



**56<sup>th</sup> EIFCA  
Statutory Meeting**

**To Be Held at:**  
Council Chambers, Kings Lynn Town Hall, Saturday Market Place, Kings  
Lynn, Norfolk, PE30 5DQ

**Wednesday  
19<sup>th</sup> June 2024**

**1030 hours**

### Vision

The Eastern Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority will lead, champion and manage a sustainable marine environment and inshore fisheries, by successfully securing the right balance between social, environmental and economic benefits to ensure healthy seas, sustainable fisheries and a viable industry.



Meeting: **56<sup>th</sup> Eastern IFCA Meeting**

Date: 19 June 2024

Time: 1030hrs

Venue: Council Chambers, Kings Lynn Town Hall, Saturday Marketplace,  
Kings Lynn, Norfolk, PE30 5DQ

### Agenda

- 1 Election of the Chair of the Authority – *Clerk*
- 2 Welcome - *Chair*
- 3 To accept apologies for absence – *Chair*
- 4 Election of the Vice-Chair of the Authority – *Chair*
- 5 Declaration of Members' interests – *Chair*

### Action items

- 6 To receive and approve as a true record, minutes of the 55<sup>th</sup> Eastern IFCA Meeting, held on 13<sup>th</sup> March 2024 – *Chair* **Pg 3**
- 7 Matters arising (including actions from previous meeting) – *Clerk*
- 8 To receive a report to consider Health and Safety risks and mitigation – *Hd Operations* **Pg 14**
- 9 To receive a report on the meeting of the Finance and HR sub-committee held on 7<sup>th</sup> May 2024 – *CEO* **Pg 19**
- 10 Oyster Heaven project – *ACO* **Pg 25**
- 11 Cockle Fishery 2024 – *ACO / Senior Marine Science Officer (Research)* **Pg 30**
- 12 Quarterly review of annual priorities and Risk Register - *CEO* **Pg35**

### Information items

- 13 CEO update (verbal) – *CEO*
- 14 Marine Protection Quarterly report – *DCO* **Pg 53**
- 15 Marine Science Quarterly report – *ACO* **Pg 63**

**Any other business**

- 16 To consider any other items, which the Chairman is of the opinion are Matters of urgency due to special circumstances, which must be specified in advance.

J. Gregory  
Chief Executive Officer  
3 June 2024

### Vision

The Eastern Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority will lead, champion and manage a sustainable marine environment and inshore fisheries, by successfully securing the right balance between social, environmental and economic benefits to ensure healthy seas, sustainable fisheries and a viable industry.



## 55<sup>th</sup> Eastern IFCA Meeting

A meeting of the Eastern IFCA took place on Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup> March 2024 at 1030 hours in the Assembly Rooms, King's Lynn Town Hall.

### Members Present:

Cllr T FitzPatrick	(Chair)	Norfolk County Council
Mr S Bagley		MMO Appointee
Cllr Chenery of Horsbrugh		Norfolk County Council
Mr K Copeland		MMO Appointee
Cllr P Coupland		Lincolnshire County Council
Mr J Davies		MMO Appointee
Mr L Doughty		MMO Appointee
Mr P Garnett		MMO Appointee
Mr P Gilliland		MMO Appointee
Mr T Goldson		MMO Appointee
Ms J Love		Natural England Representative
Mr J Rowley		MMO Representative
Cllr P Skinner		Lincolnshire County Council
Mr S Williamson		MMO Appointee

### Eastern IFCA (EIFCA) Officers Present:

Jon Butler	Head of Operations
Luke Godwin	Senior IFCO (Regulation)
Julian Gregory	CEO (& Clerk)
Ron Jessop	Senior Marine Science Officer
Emma Claxton	Marine Science Officer
Ella Constable	Marine Science Officer
Yliam Trèherne	Marine Science Officer
Willilam Wade	Marine Science Officer

### Also present:

Joanne Sams	Aston Shaw Accountants
Tim Smith	Association of IFCAs

### Minute Taker:

Jodi Hammond

### EIFCA24/01 Item 1: Welcome

The Chair welcomed members to the meeting.

## **EIFCA24/02 Item 2: Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Mr Mogford and Ms I Smith (MMO Appointees), Cllrs T Adams (NCC), E Back (SCC) and Vigo Di Gallidoro (SCC)

## **EIFCA24/03 Item 3: Declaration of Members Interests**

The Clerk advised the list of DPIs indicated there were members with an interest in items, 9 and 10 to which the guidance on voting and contributing to discussion would apply. Both items related to the management of the cockle and mussel fisheries in the Wash.

## **EIFCA24/04 Item 4: Minutes of the 54th Eastern IFCA Meeting held on Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup> December 2023**

**Members agreed the Minutes were a true record of proceedings.**

## **EIFCA24/05 Item 5: Matters arising.**

EIFCA23/57 CRAB AND LOBSTER BYELAW 2023:

The CEO advised the byelaw would shortly be ready to go to the MMO for quality assurance.

EIFCA23/57 WASH COCKLE AND MUSSEL BYELAW: The MMO quality assurance was now complete, and the byelaw will be submitted to Defra.

## **EIFCA24/06 Item 6: Health & Safety Risks and Mitigation**

**INCIDENTS:** Since the previous meeting there had been only one reported near miss incident, whilst travelling to a training venue the driver had become dazzled by the sun and veered slightly off the road.

**RISKS/MITIGATION:** interaction between Officers and Stakeholders continued to be monitored, and Conflict Resolution Training was being refreshed.

Working at Heights training was also ongoing.

Recent recruits to the Marine Science Team had undergone Mud Familiarisation training.

Cllr Skinner questioned whether quayside ladders were regularly checked, unfortunately there were a number of ladders across the District it would be impossible to know if they had all been

tested, a Dynamic Risk Assessment of each ladder was carried out and decision made on the use of it at the time.

**Members Agreed to Note the contents of the report.**

**EIFCA24/07 Item 7: Finance and HR Sub-Committee held on 6<sup>th</sup> February 2024**

Members were provided with unconfirmed Minutes of the Meeting. The CEO updated members on the review of staff structure which involved some internal staff changes to ensure key priorities were being met.

Members were reminded that the financial year end was fast approaching, the Audit for the previous year had raised some minor issues which it was hoped to avoid this year, discussion would take place with the Authority's Accountant following this meeting.

Mr Gilliland questioned whether all posts had now been filled. There remained one vacancy which would be recruited following completion of a pending six-month probation.

**Members agreed to Note the contents of the report.**

**EIFCA24/08 Item 8: Strategic Assessment and Business Plan 2024-29**

The ACO advised members of the requirement to produce both the Strategic Assessment and Business Plans. Essentially the Strategic Assessment would identify workstreams and identify risks, whilst the Business Plan was a rolling 5-year plan which was refreshed annually.

In support of the meeting papers Members were provided with a presentation on the revised process of the Strategic Assessment and identifying the priorities, which would ultimately inform the Business Plan.

Whilst nothing had been removed from the priority list, additional high priorities had been identified, related to Marine Planning. The list of future and potential workstreams had also been amended including consideration of Recreational Sea Angling.

Ms Love questioned how the closed area byelaw was progressing. The ACO advised there was a need for a robust evidence base, additional surveys had been needed, but he felt it was a relatively simple byelaw and there was every confidence there would be no issue getting the Byelaw in place.

Mr Gilliland questioned why water quality did not appear in the Risk Assessment, was it too minor to feature or not considered part of EIFCA scope. The ACO advised that water quality featured in the overall assessment and was part of the Business Critical Workstream.

The CEO advised that recent anomalies in water quality were thought to be related to unusually high rainfall levels, but it needed to be properly investigated, however, undertaking this work was outside the remit of EIFCA and fell to other organisations that officers were engaged with.

It was noted that water quality issues were not solely related to the Eastern region, in a standard year there were elevated readings once or twice a year but it was understood that nationally there had been 19 cases throughout the UK.

Mr Williamson questioned who could provide the information regarding increased E.coli levels, whilst no one wanted housing to flood they also didn't want the fisheries affected.

Mr Doughty advised the expected increased reporting rate for IVMS would become expensive and questioned whether black box technology could be used. The ACO advised that all options were being considered, but the increased reporting rate was critical for managing certain fisheries.

Ms Love questioned whether the assessment of Amber and Green HRAs would be finished in 2024. It was acknowledged that there was a hope the assessments would be finished but it was unlikely the byelaws would be in place.

**Members Resolved to :**

- **Note the content of the Strategic Assessment, including the priorities for 2024-25**
- **Approve the draft Business Plan, including priorities and plans for 2024-25**

**Proposed: Cllr Skinner**

**Seconded: Cllr Chenery of Horsbrugh**

**All Agreed**

**EIFCA24/09 Item 9: Wash Cockle & Mussel mortality study update**

Senior MSO Jessop summarised the meeting paper, reminding members of the ongoing situation regarding atypical mortality, the joint study with Cefas which started in 2020 involving samples of both cockle and mussel, and the identification of the *Marteilia* parasite in cockles.

Ongoing work with cockles had now identified the presence of both a virus and a *disseminated neoplasia* in the cockles. It was

not yet clear how these and the *Martellia* parasite were contributing to cockle mortality.

Cefas had secured funding for further research under the Coastal Health project, with the Wash being a case study for the project. This work was likely to include water quality and it was also hoped to include samples from outside the area to establish if the pathogens were present outside the Wash.

Officers also expressed concern with regard to biosecurity and in particular the risk that would be posed if seed mussels harvested from the Wash were re-laid in fisheries outside the Wash and North Norfolk Coast SAC.

Cllr Skinner queried whether it was possible to investigate the development of a more resilient strain of cockle. Senior MSO Jessop advised the Spanish were taking steps to breed a resilient strain of cockles, although even this would have limitations as it would reduce the available gene pool for the future, making them more susceptible to other ailments.

Shane Bagley advised that occasionally a 'jumbo' cockle, estimated to be between 7-8 years old would be found, he questioned whether these could be looked at to see what was different about them which meant they survived so long. Senior MSO Jessop agreed if samples of such cockle could be gathered it could be beneficial to investigate what was different about them, it was possible the die-off was due to the effort of spawning, maybe the larger cockle was less affected by the effort, or unable to spawn.

Cllr Goldson enquired whether Cefas could be invited to the next Authority meeting to provide an update of their research. The CEO advised that at this point there would be very little more to add as Cefas would be undertaking further work, but it was something that could be borne in mind for future meetings.

This matter would remain a key workstream with members being kept up to date with progress.

Ms Love advised this was also a matter of priority for NE, research was being undertaken of sediment and water quality and the impact on birds.

Mr Williamson noted the lack of cockle stocks were usually held responsible for declining bird numbers but questioned whether it was possible the bird numbers were declining due to eating the cockles. This was not a question which Ms Love could answer at this time.



**Members Agreed to note the content of the report, including Eastern IFCA's participation in the Coastal Health Project.**

**EIFCA24/10 Item 10: Wash Mussel Fishery 2024 update**

The ACO provided an update on the outcome of the recent consultation regarding the opening of the Wash Mussel fishery, revisions to management measures and consideration of maintaining the management measure that seed be re-laid within the Wash & North Norfolk Coast SAC.

It was noted that whilst there had been consideration given to allowing the movement of seed to areas outside the WNNCSAC, the evidence provided by Cefas discussed during the preceding agenda item led to the conclusion that the risk of transfer to other fisheries by small amounts of cockle which would inevitably be caught along with seed mussel was too great to allow the seed to be moved outside the area.

As this would be a deviation from the agreed management measures it had been taken back to the Authority for their consideration.

Members went through the findings of the consultation responses, the use of lays for re-laid seed and the legality or selling on 'improved seed' from lays.

Mr Williamson provided some context to the extent of the mussel fishery within the UK, advising that the markets had collapsed and what would previously have attracted £1,000/tonne would now be more likely to achieve £300/tonne.

**Members Resolved to:**

- **Note the proposed management measures at Appendices 1 and 2, the outcomes of the consultation including the potential for impacts on fishing activities and to agreed management measures.**
- **Agree to the management measures for the hand-work and dredged mussel seed fisheries proposed at the meeting, which would include maintenance of the provision which prohibits mussel seed being re-laid outside of the Wash and North Norfolk Coast SAC.**

**Proposed: Cllr Chenery of Horsbrugh**

**Seconded: Cllr Skinner**

**All those who could vote Agreed**

**EIFCA24/64 Item 11: Review of the Constitution and Standing Orders**

The CEO reminded members the Constitution and Standing Orders were reviewed on an annual basis. There were no substantive revisions.

NPLaw had made some changes which were largely clerical in nature, relating to clarification and updating of legislation. The CEO referred to the list of revisions set out in the Appendix to the paper.

