

# NWIFCA Quarterly Meeting: 25<sup>th</sup> September 2025

**REPORT NO.  
2**

## CEO QUARTERLY REPORT 18<sup>TH</sup> JUNE – 11<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER 2025

**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 5<sup>th</sup> August. The primary purpose of this meeting was for TSB members to make decisions on the opening of several cockle and seed mussel fisheries. Members decided to open the Newbiggin and Flookburgh cockle beds with a 300 tonne and 800 tonne Total Allowable Catch (TAC) respectively. Members also decided to open the Black Scar and Perch Scar mussel beds off Fleetwood to a hand-gathered and dredge seed fishery. However, following a subsequent inspection by Science Team officers, the Perch Scar bed was found to be no longer suitable for a fishery, and the Black Scar bed only suitable for a hand-gathered fishery.

Since my last report, MMO appointee Richard Donnan has resigned from the Authority. I wish Mr. Donnan all the best for the future and thank him for his contributions to the Authority. As a result of Mr. Donnan's resignation, we are currently carrying three MMO appointee vacancies; the Chair and I continue to liaise closely with the MMO to look to fill these positions.

### **2. Finances**

The Authority's Financial Report for Quarter 1 of 2025/26 is provided in a separate report to this meeting and will be discussed under the relevant agenda item.

Further to my last update on the Government's Spending Review outcomes, IFCAs are still yet to receive clarity on the ramifications for future Defra funding. As previously communicated, CDEL funding is no longer available to IFCAs for capital asset replacements, but we are still awaiting further information on RDEL funding for revenue-related costs. However, we did recently receive confirmation of £50,000 of further RDEL funding for 2025/26 from Defra to support our work towards national Fisheries Management Plans (FMPs). This funding has come with further reporting requirements over-and-above what we have been asked to provide to Defra for previous RDEL funding. However, I am confident we can evidence prudent expenditure of this £50,000 – and indeed all previous RDEL funds received – via the employment of our fixed-term, RDEL-funded officers.

Regarding future New Burdens funding, Defra have informed us that they are pursuing an exemption for IFCAs from the Government's move towards routing all central funding to local authorities via the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG).

### **3. Estates**

Following the falling through of a proposed move of the Whitehaven Office to an adjacent property, I have since provisionally agreed to take up a lease on another office space across the other side of the

harbour. This is at the Whitehaven Fish Hall and would situate NWIFCA next door to the MMO in the building there. Further details still need to be confirmed with the prospective landlords, Whitehaven Harbour Commissioners, but I am hopeful we will have a lease in place in the coming months, with a view to moving into the building in the new year. Regarding the ownership at Duncan Square, I continue to chase Cumberland Council in seeking a resolution to matters, but progress is slow.

I continue to explore opportunities to move our Head Office at Carnforth. A potential property has been offered to us by our current landlord, situated in Morecambe; discussions with him are ongoing. Our current lease at Preston Street ends on 31<sup>st</sup> March next year.

#### **4. Vessels and Vehicles**

Following the establishing of a new Vessel Task and Finish Group (VTFG) to support officers with implementing our Vessel Replacement Strategy, I held an in-depth meeting with officers to garner further views and insight into the appropriate way forward with replacing our seagoing assets. As a result of this meeting, I communicated back to the VTFG that it would be appropriate to revise the strategy based on officers' feedback. There was unanimous consensus that procuring two ~10m catamarans – one to be based in Whitehaven and one in Liverpool – would be more appropriate than a cabin RIB and trailer RIB, and rather than looking to replace North Western Protector (NWP) in the short-term, refurbishing the vessel to increase its utility and extend its lifespan. The VTFG agreed with this revised approach, and the Head of Enforcement Joe is leading on initiating a procurement exercise for the first of the two catamarans, as well as costing the proposed refurb of NWP. We have decided that our current trailer RIB based in Barrow, Protector Gamma, can be placed up for sale given the relatively low utility we are now gaining from it.

I reiterate the point I made in my last CEO Quarterly Report that future annual operational budgets derived from council levies will need to consider replacement of *all* our capital assets, including vehicles. Currently, vehicle replacements are being funded through the Capital Asset Replacement Fund (CARF) ringfenced in our reserves, but this is not sustainable in the long-term, particularly considering the potential to use a significant proportion of the CARF to fund vessel replacements in the near future. Vehicle replacement capital costs will need to be incorporated into future budgets, particularly given the news that Defra will no longer be providing CDEL funding and given the fact we halved our CARF contribution for the 2025/26 budget. Such levels of CARF investment are not sustainable over the long-term, and uplifts need to be secured to ensure we have the money in reserves to replace *all* assets as and when necessary.

