



Comments, Compliments and Complaints Policy

Introduction

Eastern Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority (Eastern IFCA) seeks to operate in a fair, proportionate and transparent manner. Feedback from stakeholders is welcomed and will inform decisions on how we deliver our duties and the best customer service.

This policy sets out guidance for dealing with comments, compliments and complaints. Please note that general enquiries, information requests and purely informational correspondence are not covered by this policy.

Comments

Any general comments about the Authority, whether positive or negative, should be directed to the office in Kings Lynn where a member of the support team will record your feedback. The contact information can be found [here](#).

Please note that general negative commentary or feedback is distinct from a complaint (see below).

Compliments

Please tell us if you have been impressed by or appreciate the service you have received or by the general work of the Authority. You can tell us by contacting our support team [here](#).

General Complaints

For the purpose of this policy, a complaint relates to a defined topic and/or a particular officer for which the complainant seeks some form of formal consideration or resolution.

This section deals with general complaints. Complaints against the Authority members or Authority decisions have a slightly different process, which is covered in separate sections of this Policy.

If you wish to make a complaint, please contact the support team [here](#). Your complaint will be addressed following the procedure below. We will endeavour to acknowledge receipt of your complaint within two working days and to advise who it has been allocated to.

Informal resolution

In the first instance, your complaint will be considered by the relevant manager with the objective being to resolve problems informally through dialogue with you and the officers involved in the matter. In cases that are appropriate for informal resolution we will aim to provide a full response within 10 working days. The reply will clearly explain the how the matter has been resolved.

If at any stage you are unsatisfied with the response, you can submit a formal complaint.

Stage one – making a formal complaint

All formal complaints should be made in writing to the Authority's office either by email or post (see our [contact information](#)). If you are unable to make a formal complaint in writing, please contact the support team via telephone (01553 775321).

Formal complaints should include:

- Reference to any informal dialogue on the matter
- An explanation of the issue and how it has affected you
- Reference to the matter being a 'formal complaint'

Your complaint will be acknowledged within two working days. The relevant manager or executive officer will look into your complaint and will seek to respond to it within 20 working days. If the complaint or response is particularly complex, an interim response will be sent within 20 working days, and which will explain why additional time is needed to consider the matter.

Complaint upheld

Where a complaint is upheld:

- The manager or Executive Officer will provide a written apology and explanation of any redress and any steps taken to prevent a similar problem recurring.
- Where possible, the error will be corrected, or a satisfactory service will be provided as a matter of urgency.

Complaint not upheld

Where a complaint is not upheld you will receive a written explanation from the appropriate manager or Executive Officer. The response will set out the reasons for not upholding the complaint.

Stage two – appeal to the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) or their nominated representative

If you consider that the material aspects of your complaint have not been fully considered or resolved, you can appeal against the stage one decision.

The CEO or their representative will undertake a review of the investigation of your complaint.

An appeal will be acknowledged within two working days and a response to the appeal provided within 20 working days. Where the matter is particularly complex, an interim response will be provided within 20 days explaining that more time is needed to undertake the review.

Involvement of the Vice-Chair and Chair of the Authority

In the case that a complaint cannot be fully or partially dealt with by the Authority's officers, such as a complaint about an Executive Officer or the CEO, the Vice-Chair

and /or the Chair of the Authority will undertake oversight of stages 1 and/or 2 of the formal complaint process as required.

In such cases an officer or body designated by the Vice-Chair or Chair may undertake any work required to investigate the matter on behalf of, but overseen by, the Vice-Chair or Chair.

Ombudsman

In the unlikely event that you are not satisfied with the response received, you may refer your complaint to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO), which is empowered to investigate maladministration in public bodies, including Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities. The LGSCO will not normally consider a complaint until it has been handled by the public body in question. More information on referring a complaint to the LGSCO can be found [here](#).

Complaints about an Authority decision

The process for consideration of complaints against Authority decisions is a one-stage process.