Mr Doughty noted the change of name for WFO to Wash Cockle and Mussel Byelaw when it came into effect and queried 'if' it was coming into effect. The CEO advised that the terms when or if were academic but the changes reflected the current situation.

Mr Doughty also questioned cost recovery and whether surveys could go out to tender. The CEO advised that it was part of the Authority's operating model to operate vessels and undertake survey work. With the cockle surveys they were regarded as good practice and the fact that they were undertaken by officers ensured that there was integrity in the process. The Authority had agreed to only recover 50% of costs from industry and therefore there was unlikely to be any benefit to industry if surveys were outsourced.

Cllr Goldson questioned whether rotation of the role of Chair between County Councils had been changed within the Constitution and Standing Orders. The CEO advised it was never in the orders but had been an agreement amongst members. The Orders stipulated the role of Chair was taken by a County Councillor. What had previously been changed was that the maximum term as Chair could be extended beyond two years with Members agreement.

**Members Resolved to Agree to the proposed changes to the Constitution and Standing Order at Appendix A.**

**Proposed: Cllr Skinner**

**Seconded: Cllr Goldson**

**All Agreed**

#### **EIFCA24/12 Item 12: Quarterly review of annual priorities and risk register**

The CEO advised there were no changes to the Risk Assessments and highlighted the progress against priorities.

It was noted the Closed Area Byelaw was going to the MMO for QA in Q1 of the next financial year. There had been a change to the Cromer MCZ stakeholder in group as a result of staff changes at MCS and the Natural Disturbance Study remained a high priority.

Completion of amber/green gear/feature interactions remained a high priority workstream and it was anticipated the new staff structure would mean progress would be made on this workstream.

The Wash Cockle and Mussel Byelaw was almost at the point of being submitted to the Secretary of State. It was noted the industry remained concerned about moving from an Order to a Byelaw and had approached the Minister to express their concerns. Subsequently the Minister had met with EIFCA representatives. Once the Byelaw was submitted it was anticipated there may be a delay in progress due to the timing of a General Election. It was important to note the Authority had the ability to manage the fisheries in the interim.

Mr Garnett queried whether a green risk would be re categorised as amber if surveys were delayed. The CEO advised the matter would remain a priority.

Mr Gilliland queried whether the Authority had an 'issue log'. The CEO advised there was no issue log, Officers responded to issues as they arose.

**Members Agreed to note the content of the report.**

### **EIFCA24/13 Item 13: CEO Update**

The CEO updated members on matters which had not already been covered by items on the Agenda.

**CONDUCT AND OPERATIONS REPORT:** Members were reminded the third report into the conduct and operations of IFCA's was due, covering the period 1<sup>st</sup> September 2018 to 31<sup>st</sup> August 2022. Participation from Members was requested. There were two ways to respond, as either a member of the General Public or as an Authority Members. The CEO encouraged members to respond.

**DEFRA WORKSTREAM FUNDING:** The CEO advised that funding for aquaculture and Marine Spatial Prioritisation & Marine Planning work had been removed. It was anticipated funding for the 2024-25 financial year would be reduced from £150k to £130k.

**VESSEL BUILD/PROCUREMENT :** Procurement of the potting vessel had gone ahead. The vessel was being modified and new engines fitted. It was anticipated the vessel would be the lead survey vessel for the North Norfolk Coast. Delivery was expected in May.

Members questioned why the decision had been taken to buy diesel engines, the DCO advised that petrol engines were not practical as fuel availability was a problem on the coast.

Protector IV – handover of the vessel had been slightly delayed due to the A-frame hydraulics working too slowly. A means of overcoming this problem had been found, it was anticipated the modification should be completed by the end of the following week. The CEO anticipated having the vessel available for the second half of the cockle surveys.

The CEO advised members he had hoped to be able to hold the naming ceremony for the vessel at the Royal Norfolk and Suffolk Yacht Club, to coincide with the next Authority meeting but unfortunately the Lord Lieutenant for Norfolk was not available that day.

There was some concern there would not be enough time to hold the meeting prior to the naming ceremony and it would not be prudent to rush through the agenda. It was accepted it may be necessary to adjourn the meeting for the naming ceremony and continue the meeting afterwards. The meeting could start at 1000hrs instead of 1030hrs.

Of particular concern was discussion regarding cockle surveys and the opening of the fishery. The CEO advised there had been a request to consider an early opening of the cockle fishery. If this was the case, there was delegated authority in place to vary the management measure to open the fishery outside the confines of an Authority Meeting. The normal consultation process would be followed, after which a decision would be taken on Management Measures, as long as Members were happy with this option. Mr Garnett advised he would be happy with that on the proviso there was nothing unusual in the cockle survey outcome. It was acknowledged there was the option if necessary to hold an Emergency Meeting to discuss the opening of the cockle fishery.

**Members Agreed to Note the contents of the report.**

#### **EIFCA24/14 Item 14: Marine Protection Quarterly Report**

The DCO advised Members these reports were circulated on a monthly basis. The reports were compiled using messages received from around the coast, they were reported as received and were not always fact checked. Recent activity included two offences being taken to court, both related to the whelk fishery, both pleaded guilty and were fined.

Activity that was anticipated to increase involved the Bass fishery; work would be carried out in conjunction with the MMO.

Mr Williamson questioned whether there had been any follow-up surveys on the Sabellaria beds which had been closed to fishing, essentially he was curious as to whether they had

grown, as he been led to believe it was anticipated they would grow to 6m in height. Senior MSO Jessop advised that the only survey that had been conducted indicated the Sabellaria bed remained stable. A survey on another area which was historically an area of Sabellaria had shown no sign of the species.

Mr Williamson questioned why the area remained closed to fishing if the protected species had shown no growth, he believed fishing the bed had encouraged growth so it was probably time it was looked at.

The CEO advised keeping the bed closed was mostly about protecting the feature, if a survey found it was no longer there then reopening the area would be looked into. Ms Love advised Members that Sabellaria was very sensitive, and coverage would be patchy with slight elevations, but not up to 1m. One of its main benefits was its ability to attract other creatures which were a source of food further up the foodchain. NE were planning to survey the bed later in the year to see how the reef was.

Cllr Goldson questioned whether inspections were carried out at Southwold harbour. The DCO advised that enforcement was intelligence led, and that inspections were carried out in the harbour.

**Members Agreed to note the contents of the report.**

#### **EIFCA24/15 Item 15: Marine Science Quarterly report**

The ACO explained the key outputs of the Marine Science Team.

The Natural Disturbance Study was ongoing, unfortunately weather conditions had made it difficult to get the vessel out. Mr Goldson questioned when the weather would be considered as a contributing factor to damage to the chalk beds. The CEO advised that was the purpose of the Natural Disturbance Study. The study had a three-year life span, the result would not be known after the first survey.

Mr Davies questioned whether there had been any progress on the buoys for the closed areas. The DCO advised they would hopefully be in place within the next month.

EHO Sampling – February's results had all been above the threshold for class B classification, however it was only just above the threshold, so the classification did not change. There was a suggestion higher than normal rainfall may be a contributing factor.

**Members Agreed to note the contents of the report.**

**EIFCA24/16 Item 16: Any other business**

There were no other matters that had been raised for discussion.

There being no other business the Chair thanked members for attending, the meeting closed at 1305 hours.

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## Action Item 8

### 56<sup>th</sup> Eastern Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority meeting

19 June 2024

#### Health and Safety update

**Report by:** Jon Butler, Deputy Chief Officer

#### **Purpose of report**

The purpose of this report is to update members on health and safety activity and incidents, risks and associated mitigation over the last reporting period.

#### **Recommendations**

It is recommended that members:

- **Note** the contents of this report.

#### **Background**

H&S law requires employers to assess and manage risks and so far as is reasonably practicable, ensure the health, safety and welfare of all its employees and others affected by workplace activities.

The Authority has a declared intent to promote and nurture an appropriate health and safety culture throughout the organisation.

#### **Incidents**

The table in *Appendix 1* summarises the incidents that have occurred since the last authority meeting:

There have been no reported incidents since the last authority meeting.

#### **Risks/Mitigation**

Ongoing monitoring of stakeholder behaviours towards officers continues, initial and refresher conflict resolution training was provided to all IFCO's and other officers who come into regular contact with stakeholders and members of the public.

Officers have been undertaking working at height training as this was identified as risk, particularly for IFCO's working on quaysides, relating to ladders.

**Appendix 1**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Nature of incident</b>	<b>Injury / damage occurred</b>	<b>Action Taken</b>	<b>RIDDOR MAIB Y/N</b>	<b>Investigation complete Y/N</b>	<b>Name of investigating Officer</b>	<b>Follow-up action required Y/N. If Y then what?</b>
No reported incidents							



## Appendix 2

### Eastern IFCA Health and Safety risks

Risk	Intervention	Residual Risk	Risk rating* (Current)	Risk rating* (Previous)
1. Whole Body Vibration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Risk awareness training to manage impacts.</li> <li>• Health monitoring process to be developed.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personal injury from boat movement owing to lower resilience as a result of individual physiology</li> </ul>	<b>Tolerate</b>	<b>Treat</b>
2. Staff stress through exposure to unacceptable behaviour of stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduction of Unacceptable Behaviour policy</li> <li>• Stakeholder engagement plan and activity delivered in pursuit of corporate communications strategy.</li> <li>• Dialogue with Stakeholders to ensure appropriate tone of communications.</li> <li>• Conflict resolution training for “front line” Officers</li> <li>• Introduction of Body worn Camera’s and Sky Guard Alarms.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No change in behaviour of some stakeholders.</li> <li>• Long term sickness caused by stakeholder hostility</li> </ul>	<b>Tolerate</b>	<b>Treat</b>
3. Damage to vehicles, trailers and/or equipment through inappropriate operation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Formal trailer training for unqualified officers</li> <li>• Refreshers for those with previous experience</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Failure to adhere to training</li> <li>• Mechanical failure of vehicle or trailer</li> </ul>	<b>Tolerate</b>	<b>Treat</b>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Periodic vehicle maintenance checks training</li> <li>• In-house assessment for drivers using unfamiliar vehicles (crew transport, 4x4)</li> </ul>			
4. Physical fitness of personnel to undertake arduous duty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff briefing</li> <li>• Management overview to ensure rostered duties are appropriate and achievable</li> <li>• Reasonable work adjustments</li> <li>• Routine periodic medical assessment (ML5)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individual health fragilities</li> <li>• Individual lifestyle choice</li> </ul>	<b>Tolerate</b>	<b>Tolerate</b>
5. Working at Height	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff briefing</li> <li>• Scoping of all quayside ladders</li> <li>• Risk Assessment</li> <li>• Training to be provided if required</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Failure of quayside ladders</li> </ul>	<b>Treat</b>	<b>Treat</b>

\*

<b>Risk Rating</b>
High
Medium
Low

<b>Risk Treatment</b>	
<b>Treat</b>	Take positive action to mitigate risk
<b>Tolerate</b>	Acknowledge and actively monitor risk
<b>Terminate</b>	Risk no longer considered to be material to Eastern IFCA business
<b>Transfer</b>	Risk is outside Eastern IFCA ability to treat and is transferred to higher/external level

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## Action Item 9

### 56<sup>th</sup> Eastern Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority meeting

**Report by:** Julian Gregory, CEO

#### **Meeting of the Finance & HR Sub-committee held on 7 May 2024**

#### **Purpose of report**

To inform members of the key outputs and decisions from the Finance & HR Sub-Committee meeting held on 7 May 2024.

#### **Recommendations**

Members are asked to:

- **Note** the content of the report.

#### **Background**

Chapter 4 of the Authority's Constitution and Standing Orders sets out the extent to which the Authority's functions are:

- the responsibility of the full Authority.
- the responsibility of the Chief Executive Officer.
- the responsibility of Sub-Committees of the Authority.

Decision making powers for all strategic and operational financial matters are delegated to the Finance & HR sub-committee except for approving and adopting the Annual Budget and setting the levy to the County Councils, which is the responsibility of the full Authority. The full Authority also retains oversight of finance and HR matters by receiving and approving reports from the Finance and HR sub-committee.

#### **Report**

The Finance & HR sub-committee meets quarterly, and the last meeting was held on 7 May 2024. Unconfirmed minutes of the meeting can be found at Appendix A.

#### **Appendices**

Appendix A - Unconfirmed minutes of the Finance and HR sub-committee meeting held on the 7 May 2024.

**Appendix A – Unconfirmed** minutes of a meeting of the Finance & HR sub-committee held on 7 May 2024.

**Vision**

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**Finance & HR Sub-Committee**

A meeting of the Finance & HR Sub-Committee took place at the EIFCA Offices, King's Lynn on 7<sup>th</sup> May 2024 at 1030 hours.