#### **5. Communications and Engagement**

Comms this quarter have centred on updating stakeholders on the Authority's decisions around the opening of cockle and seed mussel fisheries in the district. Our Comms Officer Grace has completed development of a bespoke page for our website to cover all comms relating to Byelaw 3 and our cockle and mussel fisheries. This is on the back of feedback received from some stakeholders regarding the sheer quantity of comms we necessarily publish on these fisheries, and it sometimes being difficult to find the relevant information on our website's newsfeed. Having a dedicated webpage will help make relevant information more accessible to relevant stakeholders.

We have also run some concerted comms on the opening of applications for permits under our forthcoming Netting Byelaw (Byelaw 7), with particular emphasis on bass entitlements, due to anticipated high levels of interest, the cap on the number of entitlements we can issue and the restricted application window that we will need to have in place.

In July, we did some comms with drone company heliguy promoting the innovative work our Science Team are doing using multispectral imagery software to map and assess our mussel beds.

With the opening of the Flookburgh and Newbiggin cockle beds, I met with BBC Radio Cumbria at the beginning of September at Newbiggin to discuss the work the Authority is doing to sustainably manage the intertidal shellfisheries of north Morecambe Bay. This was featured on the station on 8<sup>th</sup> September.

We have developed a webpage to cover the Dee Estuary Cockle Fishery Regulating Order (DECYRO) as a one-stop shop for stakeholders. This was in anticipation of launching an informal, pre-application consultation with stakeholders alongside our partners Natural Resources Wales (NRW). We have delayed publishing this as NRW needed to resolve various issues around Welsh language translations for the consultation. We are hoping that the consultation will be launched in October, with a view to then applying for the DECYRO in the new year.

On 2<sup>nd</sup> August, three officers attended Cumbria Wildlife Trust's SeaFest event at St. Bees.

## **6. HR**

Towards the end of June, I offered all staff a one-to-one chat with me to discuss any issues, queries or concerns they had. Roughly half the staff took up this offer, and a variety of useful conversations were had, which gave me additional insight into how the Executive is operating and how we can improve in the future. Latterly, our second annual Staff Survey was conducted in late August, the results of which were considered by the Senior Management Team (SMT) and then discussed with all staff at our next face-to-face team meeting. A PowerPoint presentation summarising the results of this survey is included as an appendix to this report for members' consideration. Members will note that scores across all engagement areas have increased from last year, which is extremely encouraging. However, there are still several issues that I and the rest of the SMT need to continue to focus on addressing, particularly around inter-team cooperation, SMT communication and decision-making, and culture.

Our Enforcement Team has undergone a minor restructuring, with a couple of changes of line management to better reflect a delineation in coastal and at sea work in Whitehaven, and the extension of Senior IFCO Ian Dixon's patch to cover the entirety of Morecambe Bay; he now covers from Haverigg to Knott End, with SIFCO Andy Brownrigg covering from Fleetwood to the Dee.

Following discussions with Joe and our IFCO (Intel) Anthony Graham, I have decided to authorise a three-month trial for Anthony to work full-time on intelligence work for the Authority, rather than the current dual role he undertakes whereby he delivers coastal IFCO work alongside intel (on a roughly 70:30 split). This trial will last three months, after which, I will assess the costs and benefits of making this change to Anthony's role and decide whether to make this change a permanent one or revert to the previous arrangement.

For updates on the work of our newly appointed Health and Safety Competent Person, Robin Love, please see my separate Health, Safety and Wellbeing Report.

## **7. Fisheries**

The Netting Byelaw has now been resubmitted to the MMO for a third – and hopefully final – round of quality assurance (QA). I have been keen to impress on the MMO that we do not wish to enter into a continual back and forth on the QA process, as some other IFCA's have experienced, and that, as most of their comments and suggested amendments are minor, I would like to see a relatively swift resolution to this stage of the Byelaw making process, so that the Netting Byelaw can then be sent to Defra for Secretary of State confirmation. In anticipation of the Byelaw's confirmation, on the week commencing 8<sup>th</sup> September, we launched applications for netting permits, including for bass entitlements for commercial shore-set nets. The window for permit applications will remain open indefinitely, as there is currently no limit on the number of permits under each category. The window for bass entitlements will close after several months, although for now this is being left open-ended to allow plenty of time for prospective applicants to find out about, and apply for, one of the 26

entitlements that we can issue. Once it is felt that the window can close, one month's notice will be given, with appropriate comms to ensure that fishers are aware of any impending deadlines. A clear decision-making process has now been agreed and finalised with the four Authority members who will form the Bass Entitlement Decision Panel.

