



62nd EIFCA Statutory Meeting

To Be Held at:
Council Chambers, King's Lynn Town Hall, Saturday Marketplace,
King's Lynn, Norfolk PE30 5DQ

**Wednesday
10th December 2025**

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: **62nd Eastern IFCA Meeting**

Date: 10 December 2025

Time: 1030hrs

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

Revised Agenda

- 1 Welcome – *Chair*
- 2 To accept apologies for absence - *Chair*
- 3 Declaration of Members' interests – *Chair*

Action items

- 4 To receive and approve as a true record, minutes of the 61st Eastern IFCA Meeting, held on 10 September 2025 – *Chair* pg4
- 5 Matters arising (including actions from previous meeting) – *Clerk*
- 6 To receive a report to consider Health and Safety risks and mitigation – *ACO(DD)* pg14
- 7 To receive a report on the meeting of the Finance and HR sub-committee held on 4 November 2025 – *CEO* pg20
- 8 Budget and levies 2026-27 and Budget Forecast to 2031 – *CEO* pg32
- 9 Wash Mussel Fishery 2025/26 – *ACO* pg45
- 10 Wash Cackle and Mussel Byelaw 2021 permit fees – *ACO* pg63
- 11 Wash Several Order interim measures – *Policy & Project Officer* pg72
- 12 Wash Several Order Application Update – *ACO* pg82
- 13 Cromer Shoal Chalk Beds Byelaw 2023 permit conditions – *ACO* pg86
- 14 Whelk Permit Byelaw 2019 permit conditions review – *MSO* pg96
- 15 Shrimp Permit Byelaw 2018 permit conditions review – *PO* pg114
- 16 Authority Meeting Dates 2026-27 – *CEO* pg133
- 17 Review of Annual Priorities and Risk Register - *ACO* pg136

Information items

- 18 CEO update (verbal) – *CEO*
- 19 Operational update
 - a. Marine Protection report – ACO (DD) pg153
 - b. Marine Science report – ACO pg166

Any other business

- 20 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
25 November 2025

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.



61st Eastern IFCA Meeting

A meeting of the Eastern IFCA took place on Wednesday 10th September 2025 at 1030 hours in the Council Chambers, King's Lynn Town Hall, Saturday Market Place, King's Lynn Norfolk, PE30 4DQ

Members Present:

| | | |
|---------------------------|--------------|--------------------------------|
| Cllr T FitzPatrick | (Chair) | Norfolk County Council |
| Cllr E Back | (Vice Chair) | Suffolk County Council |
| Cllr T Adams | | Norfolk County Council |
| Cllr Chenery of Horsburgh | | Norfolk County Council |
| Mr J Davies | | MMO Appointee |
| Mr R Dyer | | MMO Appointee |
| Dr P Gilliland | | MMO Appointee |
| Mr T Goldson | | MMO Appointee |
| Ms J Love | | Natural England Representative |
| Mr N Schiller | | MMO Appointee |
| Mr S Williamson | | MMO Appointee |

Eastern IFCA (EIFCA) Officers Present:

| | |
|-------------------|--|
| Julian Gregory | Chief Executive Officer (Clerk) |
| Jon Butler | Assistant Chief Officer (Designated Deputy), |
| Luke Godwin | Assistant Chief Officer |
| Samantha Hormbrey | Senior Marine Science Officer |
| Ron Jessop | Senior Marine Science Officer |

Minute Taker:

Jodi Hammond

EIFCA25/19 Item 1: Welcome

The Chair welcomed Members to the meeting.

EIFCA25/20 Item 2: Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Robinson (SCC) & Taylor (LCC), Ms Smith, Ms Lynam, Messrs Bagley, Doughty & Garnett (MMO Appointees) and Mr Rowley (MMO Rep)

EIFCA25/21 Item 3: Declaration of Members Interests

Messrs Davies and Williamson had a Dispensation to discuss but not vote for Item 8 relating to the Cromer Shoal Chalk Bed.

Mr Williamson had a Dispensation to discuss but not vote on Items 9 and 10 relating to the Closed Area Byelaw and the Wash Cockle Fishery.

EIFCA25/22 Item 4: Minutes of the 60th Eastern IFCA Meeting held on Wednesday 12th June 2025

Members Resolved to approve the Minutes as a true record of proceedings.

Proposed: Cllr Back

Seconded: Dr Gilliland

All Agreed

EIFCA25/23 Item 5: Matters arising.