**Members Present:**

Cllr M Vigo Di Gallidoro	Vice Chair	Suffolk County Council
Cllr E Back		Suffolk County Council
Cllr P Coupland		Lincolnshire County Council
Ms I Smith		MMO Appointee

**Eastern IFCA Officers Present:**

J Butler	Deputy Chief Officer
J Gregory	CEO
L Godwin	Assistant Chief Officer

**Other Bodies**

J Sams	Aston Shaw Accountants
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**FHR24/01 Welcome**

In the absence of the Chair, Cllr Vigo Di Gallidoro, as Vice-Chair, welcomed members to the meeting.

**FHR24/02 Apologies for absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Adams (NCC), Chenery (NCC), FitzPatrick (NCC), Skinner (LCC) and Mr Williamson (MMO Appointee)

**FHR24/03 Declarations of Members Interest.**

No Declarations of Interest were received.

**FHR24/04 Minutes of the Finance and Personnel Sub-committee meeting held on 6<sup>th</sup> February 2024**

**Members Agreed to accept the minutes as a true record of proceedings.**

**FHR24/05 Matters Arising**

There were no matters arising that were not addressed in the agenda. It was noted that changes to the structure agreed at the last meeting had been implemented.

**FHR24/06 Quarter 4: Payments and Receipts**

Whilst there was a notable increase in expenditure for General Establishment, when the expense was analysed, there were no exceptional payments but a general increase in prices seemed to be attributable to the increase in expenditure.

It was noted expenditure for Three Counties did not include the cost for the Annual Refit, this would be paid in the next financial year.

Interest from the Deposit held by Suffolk County Council had been paid at a better rate than anticipated.

**Members Agreed to Note the contents of the paper.**

**FHR24/07 Quarter 4 Management Accounts**

Members noted the variance on expenditure was close to budget for the year.

Cllr Coupland enquired whether there was any news on future New Burden Funding for the year. The CEO advised it was his understanding that Defra accepted that core new burdens funding needed to be permanent, but any additional funding was being linked to specific work streams or issues. This was the final year of the additional workstream related funding and AIFCA were in the process of putting forward the case for new funding to take its place and a paper had been submitted to the Government's Spending Review. However there was some concern regarding this process as a General Election may hinder the process.

**Members Agreed to note the content of the report.**

**FHR24/08 Annual Statement of Accounts**

Joanne Sams explained the end of year accounts and the slightly different presentation. It was noted there had been some difficulty in understanding the working of the previous years' comparisons.

**CURRENT ASSETS:** Defra funding which had been spent but not yet received had been included. This comprised £140k for workstream funds and £225k towards the purchase of *FPV Thunderstruck*.

Debtors listed at the end of the previous year total £4k but there was no indication what this was comprised of so the decision was taken to resolve and remove this sum.

**CURRENT LIABILITIES:** at the end of 2023 this totalled £247,553 which had been resolved down to £29,652, the rest having been moved to Long Term Liabilities and comprised funding previously received from Defra for IFCA's to purchase IVMS – it had previously been held in Creditors but was shown more clearly in Long Term Liabilities. Ultimately this money would be used by AIFCA for national projects.

**CAPITAL & RESERVES:** The only change was to the Vessel Replacement Fund, all excess for the year having been moved into this Reserve.

Earlier in the year the decision had been made to put £100k of Defra funding in the Operational Fund Reserve.

**INCOME & EXPENDITURE:**

Income included project grants to support work projects.

*RV Three Counties* expenditure did not include the Refit costs for 2023/24, this would be paid in the next financial year.

Vessel Insurance had been moved to a separate heading for clarity. It was noted that advice had been received that all insurances were going up in price.

**ASSETS :** did not form part of the Balance Sheet, the decision was made not to depreciate them as it had not been previous policy to do so. An Asset Register was kept so the initial costs was known. If the decision was taken to start depreciating the Assets a revised Profit and Loss account would be required and many would have no value, when in reality there would be profit from the sale. It was felt that as long as any sale returned the market value then it was acceptable.

Cllr Coupland suggested this clarification was added to the bottom of the fixed Asset list, stating the price listed was the purchase price not the actual value.

**Members Resolved to :**

**Approve the Statement of Accounts for submission for external examination.**

**Authorise the Chairman and Chief Executive to sign the Annual Return before submission to the auditors for review.**

**Authorise in accordance with Authority's Financial Regulation 3.4 transfer of funds to and from 'ear-marked' reserves as outlined in the Statement of movement in reserves.**

**Proposed: Cllr Back**

**Seconded: Cllr Coupland**

**All Agreed**

**Members Resolved that under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for Item 10 on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.**

**Proposed: Cllr Back**

**Seconded: Cllr Coupland**

**All Agreed**

## **FHR24/10 HR Update**

*Summary in accordance with Section 100(C)(2) of the Local Government Act 1972*

The Deputy Chief Officer advised there had been no new starters or leavers during the last quarter.

All the structure changes discussed at the last meeting had been implemented with officers now working through the probationary period. There remained one vacant Grade 5 Marine Science Officer post which recruitment would be considered for once the new incumbents had completed their probationary periods and the changes reviewed.

Regular meetings were being held with the outsourced HR Consultant, work was progressing with updating contracts and policies.

Unison Representatives had been met to advise them the reviews were taking place.

One IFCO was on long term sick. Having previously encountered problems with his back and neck he had undergone an operation. Before returning to work the Officer would be referred to Occupational Health/Muscular Skeletal consultants for review.

Unions had submitted their preferences for the annual pay review, it was anticipated any decision would not be made until later in the year.

Rules around flexible working had been changed, effective from 1<sup>st</sup> April. Two requests for flexible working arrangements had been received. Each would need to be considered on a case-by-case basis.

**Members Agreed to note the content of the Report.**

## **FHR24/11 New Vessel Update**

The CEO advised the Authority had taken delivery of *FPV Protector IV* the previous week. It had been a protracted process which had started in 2019. There remained one final stage payment left to make. Sea trials and crew training were being undertaken. It was anticipated the vessel would be used throughout the district. The vessel capability was a big step forward on all levels, prompting positive responses from the crew.

The naming ceremony would be held on 19<sup>th</sup> June, in conjunction with the next Authority meeting.

The Authority were also progressing with two further vessels:

C-FURY: the daughter vessel for Protector IV was being built to comply with Workboat Code 3, as this was the first vessel they had built to this standard the builders were being particularly cautious to get the build right. It was hoped the vessel would be complete by the end of July.

THUNDERSTRUCK: a second-hand fishing/potting vessel currently undergoing refit and it was intended that it will be on display at the Seawork Workboat Show early in June prior to being operational in the district by mid-June.

The vessel will have the capability to inspect and recover gear as well as other research work.

*RV Three Counties* was up for sale, to date there had been three viewings, valued at £620k it was anticipated there may be some negotiation before the vessel was sold.

Members raised some queries about the capabilities of the new vessels. It was noted that some research work off Cromer had not been completed in part due to lack of availability of multi-beam survey equipment, following the purchase of these new vessels it might be worth enhancing their capabilities by purchasing such equipment from funds in the Asset replacement fund, however there was a lot to consider first before making such a decision.

**Members Agreed to note the content of the report.**

**FHR24/12 Any Other Business**

No urgent matters had been brought to the attention of the Chair.

There being no other matters to discuss the meeting closed at 1130 hours, the Chair thanked members for attending.



## Vision

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## Action Item 10

### 56<sup>th</sup> Eastern Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority Meeting

19 June 2024

#### Oyster Heaven Project

**Report by:** Luke Godwin (ACO)

#### **Purpose of Report**

The purpose of this report is to present proposals regarding the Oyster Heaven Project for discussion and seek direction as to whether the project should be provided with a letter of support.

#### **Recommendations**

It is recommended that members:

- **Note** the contents of the report
- **Agree** to the draft letter of support in principle as at Appendix 1
- **Direct** officers to send the letter of support to Oyster Heaven

#### **Background**

The Authority's main duties<sup>1</sup> include to "...take any other steps which in the authority's opinion are necessary or expedient for the purpose of making a contribution to the achievement of sustainable development...".

Defra guidance to IFCAs on fulfilling this duty<sup>2</sup> sets out that IFCAs should "...seek to accommodate multiple uses of the marine area and consider the possibilities for co-existence. Where uses/activities are not compatible with each other, or will potentially have adverse impacts on the environment, IFCAs will need to decide which use has priority in the given circumstances and the likely risks..." and in coming to a decision, should consider the relevant Marine Plan.

IFCAs are uniquely placed to provide advice on the compatibility of sustainable development within their districts given that the IFCA's membership reflects the economic, social and environmental needs of the local area.

#### **Report**

Oyster Heaven is a marine conservation organisation which seeks to regenerate native oyster (*Ostrea edulis*) reefs at scale. To achieve this, the organisation developed the 'mother reef' system; specially manufactured brick like blocks

<sup>1</sup> [Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://legislation.gov.uk)

<sup>2</sup> [Guidance for IFCAs on their contribution to achieving sustainable development \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)

impregnated with oyster seed. Further, the company has developed an ‘impact-based business model’ whereby financial investment is sought, with returns generated through oyster production, and local communities (including fishing interests) benefit from participation in the project’s delivery (e.g. ‘mother reef’ deployment and harvesting).

More information can be found on the project’s website: [Home - Oyster Heaven](#)

The organisation is seeking to establish two project areas for native oyster regeneration within the Eastern IFCA district: one site in The Wash and one on the North Norfolk Coast.

Marine Licences will be required to undertake the project, and neither is at the consultative stage of the Marine Licence Application process yet. However, the organisation is seeking a ‘letter of support’ from the Authority for the project at this stage.

### Consideration

Native oysters were historically an important component of The Wash and to an extent throughout the district<sup>3</sup>. However, a combination of habitat damage and over-fishing during the 19<sup>th</sup> century is thought to have led to significant decline. As a consequence, native oysters are now listed as a priority species<sup>4</sup> and require conservation action.

In principle, oyster regeneration is likely to have benefits. The organisation’s website refers to the bioengineering capacity of oysters, which is well-known as oyster reef redevelopment is reportedly capable of rapidly recovering biodiversity<sup>5</sup> and they are capable of effectively cleaning water through filter-feeding which is likely to be of benefit in the context of The Wash given recent higher *E.coli* levels.

Despite the projects aims however, there is the potential for conflict with fisheries, potentially further reducing the space available. In particular, any towed fishing activity would likely be precluded as a consequence of the ‘mother reef’ system being deployed. However, the area intended to be covered by the system is circa 0.4ha (20x200m) and therefore a very small proportion of the area available for fishing (noting for example that the maximum area of a shellfish Lay in The Wash is 10ha). The organisation has indicated that pot-based fishing will not be excluded as a result of the ‘mother reef’ system, however, it is likely that they would pose a greater risk of snagging with shanks of pots.

The site selection process is ongoing at this stage, but the organisation is of the view that the potential sites in The Wash will avoid shrimp fishing areas, which are the most likely to be impacted by the project as a consequence of the deployment of ‘mother reef’. Furthermore, the North Norfolk site is intended to be collocated with

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<sup>3</sup> The Environment Agency launched a new tool mapping historic native oyster reefs in the UK to facilitate efforts for oyster restoration [New tool to drive restoration of historic native oyster reefs - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

<sup>4</sup> Included in the OSPAR List of Threatened and/or Declining Species

<sup>5</sup> Deevsh A. Hemraj et al. ,Oyster reef restoration fails to recoup global historic ecosystem losses despite substantial biodiversity gain.Sci. Adv.8,eabp8747(2022).DOI:10.1126/sciadv.abp8747

the 'Norfolk Seaweed' farm (north of Blakeney, west of the Cromer Shoal Marine Conservation Zone).

It is relevant to note that the organisation anticipates 'spill-over' from the reef into the surrounding area which could be of benefit as a fishery in its own right, particularly if the oysters eventually establish themselves on the intertidal areas of The Wash. However it should also be noted that, in the event such a fishery is possible, additional management measures (most likely in the form of a new byelaw) would be required to manage this.

The organisation has reportedly been in dialogue with local fishing industry to discuss the matter but have not provided a detailed consideration of stakeholder views on the matter. During dialogue on the proposals, the organisation have been made aware of the range of fishing activities which operate in the area to facilitate continued dialogue.

On balance, the project appears to be consistent with the aim to restore Oyster reefs and government targets to enhance biodiversity<sup>6</sup> and is likely to be of minimum disruption to fishery stakeholders. However, the extent of consultation with fishing industry is not, at this stage, sufficient to determine the level of impact which will potentially be dependent on final site selection in any case.