At time of writing, we are in the final stages of drafting our consultation response to the MMO regarding their Stage 3 MPA proposals, namely the prohibition on all forms of bottom-towed gear in four MPAs in the Eastern Irish Sea – West of Copeland Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ), West of Walney MCZ, Shell Flat and Lune Deep Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and Fylde MCZ<sup>1</sup>. Our response has focussed primarily on the potential impacts to the Fleetwood inshore trawling industry from the proposed ban in the Shell Flat component of the Shell Flat and Lune Deep SAC and Fylde MCZ. It is the Executive's view that the MMO has presented no evidence of the current impacts of inshore trawling on these two MPAs' features, and we have suggested that they consider alternative methods of management for them, including exempting smaller vessels and / or low-impact gear from the ban and not including the portion of these MPAs that sits within the Authority's district, which is where the Fleetwood fleet spend the majority of their time when fishing within the two MPAs.

## **8. External Engagement / Other CEO Work**

On 30<sup>th</sup> June I attended the inaugural North West Marine Ecosystems (NWME) Conference in Lancaster, along with our Head of Science, Anna. NWME is a new initiative established by the North West Coastal Forum in collaboration with the North West Wildlife Trusts, which is looking to replicate a similar successful initiative in the South West to identify opportunities for partnership working in the region to support ecosystem restoration and improvement projects along the North West Coast and in our coastal waters. Following the Conference, I volunteered to lead NWME's new Fisheries Community of Practice (CoP), and, through individual officers from the Science Team, we will also be participating in various other marine-focussed CoPs that NWME has set-up.

On 1<sup>st</sup> July I attended an Acas Workshop focussing on best practice in conducting HR investigations, along with Anna and our Head of Administration, Alison.

On 3<sup>rd</sup> July I attended a NEBOSH Health and Safety Leadership Course.

From 7<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> July, I attended the IFCAs' Technical Advisory Group (TAG) Conference in Folkestone, along with Anna and two of our Science Officers, Lucy Loud and Robin Love. The Conference was extremely successful and provided some great insight into the work that other IFCAs are doing in the fisheries science field, as well as allowing Anna and her team to showcase some of the work NWIFCA is doing.

In the absence of the IFCAs' Chief Officer Group's (COG's) Chair, I chaired two meetings of the COG on 16<sup>th</sup> July and 6<sup>th</sup> August, as Vice-Chair. I also attended a third meeting on 8<sup>th</sup> September. Topics of conversation at these meetings were varied but included discussions around Defra funding as well as Defra's IFCA Conduct and Operations Report and how we are to respond and adapt to the Minister's findings therein. On the latter subject, a separate working group has been established with representatives from IFCAs, Defra and MMO to discuss the Conduct and Operations Report and initiate actions and projects to deliver against its recommendations; I am part of this group as COG Vice-Chair, and we met on 24<sup>th</sup> July and 3<sup>rd</sup> September.

As part of the MMO's Stage 3 MPA consultations (see Section 7 above), I attended two MMO-ran stakeholder meetings, in Whitehaven on 30<sup>th</sup> July and Fleetwood on 28<sup>th</sup> August.

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<sup>1</sup> The consultation deadline has been extended from the original 1<sup>st</sup> September deadline to 29<sup>th</sup> September.

Whilst in Whitehaven on 30<sup>th</sup> July, I spent a day at sea with the crew of NWP, which was incredibly insightful and useful to see the great work the officers are doing and challenging circumstances they operate in. The following day, I spent a day with our two Enforcement Team officers based in Liverpool.

On 1<sup>st</sup> September I attended the first day of the Flookburgh and Newbiggin cockle fisheries to liaise with stakeholders and officers, and returned to Newbiggin on 4<sup>th</sup> September to meet with BBC Radio Cumbria.

*Mark Taylor, North Western IFCA CEO, 11<sup>th</sup> September 2025.*