Complaints against decisions made by the Authority should be made in writing to the CEO. An acknowledgement will be provided within two working days and the CEO, or their representative will seek to provide a full response within 20 days. An interim response may be provided if the matter is particularly complex which will include an explanation as to why more time is required to consider the matter. The reply will clearly explain the Authority's position on the matter and include information on contacting the LGSCO (see above) in the event that the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome.

Complaints about Authority Members

Complaints against members of the Authority should, in the first instance, be made to the CEO, who is also the Clerk of the Authority.

Complaints against elected members (i.e. County Councillors) will be referred to the relevant County Council Monitoring Officer, who will be responsible for dealing with the matter.

Complaints against general members (i.e. those appointed by the Marine Management Organisation (MMO)) will initially be investigated by the CEO/Clerk to seek to determine whether or not the appointee has broken their [terms and conditions of appointment](#). Recommendations from the CEO/Clerk will be considered by the Chair of the Authority, who will determine whether or not the matter should be referred to the MMO or can be addressed by the Authority. If the matter is referred to the MMO, they will investigate and determine what action should be taken, which may include terminating the membership of the general member.

If a complainant does not feel that Eastern IFCA has addressed their concerns about a general member satisfactorily, they should contact the MMO at ifcas@marinemanagement.org.uk.

Withdrawing a Complaint

A complaint may be withdrawn at any time by the complainant. In such circumstances, the Authority will contact the complainant to confirm the withdrawal of the complaint in writing. The Authority will decide whether or not to continue considering the issues that gave rise to the complaint.

Confidentiality and Data Protection

It is understandable that it might be difficult to make a complaint. However, if complaints are made anonymously, we will not be able to contact you to explain the outcome of consideration of the complaint.

All conversations and documents relating to the complaint will be treated as confidential and will be disclosed further only to the extent that is necessary for the investigation or for legal or insurance purposes. The information provided by the complainant will only be held for the purposes of investigation, administration and processing and will not be passed on to third parties except where necessary for legal or insurance purposes.

Unreasonable complaints

It is understandable that people may act out of character. Complainants who are forceful or determined will not necessarily be considered unreasonable, however the actions of complainants who are angry, demanding or persistent may result in unreasonable demands on workloads or unacceptable behaviour towards staff. Such actions have been grouped in three headings below.

When a complaint is found to be unreasonable, an explanation of such will be provided with the intention of seeking that their behaviour changes. If the behaviours continue, it may affect the Authority's ability to investigate the complaint and may result in action to restrict the complainants contact with the Authority.

1. Unreasonably persistent

Examples include:

- Refusing to specify the grounds for a complaint despite offers of assistance.
- Refusing to cooperate with the complaints investigation process and still wishing their complaint to be resolved.
- Refusing to accept that the matters within the complaint are not within the remit of the Authority.
- Insisting that the complaint is dealt with in a way which is inconsistent with the complaints procedure.
- Changing the basis of grounds for the complaint and / or denying statements which were made earlier in the process.

- Electronically recording meetings without consent.
- Making unnecessarily excessive demands on time and resource of staff.
- Submitting repeat complaints after a final decision has been reached.
- Refusal to accept a decision and / or refusal to accept the decision after exhausting the complaints process.
- A combination of the above.

2. Aggressive or abusive behaviour ('unacceptable behaviour')

The Authority's Unreasonable Behaviour Policy can be found [here](#). In summary, the Authority will not tolerate abusive or aggressive behaviours directed to its officers and any such behaviour may result in the Authority restricting the complainants contact with the Authority.

3. Unreasonable demands

Complainants may make unreasonable demands through the amount of information they seek, the nature and scale of service they expect or the number of approaches they make. What amounts to unreasonable demands will depend on the circumstances surrounding the behaviour and the seriousness of the issues raised by the complainant.

Examples include demanding responses within an unreasonable timescale, insisting on speaking to or seeing a particular member of staff, continual phone calls or letters.