Noting that the project is at the 'pre-application phase', it is considered appropriate to provide support for the project in principle but that the Authority will consider the proposal in more detail once the full facts of the project are known and would expect further dialogue with fishing industry to determine the extent to which they could be impacted by the project.

A letter to that effect is provided at Appendix 1.

### **Financial Implications**

No immediate costs identified. In the longer term the Authority may need to consider management measures (with associated costs) should oysters become well established.

### **Legal Implications**

The Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 sets out the duties of the Authority, which include taking '*...steps which in the authority's opinion are necessary or expedient for the purpose of making a contribution to the achievement of sustainable development.*'

### **Conclusion**

It appears that the proposed projects have the potential to be of benefit to the marine environment whilst having minimal impact upon fishing activity. The marine licensing process will provide the appropriate checks and balances, including dialogue with industry, and it is therefore recommended that the letter of support in principle be provided as requested.

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<sup>6</sup> Noting biodiversity is listed as a 'priority area' within the Environment Act 2021.

**Appendices**

Appendix 1 – Draft letter of support

**Background Documents**

As per references in footnotes.

**Appendix 1 – Draft letter of support in principle for the Oyster Heaven Project in The Wash and North Norfolk Coast.**

**By Email Only: [email address]**

Mr George Birch  
Oyster Heaven

[date]

Dear Mr Birch

**Oyster Heaven Project**

I am writing on behalf of the Authority with regard to proposals for Oyster Heaven to undertake two projects within the Eastern IFCA district.

Having considered the overall aim of the project and likely benefits, the Authority can confirm its support in principle at this stage for the projects in The Wash and the North Norfolk Coast.

In coming to this decision, the potential benefits have been considered alongside the potential for the projects to impact local fishing operations, primarily through the exclusion of fishing activity from the project areas as a consequence of the deployment of the 'mother reef' system. It is understood that the organisation has sought dialogue with local fishery stakeholders and that the area impacted by the project is likely to be small (circa 0.4ha for each project) and that one area will be co-located with a proposed seaweed farm. However, further dialogue with fishing industry and consideration of their views would be required to inform a final position on the matter.

The Authority will consider the proposals in more detail once they reach the Marine Licence Application stage, at which point we reserve the right to respond to the consultations as considered necessary and appropriate.

Yours sincerely

Julian Gregory  
Chef Executive Officer

### Vision

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## Action Item 11

### 56<sup>th</sup> Eastern Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority Meeting

19 June 2024

#### Wash Cockle Fishery 2023

**Report by:** Luke Godwin, ACO

#### **Purpose of Report**

The purpose of this report is to brief members on the process and associated information that led to a decision to open the 2024 cockle fishery on 20 June 2024.

#### **Recommendations**

It is recommended that members:

- **Note** the contents of the report including the stock survey, the output from the consultation, the management measures for the fishery and the decision to open the fishery on 20 June 2024.
- **Agree** to delegate authority to the CEO in consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chair to introduce, vary or revoke flexible management measures referred to in Schedule 4 of the Wash Cockle and Mussel Byelaw 2021 to manage a cockle fishery in the event that the byelaw comes into effect.
- **Agree** to delegate authority to the CEO in consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chair to introduce, vary or revoke flexible management measures with less than 12-hours' notice as may be required, in accordance with the provisions of the Wash Cockle and Mussel Byelaw 2021 should the byelaw come into effect.

#### **Background**

The Authority manages cockle fisheries in The Wash and such management in accordance with the associated Fisheries Management Plan (FMP)<sup>7</sup> as agreed by the Authority at the 37<sup>th</sup> Eastern IFCA meeting. The FMP sets out how the Total Allowable Catch (TAC) for the fishery is calculated along with other policy and principles for management required to ensure a sustainable fishery which operates within environmental parameters.

To inform the bespoke management measures required for each fishery an annual stock survey is undertaken during spring.

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<sup>7</sup> [https://www.eastern-ifca.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/2019\\_07\\_WFO\\_cockle\\_fishery\\_management\\_plan1.5\\_Final.pdf](https://www.eastern-ifca.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/2019_07_WFO_cockle_fishery_management_plan1.5_Final.pdf)

The Wash cockle fisheries were managed under the Wash Fishery Order 1992 (WFO) until its expiry on 4 January 2023. At the 50<sup>th</sup> Eastern IFCA meeting, members agreed to interim measures to manage the fishery by way of implementing a temporary closure and issuing exemptions to such (to enable fishing) with conditions which reflect management measures for the fishery in accordance with the FMP. In addition, members agreed to delegate authority to the CEO to issue such exemptions (to open a fishery), to issue, vary and revoke conditions attaching to the exemptions and, in consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chair, revoke exemptions so as to effectively close the fishery in accordance with the FMP (e.g. because the TAC is exhausted).

## **Report**

### Requirement for an early decision

Representation was made by fishing industry representatives for an 'early opening' (early June) for the fishery. The main rationale provided being that the fishery is more dependent on the adult cockle stock this year, as identified in the annual survey (Appendix 1) which are also vulnerable to die-off as a result of atypical mortality which typically starts to take effect during periods of warm weather. An early fishery would, therefore, reduce the risk of cockles being lost to atypical mortality in the event of a warm spell of weather prior to the fishery taking them.

In order to provide opportunity for industry to provide a view on the matter, a short consultation was held between 17 May and 28 May, which included an industry meeting on 28 May 2024. The consultation sought views on the full suite of management measure proposals for the fishery in addition to the opening date. The decision to hold a short consultation was informed by consultation with Wash fishery members of the Authority, all of whom were of the view that a short consultation would be appropriate in the circumstances.

Ordinarily 7-days' notice is provided to industry with regards to the opening of the fishery and provide the confirmed management measures. Because the next scheduled Authority meeting was 19 June 2024, which precludes a decision being taken at that meeting, it was necessary to take a decision in advance of the Authority meeting.

The matter of the open date for the fishery was considered in Decision Memo 2024\_05\_29\_Early\_Opening\_Decision\_Memo. Having considered the views of industry, including those provided at the meeting on 28 May, it was decided to open a cockle fishery on 20 June 2024. The decision was made by the CEO under delegated Authority provided at the 50<sup>th</sup> Eastern IFCA meeting. The Chair of the Authority was consulted and agreed with the proposed decision.

### Annual stock assessment

The annual cockle stock survey was undertaken in spring of 2024 and a survey report has been published (Appendix 1).

The previous assessment in 2023 identified that the adult cockle biomass was only 457 tonnes above the SSSI Conservation Objective target of 3,000 tonnes. This could have severely limited the size of the fishery last year, had there not been

sufficiently large numbers of juvenile cockles of a size that were believed would soon recruit into the adult population. An additional short survey (of 139 stations) was conducted in July 2023 to ensure this growth and the resulting recruitment of juveniles into the adult population had occurred sufficiently to open a wider fishery. That assessment estimated the biomass of adult stocks had increased to somewhere between 8,869 tonnes and 14,651 tonnes, enabling the fishery to proceed with a TAC of 2,937 tonnes<sup>8</sup>.

The 2024 survey estimated that current adult stock was 11,882 tonnes, which is a notable increase on the 3,457 tonnes present last year and demonstrates the amount of growth and recruitment into the adult population that took place, particularly when the impacts of subsequent atypical mortality, predation and the fishery are also taken into consideration.

As would be expected, considering the amount of recruitment from juvenile to adult stocks that occurred last year, the 10,463 tonnes of juvenile stock estimated to be present this year is lower than the 14,163 tonnes present last year. Overall, though, the total stock has increased from 17,620 tonnes to 22,346 tonnes.

#### Calculating the Total Allowable Catch (TAC)

In 2023 the Authority decided to move away from the well-established practice of calculating the TAC for the fishery as a 1/3 of the adult cockle stock (cockles  $\geq 14$ mm width) and to instead use 1/6th of the total stock.

The TAC for the 2024 fishery is, therefore, **3,724 tonnes**.

#### Management measures

The results of the stock survey were considered in the context of the Wash Cockle Fishery Management Plan<sup>9</sup> to develop initial proposals and then a Habitat Regulation Assessment was undertaken to determine if the fishery was compatible with the Wash MPAs and what mitigation would be required if impacts could not be ruled out.

In summary, the key proposals included the following:

- Total Allowable Catch of 3,724 tonnes.
- Closures to prevent disturbance to seals (during the sensitive pupping season where seals haul-out over low water to feed their young), high-density juvenile cockle areas and shellfish lays (which are closed to all but the holder of the lay, as was, under the WFO).
- Operating times for the fishery in accordance with the established principles (4-day weeks, Mon-Fri, tides over 6m) with deviation from these principles to make up for lost fishing opportunity due to unfavourable tides and additional Sunday openings to provide access to Holbeach beds (which cannot be fished during weekdays by hand-working as it is used as a military bombing range).
- A requirement to sort cockles using a device which will exclude the majority of <10mm cockles (which was implemented last year).

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<sup>8</sup> For the first time since its introduction in 1998, the TAC was calculated as being 1/6<sup>th</sup> of the total cockle biomass, rather than 1/3<sup>rd</sup> adult cockle biomass.

<sup>9</sup> [2019\\_07\\_WFO\\_cockle\\_fishery\\_management\\_plan1.5\\_Final.pdf \(eastern-ifca.gov.uk\)](#)



- The 'standard' management measures previously in place under WFO Regulations and licence conditions.

These proposals were the subject of consultation with all persons named on exemptions (including the exemption holder and their nominated representatives and deputies).

As a consequence of industry representation, consideration was also given to enabling dual fishing within the cockle hand-work fishery and the mussel re-laying dredge fishery. The CEO used delegated Authority (50<sup>th</sup> Eastern IFCA meeting) in coming to a decision to issue an additional exemption condition on application to those who intend to operate in both fisheries. In summary, the risk of enabling this appears low on the basis that it is unlikely that a person would practically be able to use a mussel dredge to take cockles from the hand-work fishery and because very few intend to operate in both fisheries during the same calendar day. Issuing these exemptions on an application basis is considered to reduce risk and provide the Authority with a means to monitor uptake and revise the condition as may be needed.

### Consultation

A total of 21 consultation responses were received (albeit two of them having been received after the deadline) and the industry meeting was attended by 9 fishery representatives from a range of business models (processors, independent) and from King's Lynn and Boston (with the latter being represented by only a single fishermen).

In summary, there was limited commentary on any of the standard management measures to be implemented in the fishery. Key concerns raised related to the size of seal haul-out closures and operating times. Whilst there is apparently consensus that seal haul-out closures were too large and that fishing activity does not disturb seals, there was less consensus on the suitability of operating times. Generally commentary indicated that additional days would be preferred and to accommodate this, significant deviation from the agreed principles for operating times (4-day weeks, Monday to Friday, tides over 6m) is required. The key revisions made as a result of the consultation are as follows:

- Amendments to the closed areas for the protection of seals (reduction in area closed).
- Revised operating times (additional openings, primarily on Sundays)

The consultation outcome documents, and full suite of agreed management measures are at Appendices 2 and 3 respectively.

As a consequence of matters raised during the consultation and industry meeting, further consideration may be given to the following at a suitable time and as necessary:

- Monitor uptake of the TAC and risk of die-off across the fishery with a view to consider a revision to the daily catch restriction (possible increase to 2.5 tonnes) during the season.
- Monitor areas closed for the protection of high-density juvenile cockles with a view to consider opening if risk of 'ridging-out' or die-off due to atypical mortality occurs.
- Review of the agreed principles for determining operating times.

- Consideration of the potential to move from a weight-based daily catch restriction to a volume-based restriction (i.e. use of 'load lines' in standard cockle bags).

Such consideration will be dependent on resource availability in the context of delivering priority and business critical workstreams.

#### Conservation advice from Natural England

Conservation advice has been received from Natural England which concludes no adverse effects on site integrity. In coming to this conclusion, further mitigation is considered necessary in the form of a closure on the Black Buoy cockle bed from 1 November to mitigate the potential for impacts on over-wintering oystercatcher populations. This measure will be developed and be the subject of consultation in the coming weeks.

#### **Financial Implications**

The interim measures for managing the cockle fishery (i.e. in lieu of the Wash Cockle and Mussel Byelaw 2021 coming into effect) do not include a mechanism for charging fees of fishermen. It was anticipated that the byelaw to enable fee collection would come into effect this financial year (as reflected in the expected income in the 2024/25 budget) and failure to recover costs this year would require making up the difference from reserves (54<sup>th</sup> Eastern IFCA Meeting). The financial implications of this were considered at the 50<sup>th</sup> Eastern IFCA meeting.

