAW SUB-COMMITTEE (TSB) ON TUESDAY 10<sup>TH</sup> FEBRUARY 2026 AT TRUCKHAVEN, CARNFORTH 10:00

PRESENT MEMBERS

|                      |            |                    |
|----------------------|------------|--------------------|
| T. Jones             | Chair      | MMO Appointee      |
| S. Brown             | Vice-Chair | MMO Appointee      |
| G. Pidduck           |            | MMO Appointee      |
| N. Baxter            |            | MMO Appointee      |
| K. Thompson          |            | MMO Appointee      |
| L. Stainton          |            | MMO Appointee      |
| B. Leigh             |            | MMO Appointee      |
| P. Capper            |            | MMO Appointee      |
| G. De Jong Cleyndert |            | MMO Appointee      |
| Y. Tordoff           |            | MMO                |
| J. Turner            |            | Environment Agency |
| L. Browning          |            | Natural England    |

NWIFCA OFFICERS ATTENDING

M. Taylor (CEO), J. Moulton (Head of Enforcement), J. Haines (Acting Head of Science), I. Dixon (SIFCO), A. Brownrigg (SIFCO), G. Grose (Science Officer), S. Reid (Admin Officer).

OTHERS PRESENT

S. Isles (Natural England), M. Rowlings, S. Ward, T. Davies.

14 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies sent due to all members attending.

15 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS (Agenda Item 1)

The Chair extended a welcome to all members present.

The Chair welcomed all other members of industry and explained that they would be invited to ask questions or make comments but requested that they introduce themselves before speaking.

The Chair reminded members to sign the attendance register and complete declarations of interest slips if required.

16 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (Agenda Item 2)

T. Jones declared an interest in all Items.

L. Stainton declared an interest in Item 11, subject to Byelaw 7 Bass Netting Bycatch being discussed.

G. Pidduck declared an interest in Items 7 and 8.

17 MINUTES OF TSB MEETING 4<sup>th</sup> NOVEMBER 2025 (Agenda Item 3)

The minutes were accepted as a true and accurate record.

Proposed: K. Thompson, Seconded: L. Stainton, 1 Abstention, Carried

18 MATTERS ARISING FROM MINUTES (Agenda Item 4)

There were no matters arising from the minutes.

19 SURVEY AND INSPECTION SCIENCE REPORT (Agenda Item 5)

The AHOS gave a verbal update on surveys undertaken by the Science Team. The AHOS explained that the Science Team had been testing their Dutch Wand methodology. The data is being analysed and will be reported on at the TSB meeting at a future TSB meeting. Officers have inspected the Duddon Mussel bed and reported that some mussel stock is present however there has been some scour. A full inspection is planned to take place on a date later in February.

Discussion took place around the accuracy of the Dutch Wand Surveys. The AHOS explained that accuracy was based off historical data, cross checking, plus an increase in samples. The Chair asked if the Dutch Wand Surveys were being linked to drone surveys. The AHOS explained that the plan was to link the drone work with this survey, but the Oyster Catchers became too aggressive, leading to the drone flight be being abandoned. However, using the Dutch Wand method and the Drone for surveys was planned for other locations.

THE REPORT WAS RECEIVED

20 SCIENCE REPORT (Agenda Item 6)

The AHOS verbally gave key updates. Work has been undertaken on the Whelk Flexible Permit Conditions which will be covered in Agenda Item 7. Salford University have been granted funding to assess the contaminate levels in shrimps and water sediment and to compare this with climate stressors. NWIFCA will work alongside the University to provide monthly samples of shrimps and water from Morecambe Bay. As part of the project Salford University will be providing some training opportunities to officers.

P. Capper enquired on the progress of the work being undertaken with the PHD student from Bangor University. The AHOS explained that NWIFCA have provided her with data from 2017 onwards however she would like further historical data. In Year Two onwards there will be more engagement with the PHD student.

Further discussion took place around the Salford University project. The AHOS felt that work which will be undertaken on the chemical analysis especially heavy metals will provide the Authority with evidence to link or disperse the theory of heavy metals in the water having an impact on the shrimp population in Morecambe Bay. The CEO warned that the project may conclude that some of the reasons for the decline of the shrimp population are out width of the Authority, however the information would be passed on the relevant organisations. There will be an output for stakeholders at the end of the project where the results will be presented.

The CEO said that there could be a further opportunity to work collaboratively with Bangor University on a project which will look at Bass recruitment in the NWIFCA region.

#### THE REPORT WAS RECEIVED

#### 21 BYELAW 4 – WHELK FLEXIBLE PERMIT CONDITIONS (Agenda Item 7)

The AHOS referred to key elements of the review of Byelaw 4 Whelk Permit Conditions Report. He drew attention to section 3.1, the number of whelk permits which have been issued each year since the introduction of the pot allocations in the flexible permit conditions in 2022. The consultation response, five people responded to the consultation and despite the low number it does reflect the current number of permit holders. All consultation respondents supported a pot limit. Further information on the consultation results can be found in Tables 2, 3 and 4. Overall, whelk permit numbers in the district are falling, giving the Authority some capacity to increase the number of whelk permits which can be issued. This information has led to the recommendations which are being made.

It is proposed that the application process will open for two months between March and April and allow up to 2500 pots to be split between successful applicants. Pots will be equally distributed amongst the new permit holders with each vessel receiving a maximum of 500 pot allocation. The AHOS stated that the permit application would be open to everyone and applicants will not need to provide evidence of prior whelk fishing. The Authority will ensure the reopening of the application process is communicated across a variety of communication streams. The application for a 1000 whelk pot permit would not be reopened. S. Brown supported the recommendations as it supports independently owned smaller vessels, providing more work for local fishers. Interest in taking up a whelk permit has been shown from fishers in Whitehaven and North Wales. If an appeals process is required due to a high number applicants, it will be brought to the TSB Committee in May.