#### **Legal Implications**

The main legal implications relate to failing in the Authority's duties to protect the Wash MPAs of in enabling a fishery which is not sustainable. Such is potentially challengeable via a judicial review. Risk of legal challenge is mitigated through the adoption of due diligence in coming to a decision on the matters reported above. Such includes a robust evidence base on which the recommendations are based, seeking conservation advice from the Statutory Nature Conservation Advisor (Natural England) and consultation with stakeholders.

#### **Conclusion**

Fishery management measures were developed considering the Cockle Fishery Management Plan, a Habitat Regulation Assessment and consultation with industry.

#### **Appendices**

Appendix 1 – 2024 Intertidal Wash Cockle Stock Survey Report  
Appendix 2 – Wash Cockle Fishery 2024 Consultation Outcome Document  
Appendix 3 - Management measures for the 2024 Wash Cockle Fishery

All Appendices available on the Authority's website at:  
[Authority Meeting Papers - Eastern IFCA \(eastern-ifca.gov.uk\)](https://www.eastern-ifca.gov.uk)

#### **Background Documents**

Minutes and papers for Action item 11 of the 37<sup>th</sup> Eastern IFCA Meeting, 11 September 2019.

Minutes and papers for Action item 10 of the 50<sup>th</sup> Eastern IFCA Meeting, 14 December 2022.

Minutes and papers for Action item 9 of the 54<sup>th</sup> Eastern IFCA Meeting, 13 December 2023.

### Vision

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## Action Item 12

### 56<sup>th</sup> Eastern Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority Meeting

19 June 2024

#### Review of Annual Priorities and Risk Register

**Report by:** J. Gregory, CEO

#### **Purpose of Report**

The purpose of this report is to update members on progress against 2024-25 priorities and to review the Risk Register.

#### **Recommendations**

It is recommended that members:

- **Note** the content of this report

#### **Background**

The Authority is mandated to produce an annual plan each year to lay out the expected business outputs for the year ahead.

The Authority has a rolling five-year Business Plan that incorporates annual priorities informed by the annual Strategic Assessment. The plan also includes the high-level objectives agreed with Defra.

The rolling five-year business plan reflects the need to engage in longer term planning in the context of high levels of demand and the requirement to be flexible with priorities to reflect the dynamic nature of inshore fisheries, the marine environment and the policy landscape.

The Risk Register is contained within the Business Plan, and it captures key issues that are judged to pose potential risks to the organisation. The matrix sets out the magnitude of the risk to Eastern IFCA from an organisational viewpoint, incorporating amongst others reputational and financial risks. It also sets out the likelihood of an identified risk occurring.

#### **Report**

This update encompasses the period March 2024 to end of May 2024.

The tables at Appendix 1 detail the progress against the key priorities for 2024-25, as set in the Business plan for 2024-29.

The Risk Register is set out at Appendix 2 and the current status of each risk area is shown at Appendix 3.

**Appendices**

Appendix 1 – Update on priorities set for 2024-25

Appendix 2 – Risk Register

Appendix 3 – Update on Risk Register

**Background Documents**

Eastern Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority Business Plan 2024-29.

## APPENDIX 1 - Progress against Annual Priorities – March 2024 to May 2024 (inclusive)

Four key priorities are established for 2024-25.

Financial Year 2024-25		
Priorities	Progress	Comment
<b>1. To ensure that the conservation objectives of Marine Protected Areas in the district are furthered through:</b>		
a) Implementation of management measures for 'red risk' gear/feature interactions (carried over).	<b>Delayed</b>	<p>Completion of this workstream is dependent on confirmation of the Closed Area Byelaw 2021, which was intended to be submitted during Q1 of 2024-25. The development of the byelaw had taken place over a number of years and involved analysis of a significant amount of environmental data and additional research work.</p> <p>Submission is delayed whilst additional consideration is given to the evidence and rationale for all closed areas to ensure that the closures reflect the legal obligations to protect 'red risk' features without disproportionately impacting fishery livelihoods. The additional resource required to undertake a review of the byelaw was unexpected and will be ongoing through Q2 with submission anticipated in Q3. Any requirement to re-consult on the byelaw will have an impact on delivery timescales.</p>
b) Continued implementation of Adaptive Risk Management of fishing activity within the Cromer Shoal Chalk Beds Marine Conservation Zone (carried over).	<b>Delayed</b>	<p>A delivery plan for the project was developed in Q1 of 2024-25 and progress against the plan is delayed on some aspects of the workstreams. Key updates are as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consideration of comments from the Marine Management Organisation Formal QA has not been completed as anticipated however re-submission is anticipated in Q2;</li> <li>• Agreement of the delivery plan for the 'Natural Disturbance Study', the projects' key research programme, was delayed following review of the robustness of the experimental design, with several elements of the original plan identified as potentially not capable of providing the necessary statistical certainty;</li> <li>• Budgetary management of the 'Natural Disturbance Study' was also reviewed during Q1 which is ongoing and resulted in the application of</li> </ul>

		<p>funding for the project with an outcome to the application being anticipated in Q2;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Completion of survey work in furtherance of the ‘Natural Disturbance Study’, was delayed due to poor weather and the availability of required research equipment and technical experts but has now moved forward with the completion of the baseline multibeam survey and results from this are anticipated in early Q2;</li> <li>• Review of the consultation on Phase 1 Cromer Shoal Permit Conditions was completed in Q1 and recommendations are being brought to this meeting.</li> </ul>
c) Completion of ‘amber/green’ gear/fishing interaction assessments and development and implementation of management measures as required (carried over).	<b>In Progress</b>	This workstream was significantly delayed during 2023-24 due to a number of factors. Progress in Q1 included the redevelopment of the projects delivery plan and framework for undertaking the required assessments and progress has been made in line with the plan.
d) Participation in the national ‘Coastal Health’ project and the pilot in The Wash (new priority).	<b>In Progress</b>	Contribution to the project during Q1 has included required attendance at Working Group meetings and contribution to the project’s delivery plan and funding bids. Work during Q2 will include collection of additional cockle samples for analysis and undertaking a ‘summer survey’ of the cockle fishery to provide data to the project.
<b>2. Management of Wash cockle and mussel fisheries (wild capture and private)</b>		
a) Confirmation of the Wash Cockle and Mussel Byelaw 2021 to enable management of wild capture fisheries (carried over).	<b>Delayed</b>	The formal QA process continued through Q1. MMO provided further comments for consideration which were quickly resolved although these were not anticipated on the basis of previous assurances that the byelaw was ready for submission to Defra. It is understood that further feedback will now be received again prior to submission, and this is anticipated during Q2.

b) Implementation of Wash Cockle and Mussel Byelaw access policies (transition) (carried over).	<b>In Progress</b>	The transition process was completed in the last financial year so far as it can be prior to the byelaw coming into effect.
c) Develop appropriate management of private shellfish aquaculture within The Wash (carried over).	<b>Delayed</b>	<p>The workstream is significantly delayed due to an extended period of consideration by Defra. It is understood that resource availability within Defra has limited progress in finalising the wording of the draft Several Order to manage private aquaculture in The Wash, which had effectively been paused since submission in 2022.</p> <p>Dialogue with Defra has been ongoing during Q1, and it is understood that the Several Order is now ongoing and assistance has been provided in this regard. The next phase of the workstream, a formal consultation on the Order, cannot commence until wording has been finalized.</p>
d) A review of relevant byelaws inherited from Eastern Sea Fisheries Joint Committee (new priority).	<b>In Progress (not started)</b>	This workstream is not programmed to begin until Q3 of 2024/25
<b>3. Obtaining better fisheries data</b>		
a) Facilitating and contributing to the roll-out of I-VMS by the Marine Management organisation (revised priority).	<b>In Progress</b>	Contribution to the roll-out of I-VMS prior to the statutory requirement is completed. The next phase of the roll-out will begin once the Statutory Instrument implementing the requirement is in place. This is anticipated for Q2 or 3 however, the general election has impacted upon this timeframe and the timing of the SI will now be a matter for the incoming government.
	<b>In Progress</b>	The situation remains that until the I-VMS Statutory Instrument (SI) has been laid the potential to implement permit conditions to require VMS within any of the



	<b>(not started)</b>	Authority's fisheries would be challenging, in particular because the provisions and their application are unknown and because such could detrimentally impact the national roll-out.
<b>4. Fisheries Management Plans</b>		
a) Supporting the planning / preparation phase (revised priority).	<b>In progress</b>	Support has been provided to delivery bodies responsible for each FMP as required during Q1 which primarily involved continued support to the Association of IFCAs in the development of the Cockle FMP.
b) Supporting the publication phase including by reviewing and evaluation plans ( <b>revised priority</b> ).	<b>In progress</b>	No FMPs were published during this quarter.
c) Supporting post-publication phase including implementation ( <b>revised priority</b> ).	<b>In progress</b>	Contribution to the implementation phase of the published FMPs included review of proposals for implementing the Whelk FMP and attendance at an associated workshop during Q1. The Association of IFCAs is seeking greater involvement in the process and support is being provided to this extent.
<b>5. Contribute to the development of second-generation Marine Plans through</b>		
a) Collaboration with the Marine Management Organisation to seek opportunities to improve data and evidence for inshore fishing activities ( <b>new priority</b> ).	<b>In Progress</b>	Engagement with the Marine Plan development process is ongoing and has included consideration of the 'Statement of Public Participation' on the plan and establishing dialogue with MMO officers responsible for development of the plan.  It is understood that the next phase of the workstream may be delayed due to the general election (period of heightened sensitivity).
b) Stakeholder engagement to raise awareness of marine planning and identify key issues ( <b>new priority</b> ).	<b>In Progress</b>	This has included publicising the first consultative phase of the project via the Authority's website and dialogue with stakeholders.

c) Contributing to policy development by providing expert advice and relaying information from our stakeholders ( <b>new priority</b> ).	<b>In Progress</b>	In Q1 this included feedback on the 'Statement of Public Participation' and a workshop which sought to characterise the marine plan area. Further contribution is anticipated in Q2.
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**Key:**

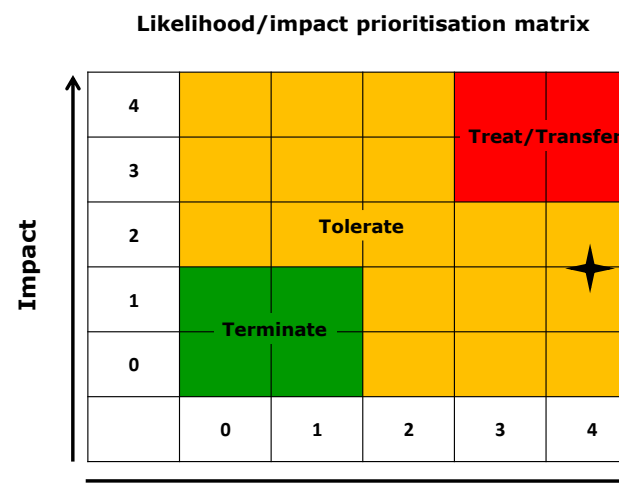
	<b>Complete</b>		<b>Progress stalled / delayed</b>
	<b>In progress</b>		<b>Not started</b>

## Appendix 1: Risk Management

The risk matrix sets out the magnitude of the risk to Eastern IFCA from an organisational viewpoint incorporating amongst others reputational and financial risks. The matrix also sets out the likelihood of an identified risk occurring. Mitigation which is in place or to be introduced is identified. Risk is ranked on an arbitrary scale from 0 (low risk – coloured green) to 4 (high risk – coloured red). The average of the combined financial and reputational risk is taken and plotted on to the matrix below, the likelihood of that risk occurring is also plotted. Mitigation action is noted. It should be noted that in most cases there are already many actions being undertaken as part of routine working practices to reduce the risks to the Eastern IFCA.

The four actions that can be applied are:

Treat	Take positive action to mitigate risk
Tolerate	Acknowledge and actively monitor risk
Terminate	Risk no longer considered to be material to Eastern IFCA business
Transfer	Risk is out with Eastern IFCA's ability to treat and is transferred to higher level.



Risk matrix with worked example.

Risk A poses a financial threat (2) to the organisation and a reputation threat (1) generating a combined impact level of 1.5. The likelihood of the threat occurring is determined as 4. The resultant risk to Eastern IFCA is therefore plotted using the matrix and is identified as a risk that should be tolerated (i.e. acknowledged and actively monitored)

Description	Owner	Implications	Organisational impact (Reputation + Financial/2)		Likelihood	Risk	Mitigation	Action
Eastern IFCA fails to secure funding to replace assets	CEO	Substantial reduction in Eastern IFCA mobility particularly seaborne activities with consequential inability to fulfil full range of duties	4		2		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Current level of reserves provides sufficient funding to cover replacement of <i>RV Three Counties</i></li> <li>The open RHIB, FPV Seaspray, was procured using EMFF funding</li> <li>Seek efficiencies and promote cost effectiveness.</li> <li>Demonstrate value for money.</li> <li>Advertise/promote Eastern IFCA output and effectiveness to funding authorities through regular engagement with Council leaders and Financial Directors.</li> <li>Engage with partner agencies to identify alternative funding sources</li> <li>Explore asset sharing initiatives</li> <li>Agreement in place with funding authorities for capital funding contributions each year. Confirmed at the annual meeting with representatives of the Finance Directors on Friday 19<sup>th</sup> November 2021</li> <li>Scheduled asset replacement takes into account expected lifespan of assets which is reviewed regularly to account for unexpected depreciation and alignment of capital funding contributions;</li> <li>Assets managed and maintained to reduce the likelihood of early retirement or unexpected depreciation.</li> <li>Alternative sources of funding sought where appropriate e.g. capital funding is available from Defra with indicative amounts nominally allocated to Eastern IFCA for a daughter RIB for the new build vessel and a 'potting vessel' to replace FPV John Allen</li> </ul>	Tolerate
			Reputation	Financial				
			4	4	Drive for savings may impact County Councils' decisions regarding Eastern IFCA funding. Visible presence reduced, enforcement and survey activities compromised.			

Description	Owner	Implications	Organisational impact (Reputation + Financial/2)		Likelihood	Risk	Mitigation	Action
Eastern IFCA fails to maintain relevance amongst partners.	CEO	If Eastern IFCA fails to maintain relevance amongst partners Eastern IFCA's utility will come under scrutiny potentially resulting in re-allocation of duties	4		2	Possible – Whilst positive relationships have been established the existence of disparate partner aspirations introduces complexities which may drive perceptions of bias or inefficiency.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide a leadership function.</li> <li>Be proactive and identify issues early.</li> <li>Engage with all partners routinely.</li> <li>Operate transparently and utilise effective communications approaches.</li> <li>Use Business Plan to prioritise and communicate outputs, Measure progress/deliver outputs.</li> <li>Represent community issues to, and support their engagement with, higher authorities.</li> <li>Recent revisions undertaken to the ARM project for the MCZ to address wider stakeholders concerns about engagement.</li> <li>Effective business planning process in place.</li> <li>Leading role where appropriate e.g. Op Blake.</li> <li>Proactive approach to raising issues with Defra.</li> <li>Identify opportunities to facilitate delivery of Government objectives through outputs and contribute to Government fisheries and environmental targets by embedding into work plans.</li> </ul>	Tolerate
			Reputation	Financial				
			4	4				
		Loss of confidence in the organisation Failure of the organisation to perform in accordance with the standards and practices of a statutory public body	Withdrawal of LA and Defra funding for the organisation					

Description	Owner	Implications	Organisational impact (Reputation + Financial/2)		Likelihood	Risk	Mitigation	Action
Negative media comment	CEO	Negative perceptions of Eastern IFCA utility and effectiveness created at MMO/Defra Loss of Partner confidence Media scrutiny of individual Authority members	3		3	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Actively and regularly engage with all partners including media outlets.</li> <li>Review use of social media and web-based information noting its unavoidable use to misinterpret and spread misinformation.</li> <li>Embed professional standards and practices.</li> <li>Deliver change efficiently and effectively.</li> <li>Promulgate successful outcomes.</li> <li>Assure recognition and understanding through clear and concise publications and effective promulgation of such as appropriate.</li> <li>Routine updating of news items on website.</li> <li>Monitor media presence and engage where appropriate.</li> <li>Targeted and meaningful dialogue with stakeholders which caters for intended audiences to reduce likelihood of misinterpretation or misrepresentation.</li> </ul>	Treat
			Reputation	Financial	Possible – disenfranchised partners seek to introduce doubt as to Eastern IFCA professionalism, utility, and effectiveness			
			4	2				
			Eastern IFCA perceived to be under performing. Eastern IFCA considered poor value for money. Eastern IFCA perceived as irrelevant.	Negative perceptions introduce risk to continued funding				
Description	Owner	Implications	Organisational impact (Reputation + Financial/2)		Likelihood	Risk	Mitigation	Action
Degradation of MPAs due to fishing activity	CEO	Loss or damage of important habitats and species within environmentally	3.5		2	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fishing activities authorised by Eastern IFCA are assessed per Habitats Regulations and MaCAA; management routinely includes</li> </ul>	Tolerate
			Reputation	Financial	Possible – Eastern IFCA's approach to managing sea fisheries			
			4	3				

		designated areas.	Eastern IFCA is not meeting statutory duties under conservation legislation. Eastern IFCA not achieving vision as champion of sustainable marine environment. Degradation of marine habitats which lead to economic, social or cultural impacts.	Legal challenge brought against Eastern IFCA for failing to meet obligations under environmental legislation (including MaCAA).	resources actively addresses our environmental obligations.		<p>mitigation to prevent adverse effects on MPA integrity.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Eastern IFCA is fully engaged in national fisheries/MPA project, prioritising management of highest risk fisheries in MPAs and implementing new management measures.</li> <li>Effective monitoring of fishing activity and enforcement of measures</li> <li>Adaptive approach to fisheries management – i.e. engagement with fishing and conservation interests in the development of management measures, and appropriate review of measures to respond to changing environmental and socio-economic factors.</li> <li>Ongoing, close liaison with Natural England regarding conservation matters,</li> <li>Review of management in accordance with Defra guidance,</li> <li>Utilising I-VMS as a management tool by the Authority.</li> <li>Continue to progress research into the impact of fishing activities on MPA features to ensure the Authority has an up-to-date evidence base to inform its management decisions.</li> <li>MPA management is a high priority with substantial progress made. Current workstreams (e.g. Cromer Shoal MCZ, remaining ‘red risk’ and ‘amber and green’ sites are a high priority and are being progressed.</li> </ul>	
Description	Owner	Implications	Organisational impact (Reputation + Financial/2)		Likelihood	Risk	Mitigation	Action
Shellfish and fish stocks collapse	CEO	Risk of significant negative impact upon industry	3		3		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Annual stock assessments of bivalve stocks in The Wash</li> <li>Annual review of the level of threat via the Strategic Assessment</li> </ul>	Treat
			Reputation	Financial				

		viability with associated social and economic problems	3	3	Possible - Bivalve stocks have high natural variation; "atypical mortality" affecting stocks despite application of stringent fishery control measures Crustacean stocks not currently subject to effort control Bass stocks nationally and internationally under severe pressure Regional whelk and shrimp fisheries effort becoming unsustainable. Regional crab and lobster stocks being exploited beyond maximum sustainable yield. Active monitoring of 2021 cockle fishery identified small cockles being landed with potential impact on stock sustainability.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ability to allocate sufficient resources to monitoring and effective enforcement.</li> <li>Consultation with industry on possible management measures.</li> <li>Review of management measures in accordance with Defra guidance.</li> <li>Develop stock conservation measures as required for crab, lobster and whelk fisheries through engagement with the FMP programme and fishing industry and continue support for industry led Fisheries Improvement Plan</li> <li>SWEEP research into primary productivity levels within the Wash.</li> <li>Regular engagement with the industry to discuss specific matters.</li> <li>Continued research into the cockle and mussel mortality events.</li> <li>Whelk research is ongoing to identify level of risk posed and potential mitigation for sustainability concerns.</li> <li>Annual surveys of Wash cockle and mussel stocks alongside innovative approach to management of the cockle fishery.</li> <li>Consideration given to an engagement plan to educate and inform about small cockles, including engagement with processors for officers to better understand the market context.</li> <li>General engagement with FMP programme.</li> </ul>	
			Loss in confidence of the Eastern IFCA ability to manage the sea fisheries resources within its district	Resources directed at protecting alternative stocks from displaced effort. Additional resources applied to research into the cause of collapsed stocks and increased engagement and discussion with partners.				
Description	Owner	Implications	Organisational impact (Reputation + Financial/2)		Likelihood	Risk	Mitigation	Action
Failure to secure data	CEO	Non-compliance with UK General Data Protection	4		2		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All computers are password protected. Individuals only have access to the server through their own computer.</li> </ul>	Tolerate
			Reputation	Financial				



		<p>Regulations (GDPR).</p> <p>Prosecution casefiles compromised.</p> <p>Loss of data in the event of fire or theft</p> <p>Breakdown in dissemination of sensitive information between key delivery partners.</p>	<p><b>4</b></p> <p>Partners no longer believe that confidential information they have supplied is secure. Personnel issues arise over inability to secure information.</p>	<p><b>4</b></p> <p>Eastern IFCA open to both civil and criminal action regarding inability to secure personal information.</p>	<p>Possible - Limited staff access to both electronic and paper files. Office secure with CCTV, keypad entry system and alarm.</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Secure wireless internet</li> <li>Remote back up of electronic files</li> <li>Access to electronic files is restricted.</li> <li>Up to date virus software installed on all computers.</li> <li>Important documents secured in safes.</li> <li>ICT equipment and policies provided by public sector provider – including encrypted laptops/secure governmental email system.</li> <li>All Eastern IFCA personnel undergo DPA training.</li> <li>Electronic backup of all Eastern IFCA documents held by ICT provider offsite.</li> <li>Policies and processes developed to ensure data security and compliance with data protection legislation.</li> </ul>	
New Burdens Funding discontinued.	CEO	Substantial reduction in Eastern IFCA capability with consequential inability to fulfil full range of duties or additional burden on funding authorities.	<p><b>4</b></p> <p><b>Reputation</b></p> <p><b>4</b></p> <p>Inability to meet all obligations would have a significant impact upon reputation.</p>	<p><b>Financial</b></p> <p><b>4</b></p> <p>Circa 25% of the annual budget is provided by Defra under the New Burdens doctrine so its loss would have a significant impact.</p>	<p><b>2</b></p> <p>Defra have continued to roll over new Burdens funding in recognition of the value that IFCA's provide in meeting national policy objectives.</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>AIFCA engagement with Defra has led to an indicative three year settlement (ends March) 2025 with 'New Burdens' funding continuing at the same level and additional funding of £150k for each IFCA to address three specific work-streams.</li> <li>County Council Finance Directors representatives have been kept apprised of the situation and the potential for increased levies in the event that funding from Defra is discontinued.</li> </ul>	Tolerate

Description	Owner	Implications	Organisational impact (Reputation + Financial/2)		Likelihood	Risk	Mitigation	Action
The Wash Cockle and Mussel Byelaw 2021 that will replace the expired Wash Fishery Order 1992 does not receive ministerial approval or is substantially delayed.	CEO	Continuing uncertainty for industry members with consequential impact upon industry viability and associated social and economic issues.  Requirement to revise the byelaw or in worst case scenario to start the process again resulting in substantial work and consequential impact upon ability to progress other priority workstreams.	4		3		Confirmation of the new byelaw is a high priority for 2024-25 in the Business Plan.  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The fisheries are being managed under interim management measures with the status quo being maintained in terms of access to the fisheries.</li> <li>The transition process under the Eligibility Policy as part of the new byelaw has been progressed to provide surety for industry members.</li> </ul> Dialogue will be maintained with Defra teams and officers will prioritise responses to information requests from Defra.  Officers met with the Fisheries Minister and Defra officials to redress inaccurate information and criticism associated with the replacement of the WFO 1992.	Treat
			Reputation	Financial				
			4	4	The effective management of all fisheries within the Wash is important in terms of industry viability, sustainability of stocks and managing the impact of fishing activity in a heavily designated MPA. Loss of confidence in Eastern IFCA's ability to manage the cockle and mussel fisheries is likely to be significant if the new byelaw is not replaced in a timely way			

Description	Owner	Implications	Organisational impact (Reputation + Financial/2)		Likelihood	Risk	Mitigation	Action
The new Several Order to replace that element of the Wash Fishery Order 1992 is substantially delayed.	CEO	Continuing uncertainty for industry members with consequential impact upon industry viability and associated social and economic issues.	4		3		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduction of a new Several Order is a high priority for 2024-25 in the Business Plan.</li> <li>• The fisheries are being managed under interim management measures with the status quo being maintained in terms of access to the fisheries. .</li> <li>• Dialogue will be maintained with Defra teams and officers will priories responses to information requests from Defra.</li> <li>• Industry dialogue will be prioritised as required to make progress.</li> </ul>	Treat
			Reputation	Financial				
			4	4	<p>The effective management of 'lays' in the Wash is important for aquaculture in the Wash is important in terms of industry viability and managing the impact of aquaculture activity in a heavily designated MPA. Loss of confidence in operating lays is likely to be significant if the new Several Order is not replaced in a timely way</p> <p>Potential for legal challenge against Eastern IFCA.</p> <p>Ongoing loss of revenue from permit fees.</p> <p>Defra have advised that the matter will now be progressed but the process relating to the order and the associated FMP are likely to still take some time to complete.</p>			