The AHOS explained that an increase in whelk permits would be beneficial to NWIFCA as it will provide improved catch data which could be used in the next review of the flexible permit conditions. Concerns were raised around if the number of pots were increased would this put additional pressure on the fishery landings. The AHOS said it would be monitored and if an increase in pots was having a negative impact on the fishery, management steps may be taken if required. The catch return data will be reviewed on an annual basis with the LPUE and pot usage.

P. Capper requested recommendation 5 was amended from '*Increase the entitlement of the vessel with 400 pots to 500 pots*' to from '*Increase the entitlement of the vessel with 400 pots to 500 pots subject to the outcome of the application process*'. This was agreed.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS:

1) Receive the report.

- 2) To re-open the application process for whelk permits for 2 months between March and April.
- 3) To issue 2500 pots to new permit holders, with an initial target of 500 pots for 5 vessels. Should more applications be received, consider the viability of sharing pots between vessels or adding additional eligibility criteria to the application process to assign permits.
- 4) Maintain the entitlement of the vessels who established track record of 1000 pots.
- 5) Increase the entitlement of the vessel with 400 pots to 500 pots, subject to the outcome of the application process.

Proposed: P. Capper, Seconded: B. Leigh, 1 Abstention, Carried

22 BYELAW 3 – MINIMUM USE POLICY (Agenda Item 8)

The CEO gave a historical context for the Minimum Use Policy. He fed back the results of the consultation which can be found in Report Number Two. The CEO summarised key themes given for supporting or opposing the policy. Further information was provided regarding some fishers misconstruing how the policy would be applied and it was emphasised that the Authority would provide clear communications around the minimum use threshold being set to reflect the fisheries for that year. Also communication would be required to alleviate concerns around fishers who diversify their commercial fishing activities within the NWIFCA district. Following the consultation, amendments have been made to the policy and can be found on Report Number Two, Page Three. B. Leigh asked if the stakeholders who showed misunderstanding during the consultation responses can be recommunicated with to dispel any misunderstanding. The CEO stated that clarification would be provided through a range of communication methods. The Authority has recently held two Byelaw 3 Stakeholder holder events in Grange-over-Sands and Wallasey and a future event is taking place in North Wales in March.

The CEO gave information regarding the appeals process as set out in Section Five of the Byelaw 3 (Cockle and Mussel Permit) Minimum Use Policy. The CEO has taken feedback from a stakeholder and has added to the policy that during the appeals process, fishers can still prosecute mussel fisheries. G. Pidduck asked if a fishery was closed by an external organisation would this provide grounds to appeal a permit not being renewed. The CEO said every appeal would be looked at on an individual basis and closures would be taken into account. The makeup of the appeal panel would be included in the final version of the policy and it would be made up of three Authority members.

Y. Tordoff expressed concern that the policy would increase fishing effort in the district. The CEO agreed but explained that the effort would not exceed the 150 permits so the Authority would still be within the parameters set out in the Byelaw and HRAs. B. Leigh emphasised that the purpose of this policy was to support the socio-economic aspects of fishing as set out in MACCA.

T. Davies asked for clarification if the policy covered the entire cockle season. The CEO confirmed that the policy would cover the whole cockle season from 1<sup>st</sup> May to the following 31<sup>st</sup> April. However the dates are subject to the cockle trial season. S. Ward raised concerns around the restrictions of fishing times being one tide a day, five days a week. The CEO explained that this is due to the Authority needing to be HRA compliant. Feedback from stake holders at the Grange-over-sands Byelaw 3 event has led to considering modifications to how the Authority write a HRA.

RECOMMENDATION: Members to vote to adopt the revised Minimum Use Policy for the 2026/27 season.

Proposed: B. Leigh, Seconded: S. Brown, 1 Abstention, Carried

23 EGM (Agenda Item 9)

It was decided that an EGM would be required to discuss the Cockle Open Season. It was agreed that an EGM would take place and would be called by the Chair seven days before the meeting. The meeting is likely to take place after the full Authority meeting in March.

24 DATE OF NEXT MEETING (Agenda Item 10)

The date of the next meeting was set at Tuesday 5<sup>TH</sup> May.

25 AOB (Agenda Item 11)

L. Stainton asked to discuss two matters and declared an interest in both. He enquired if there was an update on Byelaw 7 and the application process. The CEO said the Authority had no update and the Byelaw is still with the Secretary of State. He also said that applications for Byelaw 7 would never close as there is no limit on the number of permits. However, the bass entitlement which is an option for commercial shore fishers will have a deadline due to there only being 26 Bass bycatch entitlements. The application closure date has not yet been set due to the Authority continuing to do communications around the Bass entitlement to ensure information has reached as many fishers as possible. One month's notice will be given before the applications for the bass bycatch entitlement is closed.

L. Stainton also questioned the changes to MCS for European lobster and the lack of communication from the IFCA regarding the changes. Further discussion took place around the changes being imposed Nationally by the MMO therefore it is outside of the Authorities remit to report on the changes. Some members felt that it would be advantageous for the Authority to provide guidance communications around the changes once legislation has been produced by the MMO and DEFRA. An additional question was asked if the Authority was planning on providing fishers with lobster gauges. The positives and negatives surrounding the issuing of gauges was discussed. Y. Tordoff she would feedback to the Communication department at the MMO and asked what is the best method of communication for the fishers. The CEO said that the Authority could forward the MMO Communication to our permit holder via email. The chair suggested that the MMO produced posters which are at key locations and provide the relevant up to date information.

The Chair thanked everyone for attending – meeting closed at 13:22.