### Appendix 3 – Risk Register Update March 2024 to end of May 2024

Risk Description	Change in risk-rating / update*
Eastern IFCA fails to secure funding to replace assets	<b>No Change</b> in risk rating or mitigation since publication in Business Plan 2024-29.
Eastern IFCA fails to maintain relevance amongst partners	<b>No change</b> in risk rating since publication in Business Plan 2024-29. Participation in the Development of Fisheries Management Plans, second Generation Marine Plans and meeting Government targets for environmental protection (particularly the Environmental Improvement Plan 2023) is likely to function as mitigation of this risk and to that end, a proactive approach is taken to engaging with such which has included dialogue with MMO officers with regards to stakeholder engagement.
Negative media comment	<b>No change</b> in risk rating or mitigation since publication in Business Plan 2024-29
Degradation of MPAs due to fishing activity	<b>No change</b> in risk compared to last update. The departure of a significant proportion of the Marine Science team potentially increased the likelihood associated with this risk but which has been mitigated by the appointment of new staff, a restructure of the Marine Science team and emphasis placed in completing the ‘amber and greens’ and ‘Cromer Shoal Chalk Beds MCZ’ workstream in particular.
Shellfish and fish stocks collapse	<b>No change</b> in risk rating or mitigation since publication in Business Plan 2024-29. Risk is mitigated through the contribution to the Coastal Health Project which was established as a priority during 2024/25.
Failure to secure data	<b>No change</b> in risk rating or mitigation since publication in Business Plan 2024-29
New Burdens funding discontinued	<b>No change</b> in risk rating or mitigation since publication in Business Plan 2024-29
The Wash Fishery Order 1992 is not replaced in time when it expires in January 2023	<b>No change</b> in risk rating since publication in Business Plan 2024-29. Implementation of interim measures to enable fishing in the public fisheries and protect stocks in private fisheries is in place via Eastern IFCA legacy byelaws.

\* The risk Register was updated in the 2024-29 five-year Business Plan. Updates above are in relation to changes since agreement of updated risk register from the Plan (March 2024).

### Vision

The Eastern Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority will lead, champion and manage a sustainable marine environment and inshore fisheries, by successfully securing the right balance between social, environmental and economic benefits to ensure healthy seas, sustainable fisheries and a viable industry.



## Information Item 14

### 56<sup>th</sup> Eastern Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority Meeting

19 June 2024

#### **Marine Protection Quarterly Report**

**Report by:** Jon Butler, Deputy Chief Officer

#### **Purpose of Report**

To provide members with an overview of the work carried out by the Marine Protection team during the period of March 2024 to May 2024 inclusive.

#### **Recommendations**

It is recommended that members:

- **Note** the content of the reports.

#### **Financial Implications**

None

#### **Legal Implications**

None

#### **Appendices**

Appendix 1 – Marine Protection Quarterly Report

#### **Background Documents**

Not Applicable

## Appendix 1: Marine Protection Report March 2024 – May 2024

### March 2024

#### Enforcement and engagement priorities throughout the district:

**Area 1 (Hail Sand Fort to Gibraltar Point)** – Fill intel gap, particularly in relation to crab fishing activity. Coastal patrols visiting key ports, including prioritising a joint patrol to Grimsby with MMO / NE / IFCA, and visiting Horseshoe Point. One vessel patrol to Donna Nook, and compliance inspections of commercial gear and catch. Re-engagement with commercial fishers, including face to face contact and phone calls. Shore patrols to investigate bass landings by recreational fishers at Tetney, and engagement with recreational anglers.

**Area 2 (The Wash and North Norfolk Coast to Brancaster)** – Landing inspections of shrimp vessels, and at least one landing inspection per month of each active whelk vessel. Submit intel following patrols.

**Area 3 (Brancaster to Great Yarmouth)** – Shore patrols, and evening and weekend inspections of recreational anglers, also focusing on engagement and education. Boardings, gear compliance inspections and engagement with commercial fishers. Landing inspections of crab fishers, and at least one landing inspection of each active whelk vessel. Submit intel following patrols, particularly in relation to whelk fishing and inland recreational angling activity.

**Area 4 (Suffolk Coast)** – Shore patrols including along the rivers, engagement and education of recreational anglers. At least one landing inspection of each active whelk vessel. Submit intel relating to anything in the southern area following patrols.

#### Enforcement Metrics:

Enforcement metric	Number completed			
	Area 1	Area 2	Area 3	Area 4
Shore Patrols	2	7	10	10
Port visits	7	9	29	33
Catch inspections (landings observed)	0	3	10	6
Catch Inspections (Landings not observed)	1	2	1	1
Vehicle Inspections	0	0	0	0
Premises inspections	0	1	2	2
Enforcement actions/Offences	0	0	0	0
Intelligence reports submitted	1	4	1	7
Fishers engaged	5	9	55	63
Vessel Patrols	0	1	2	0
Boardings	0	0	0	0
Gear Inspections	0	1	0	0

## **EMS monitoring:**

Monitoring of 'restricted areas' under the Marine Protected Areas Byelaw 2018 was conducted throughout the reporting period. The following monitoring occurred:

Protected Feature	<i>Intertidal biogenic reef</i>	<i>Subtidal biogenic reef: Sabellaria spp. (Ross worm), subtidal stony reef, subtidal mixed sediments, subtidal mud.</i>	<i>Intertidal seagrass beds, subtidal mixed sediments, subtidal mud.</i>	<i>Eelgrass beds (Humber)</i>
Protected Areas	1-13	14-29	30-35	36
	<b>6</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>1</b>

## **Enforcement messages received:**

### Lincolnshire

#### The Wash

- Concern from fishermen regarding the amount of whelk gear set in the Boston Deepes, the gear has no radar reflectors and could come fast to vessels fishing in the dark.
- Fisherman considering setting boat up to trawl for sole, advised on current regulations and byelaws which are applicable.

### North Norfolk

- Wells vessels are being pushed out of whelk grounds east of the wash windfarm by larger Grimsby vessels which are receiving compensation to keep out of windfarm areas. The Wells based vessels are being forced closer inshore where whelks are in lower concentrations. Some of the whelk gear has also been cut by the larger boats.
- IFCOs have developed good relationship with a group called 'Tight lines, calm minds', plan to attend fishing matches run by the group to discuss local fishing regulations.
- Officers attended the Cromer Fisherman's AGM to update on progress towards implementing a byelaw to manage potting activity within the Cromer Shoal MCZ.
- Fisherman expressed concerns that fishing within the MCZ has become unsustainable due to the amount of gear already in the area.

### Suffolk

- IFCO's responded to query regarding the use of crab cart as bait when sea angling.
- A commercial fish shop owner has been mentioned on a restaurant's Facebook post and accused by a member of the public of supplying the restaurant with unethically caught bass.

### **Fishing trends:**

Area 1: (Hail Sand Fort to Gibraltar Point).

Area 2: (Wash and North Norfolk Coast to Brancaster).

Area 3: (Brancaster to Great Yarmouth).

Minimal activity, usual for time of year. Main fisheries are whelk and herring with various landing inspections on both, some crab and lobster reported high numbers for time of year but no landing inspections. Recreationally charter boats are still active and conducting trips from Great Yarmouth, with mixed catches, mostly whiting, and the odd codling now showing up.

Area 4: (Great Yarmouth to Harwich).

Patrols have continued throughout the district, but very little commercial activity, with just a few low-level catches of herring and whelks. On days with better weather more commercial fishermen are seen preparing their boats for the spring. Charter boats are still active and conducting trips from Lowestoft on a regular basis, with mixed catches and the odd codling now showing up. Couple of fishermen in Lowestoft targeting Spurdog, but this doesn't look like a long-term activity, due to the low prices not making it cost effective. Whelk boats still active, going every few days from Lowestoft, but returning at unpredictable hours.



**April 2024**

**Enforcement and engagement priorities throughout the district:**

**Area 1 (Hail Sand Fort to Gibraltar Point)** – Two coastal patrols with visits to key ports, including Grimsby, and a visit to Horseshoe Point. Prioritise a joint patrol with the MMO and/or NE IFCA. Commercial landings with compliance inspections of gear and catch, and education and engagement with commercial fishers. Shore patrols and engagement with recreational anglers, and investigation of bass landings by recreational angler at Tetney. Submit intel following patrols, particularly in relation to the crab fishery.

**Area 2 (The Wash and North Norfolk Coast to Brancaster)** – Landing inspections of shrimp vessels and of all active whelk fishing vessels once per month. Gear and hold inspections of vessels prosecuting the mussel fishery. Submit intel following patrols.

**Area 3 (Brancaster to Great Yarmouth)** – Landing inspections of crab fishing vessels and of all active whelk fishing vessels once per month. Boardings and engagement with both commercial and recreational vessels, with gear compliance inspections. Shore patrols with evening and weekend inspections, and education and engagement with recreational anglers. Submit intel following patrols, particularly in relation to the whelk fishery, and inland recreational fishing.

**Area 4 (Suffolk Coast)** – Landing inspections of all active whelk fishing vessels once per month. Compliance inspections of bass fishing commercial and charter vessels. Shore and river patrols focusing on education and engagement with recreational anglers. Landing inspections and joint working at Orford. Submit intel following patrols.

**Enforcement Metrics:**

Enforcement metric	Number completed			
	Area 1	Area 2	Area 3	Area 4
Shore Patrols	1	3	11	8
Port visits	5	5	53	21
Catch inspections (landings observed)	0	4	2	3
Catch Inspections (Landings not observed)	0	8	0	0
Vehicle Inspections	0	0	0	0
Premises inspections	0	1	3	2
Enforcement actions/Offences	0	1	1	0
Intelligence reports submitted	2	0	2	15
Fishers engaged	0	11	40	37
Vessel Patrols	0	9	1	1
Boardings	0	2	1	0
Gear Inspections	0	4	0	0

## EMS monitoring:

Monitoring of 'restricted areas' under the Marine Protected Areas Byelaw 2018 was conducted throughout the reporting period. The following monitoring occurred:

Protected Feature	<i>Intertidal biogenic reef</i>	<i>Subtidal biogenic reef: Sabellaria spp. (Ross worm), subtidal stony reef, subtidal mixed sediments, subtidal mud.</i>	<i>Intertidal seagrass beds, subtidal mixed sediments, subtidal mud.</i>	<i>Eelgrass beds (Humber)</i>
Protected Areas	1-13	14-29	30-35	36
	<b>7</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>

## Enforcement messages received:

### Lincolnshire

#### The Wash and North Norfolk

- Fishers reporting that price of crab has dropped to an all-time low of £1.50, this is due to an abundance early in the season and a lack of demand. Costs are increasing for fishers, particularly bait (£28/slab of scad), processors have also had an increase in the cost of minimum wage. Crab are being found in different places than considered normal, with the typical fishing season no longer matching what has been the case for years, thought to relate to climate change and increase in sea temperature.
- Fishers unsure if they are fishing in the restricted area in Cromer Shoal MCZ as there are no buoys present.

### Suffolk

- Angling Trust have requested further information regarding a no fishing sign at Landguard Point. Landguard Trust have provided a response which has been shared with the Angling Trust.

## Fishing trends:

Area 1: (Hail Sand Fort to Gibraltar Point).

Area 2: (Wash and North Norfolk Coast to Brancaster).

Whelk activity is steady, £1.40 per kg, some fishers have swapped over to crab and lobster. Shrimp activity has started to gradually pick up, but price is high, £8.60 - £9.20 per kg.

Area 3: (Brancaster to Great Yarmouth).

Activity is starting to increase, especially for crab and lobster, but lobster numbers are still low. Some herring still being caught in the area, prices are low which is discouraging the effort. One boat in Great Yarmouth still fishing regularly for whelks, but likely to be outside the 6nm.

Charter boats are catching quite a few codling and bass. Bass fishing is expected to increase in the coming weeks, especially in the areas where the RSAs fish, such as Breydon Water. Crab tiling activity is also picking up at Breydon, suggesting that there is more demand for crab as bass bait.

Anglers on the pier at Gorleston are reporting good catches of small whiting, dogfish, and the odd thornback ray/sole/dab.

#### Area 4: (Great Yarmouth to Harwich).

Commercial fishery is now moving from winter fishery of whelk and herring towards spring/summer fishery. Most whelk fishing is being done outside 6nm, with smaller scale fishers reporting swapping over to potting and netting now finned fish are showing.

Fishing for lobsters on the offshore wrecks is expected to start in the next few weeks, crab gear is also being prepared and some pots set. Herring has been a huge benefit to many fishers with a good start to the year, with huge numbers landed.

Bass is looking to be a strong season, with high catches as soon as the season started, reports of lots of smaller bass in the rivers in the south of the district. Fishers are also hopeful for a good sole fishery this year. RSAs beginning to catch the occasional sole, as well as cod, dogfish and small whiting.

## Enforcement and engagement priorities throughout the district: May 2024

### Enforcement and engagement priorities throughout the district:

A significant proportion of officer's time has been allocated to vessel training and sea trials following the delivery of FPV Protector IV and near completion of FPV Thunderstruck.

**Area 1 (Hail Sand Fort to Gibraltar Point)** – Two Lincolnshire coast patrols visiting key ports, prioritising a joint patrol to Grimsby with MMO and NE IFCA. Re-engagement with fishers including face to face contact and phone calls. Compliance inspections of commercial gear and catch, shore patrols and engagement with recreational anglers. Submit intelligence following patrols, with a specific focus on crab fishing activity.

**Area 2 (The Wash and North Norfolk Coast to Brancaster)** – Gear and hold inspections of mussel fishing vessels, monitoring of the TAC and beds being fished. One landing inspection per month of each vessel active in the whelk fishery, and landing inspections of shrimp vessels. Intelligence submitted following patrols.

**Area 3 (Brancaster to Great Yarmouth)** – Boardings and engagement with recreational and commercial fishers. Landing inspections of all vessels active in the crab and lobster fishery. All vessels active in the whelk fishery to be inspected once per month. Shore patrols, with evening and weekend inspections of recreational anglers. Intelligence submitted following patrols.

**Area 4 (Suffolk Coast)** – Landing inspections and joint working with the MMO at Orford. Monthly landing inspections of all vessels active in the whelk fishery. Compliance inspections of commercial and charter vessels targeting bass. Shore patrols of rivers focusing on engagement and education of recreational anglers. Submission of intelligence following patrols.

### Enforcement Outcomes:

Enforcement metric	Number completed			
	Area 1	Area 2	Area 3	Area 4
Shore Patrols	0	6	12	12
Port visits	0	16	48	38
Catch inspections (landings observed)	0	0	12	7
Catch Inspections (Landings not observed)	0	7	3	1
Vehicle Inspections	0	0	0	0
Premises inspections	0	2	0	5
Enforcement actions/Offences	0	0	0	2
Intelligence reports submitted	0	8	2	4
Fishers engaged	0	45	66	109

Vessel Patrols	0	2	1	4
Boardings	0	0	0	2
Gear Inspections	0	0	0	0

### **EMS monitoring:**

Monitoring of 'restricted areas' under the Marine Protected Areas Byelaw 2018 was conducted throughout the reporting period. The following monitoring occurred:

Protected Feature	<i>Intertidal biogenic reef</i>	<i>Subtidal biogenic reef: Sabellaria spp. (Ross worm), subtidal stony reef, subtidal mixed sediments, subtidal mud.</i>	<i>Intertidal seagrass beds, subtidal mixed sediments, subtidal mud.</i>	<i>Eelgrass beds (Humber)</i>
Protected Areas	1-13	14-29	30-35	36
	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>0</b>

### **Enforcement messages received:**

#### Lincolnshire

##### The Wash

- Discussions with various fishermen regarding the timing of the opening of the cockle fishery, various factors influence whether earlier opening would be beneficial.

##### North Norfolk

- Report from fisherman that the Main end mussel bed is looking better than it has for 20 years, also appears to be a new bed towards the Gat which hasn't been surveyed previously.

##### Suffolk

- The seal situation is out of control, with reports that they are being fed at Orford. Fishermen feel IFCA should be doing something to conserve the fish stocks.
- Enquiry from recreational fisher regarding the use of a single pot to target crab, lobster and whelk, IFCA informed them of all relevant legislation.

### **Fishing trends:**

#### Area 1: (Hail Sand Fort to Gibraltar Point)

#### Area 2: (Wash and North Norfolk Coast to Brancaster)

Whelk price remains at £1.40 per kg, ~ 7 vessels active in the Wash

Shrimp price is still high, between £8.50 and £8.90 moving up to £11, 14 vessels landed to Boston and King's Lynn in April.

Area 3: (Brancaster to Great Yarmouth)

Crab and lobster potting activity starting to increase, but lobster numbers still low. Herring have moved out of area, no one currently fishing for them. One boat from Great Yarmouth whelk fishing outside 6nm. Charter boats catching codling and bass, bass activity expected to increase within the coming weeks with RSAs being seen at locations such as Breydon Water. Shingle beaches popular on social media with match fishing activity. Good catches of small whiting, dogfish have been reported from Gorleston pier, with the occasional thornback ray, sole and dab.

Area 4: (Great Yarmouth to Harwich)

Small number of whelk fishing boats active from Lowestoft. Herring fishing has dropped off. Good quantity of smoothound landed in Felixstowe, but little other activity. Bass fishing activity in the rivers both from the beach and boats, has been increasing, particularly in the Stour/Orwell and Deben. Increased levels of activity in Shotley with two commercial vessels active and a new charter boat.

Main species at Lowestoft market in the past week were skate, bass and spurdog with bass reaching a maximum of £17, spurdog up to £2 and a high price for skate of £4.60 kg.

### Vision

The Eastern Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority will lead, champion and manage a sustainable marine environment and inshore fisheries, by successfully securing the right balance between social, environmental and economic benefits to ensure healthy seas, sustainable fisheries and a viable industry



## Information Item 15

### 56<sup>th</sup> Eastern Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority Meeting

19 June 2024

#### Marine Science Quarterly Report

**Report by:** Luke Godwin (ACO)

#### **Purpose of Report**

The purpose of this report is to make members aware of progress made by the Marine Science Team in its delivery of the 2024-29 5-Year Business Plan. .

#### **Recommendations**

It is recommended that members:

- **Note** the contents of the report

#### **Background**

Key Marine Science updates are typically reported within the Quarterly Progress against annual priorities paper taken to each Authority meeting and have previously often been replicated within the Marine Science Quarterly Reports. However, progress against business as usual / business critical workstreams (as per the 5-Year Business Plan) have not routinely been provided to members and so the Marine Science Quarterly Report has been revised to provide information that is more meaningful to members.

This new format of Marine Science reports, in addition to reporting against annual priorities, is intended to give members the fullest understanding of progress through the year.

#### **Report**

##### Overview

The period was characterised by embedding new starters into the team, completion of the annual cockle surveys and associated Habitat Regulation Assessments and continued establishment of the new structure.

In particular, significant resource was directed to ensuring that the structures and frameworks are in place to provide an environment which facilitates delivery of the Authority's work. This has included some reconsideration of existing practices and the implementation of new ways of working.

### Shrimp management

Shrimp effort management within The Wash and North Norfolk Coast is required to protect the associated Marine Protected Areas. The number of shrimp fishing trips is capped annually (between 1 August and 31 July each year, the 'permit year') and effort monitored to identify if additional measures are required to reduce effort and prevent exceeding this cap.

Shrimp effort monitoring updates are published monthly, and these are viewable on the Eastern IFCA website<sup>10</sup>. Updates include a risk assessment of the fishery closing prior to the next 'permit year' and in relation to the risk of effort caps being reduced in future years. At this time, the level of fishing effort is of no concern in the short or longer term.

### Study of the Wash Embayment, Environment and Productivity (SWEEP) and Environmental Health Monitoring (EHO)

EHO monitoring refers to monthly sample collection of shellfish (cockle sand mussels) on behalf of the local Councils which monitor toxin levels (incl. *E.coli*) in shellfish.

SWEEP primarily provides information on the amount of food available in The Wash to contribute to productive shellfish stocks by collecting water samples and analysing phytoplankton data. This monitoring is a key component of the management of shellfish lays. Sample collection is undertaken alongside EHO Monitoring.

Sample collection was hampered during March as a result of a vessel fault which led to postponement of the sample collections and ultimately one sample (SWEEP) not being collected.

All samples were successfully collected during April and May.

Results from SWEEP samples identified no concerns with regards to food availability in The Wash at this time. However it has not been possible to collect samples from one sample station (Thief Sand) on a number of occasions this year (three) and as a consequence, consideration is being given to the suitability of the sampling station.

EHO sample results identified higher *E.coli* levels during the periods however not to the extent that downgrades in water quality have occurred as a result. Eastern IFCA also attended a Shellfish Laison Group Meeting (4 March 2024) at which *E.coli* levels and compliance with required targets in parts of The Wash were discussed. In summary, the Ouse Mouth seasonal downgrade (from a Class B to C) ended as a consequence of sample results indicating *E.coli* levels within acceptable ranges to revert to a class B. Results from June sample collections are not available at the time of writing.

### Wash Cockle and Mussel management

A mussel relaying fishery was opened as of 20 May 2024 following favourable advice from Natural England and consideration of feedback from the consultation on its

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<sup>10</sup> [Shrimp Effort Updates - Eastern IFCA \(eastern-ifca.gov.uk\)](https://www.eastern-ifca.gov.uk/shrimp-effort-updates)



management measures. Uptake in the fishery is low although within expected levels. Effort and compliance monitoring is ongoing to ensure the fishery does not hinder the conservation objectives of the Wash MPAs or the stocks.

The annual intertidal cockle survey was completed on schedule and the fishery is the subject of a paper at this meeting. In summary, work relating to the opening of the cockle fishery was prioritised to provide opportunity for an early opening. Work included: analysis of cockle stock data, consideration against the Cockle Fisheries Management Plan, assessment against the Wash MPA conservation objectives, development of annual management measures, consultation with fishery stakeholders and Natural England and a decision on the opening of the fishery.

#### Management of Whelk Fisheries

Whelk stocks are monitored through consideration of stakeholder views and trends in Landings Per Unit Effort (LPUE) as a proxy for stock health (i.e. if LPUE is reducing, this could indicate stock sustainability issues).

Monitoring during the last period indicated lower levels of effort compared to previous year and a slight reduction in LPUE. However, monitoring based on LPUE is potentially hindered by non-compliance with pot limitations which is being addressed through compliance workstreams. Work to review permit conditions is scheduled to start in the next quarter and presented to the Authority in December.

#### Assessments of unplanned fisheries

There were no 'unplanned fisheries' during the period.

#### Advice in relation to sustainable development

During the reporting period, 22 requests to consider Marine Licence Applications were received, with 15 having been responded to at the time of writing.

The subjects of the Marine Licence Applications varied from 'coexistence and Liaison Plans' for the Sizewell C Nuclear Plant, use of Maintenance dredge materials to restore saltmarsh areas around Levington Marina and further dialogue on a previous submission relating to building flood defences on the North Norfolk Coast.

Of particular note was the planned storage of cable ducts in The Wash which had the potential to impact fishing opportunity over shrimping grounds. After being alerted to the planned activity by fishery stakeholders, the MMO were contacted to raise concern and ultimately the activity was not carried out.

#### Monitoring district-wide Biosecurity risk

This workstream has yet to be fully handed over following the previous workstream holder leaving post.

#### Coastal Health Project (*detailed information annual priority*)

Since 2021, officers have been working closely with scientists from Cefas to better understand the underlying causes of the high levels of annual mortalities affecting the Wash cockle and mussel stocks. Progress was made in this study in 2022 when Cefas identified a new species of *Marteilia* parasite in the cockles that had both a strong correlation with the mortalities and caused an immune response in the

cockles, indicating they were causing harm. In late 2023, disseminated haemocytic neoplasia was found to be widespread in a sample of cockles taken from Inner Westmark Knock. While these two diseases are likely to be contributing factors in the cockle mortalities, it is still not known whether they are the primary cause of mortalities, or whether the cockles have been weakened first by other, possibly environmental, factors.

Identifying and unravelling the effects of environmental impacts in a marine ecosystem is difficult as many factors can contribute towards the problem. Fortuitously, last year Cefas were granted funding for a national project, which aims to coordinate information and activities across Defra, its agencies and arms-length bodies, and other government departments to better understand and ultimately manage adverse animal health situations in our coastal ecosystems. This requires a systems approach, integrating multiple data types, including animal health, environmental quality, human activities, climate change, etc. Due to the current research being conducted in The Wash, and the impacts of the shellfish mortalities on local fisheries and bird populations, The Wash was recognised as being an ideal case study for this project. This will provide a great opportunity to incorporate wider expertise and resources to further our understanding of the situation.

Officers will continue to contribute to this project over the coming year by collecting further shellfish and sediment samples, conducting some additional stock surveys and by sharing local knowledge with the various workgroups set up with partner organisations.

### **Financial Implications**

None identified

### **Legal Implications**

None identified

### **Appendices**

Not applicable

### **Background Documents**

5-Year business Plan 2024-29