EIFCA25/12 WASH MUSSEL FISHERY: Some urgent Management Measures had been brought in relating to biosecurity and invasive species, in line with requirements these management measures had been reviewed, the outcome being the measures would remain in place.

EIFCA25/24 Item 6: Health & Safety Risks and Mitigation

ACO (DD) Butler reminded Members this was a standard item on the agenda as Health & Safety remained a priority across the organisation.

Since the previous meeting there had been 2 incidents and 1 near miss. The incidents involved a minor cut and potential heat exhaustion, the near miss was loss of communication while on a survey, steps had been taken to ensure there were no future incidents of this nature.

Following a request at the last meeting to revamp the H&S Risks table a column had been added to include the date of the item being highlighted as a risk. It was reported that sufficient mitigation was in place to discharge the risk relating to Physical Fitness with a new risk being added relating to the Building Fire Risk Assessment. Consequently it was felt Physical Fitness could be removed from the table.

Members Agreed to Note the contents of the report.

EIFCA25/25 Item 7: Finance and HR Sub-Committee held on 5th August 2025

Draft Minutes of the meeting had been provided.

It was noted there was to be a slight revision of the Annual Return Form to make it align with the accounting practices used

by EIFCA. The CEO advised the Financial Regulations would be redrafted to reflect any changes, approval for these would be sought from the Chair and Vice-Chair.

Members were reminded the budgets in recent years had projected overspends in the 5-year projections, having considered options the sub-committee had opted to request levy increases of 12% for the next financial year. This suggestion would be discussed with the Finance Directors of the three County Councils.

Members agreed to Note the contents of the report.

EIFCA25/26 Item 8: Cromer Shoal Chalk Beds MCZ ARM Rates of Damage Report

ACO Godwin gave a presentation on the background of the Cromer Shoal Chalk Beds Project, explaining it was a contentious issue. EIFCA had a duty to protect the site, but it was also a very important historical fishery. There remained uncertainty around the level of damage fishing caused to chalk beds. The current approach was to manage the site using Adaptive Risk Management.

Members were reminded of the steps to be taken which took the form of voluntary measures, interim measures and Phase 1 permit conditions. Phase 2 permit conditions were to be considered next, and it was important to ensure such were proportional to the risks posed, although the level of risk still remained unknown.

Data from all survey work had been analysed and it was possible to estimate a footprint of damage per year, which gave a sense of the level of risk.

The current approach involved a mathematical model to calculate risk, and available data had been added to the model. Members were advised NE were not supportive of this approach, it was also noted there was a risk of a legal challenge, which would be compounded by lack of support from NE.

There followed extensive debate among members.

Ms Love explained to members the view of NE. They did not agree that case law could be applied in the way that it had and a specialist had expressed concerns and could not understand how the numbers had been determined and questioned whether the data had been used correctly. Whilst there was much that NE could agree on there was also a lot that they wanted to better understand. Ms Love advised NE needed to see the data

used in order to understand the way forward, and now had a specialist with time available to review the approach.

Cllr FitzPatrick noted Ms Love said it was hard to understand where the numbers came from, but he felt some of the onus was on NE to advise what was needed in order for the Officers to provide the answers. ACO Godwin advised the development of Phase 2 permit conditions had been delayed as NE could not advise what they saw as the way forward, moving on was very difficult until the level of risk was better understood.

Ms Love acknowledged the situation but added that EIFCA's 200 to 300 year timeframe was not strongly supported and basing management measures on that would not change NE's view.

The CEO felt EIFCA would need to be more certain of potential risk to put strong management measures in place. On the point about using case law in the rates of damage assessment, it may be necessary to seek opinion from a Kings Counsel, which would be costly but given the importance of the fishery may be appropriate.

Mr Schiller expressed his view that he felt concern for the Authority due to the perceived level of uncertainty of the data. Mr Schiller felt there was insufficient data, the approaches' variations were huge, and he had no confidence in the findings. Mr Schiller advised the initial data had been taken in relatively calm conditions, but severe weather would increase the energy in the sea exponentially, the damage done to a 2D surface may not be so much greater, but to a 3D surface could be significant. Mr Schiller felt the data would not stand up to legal scrutiny.

ACO Godwin advised an updated report was already being written up with additional data and that the intention was to continually add more data to the approach to improve confidence in the output over time. The recommendation for this meeting was for Members to agree the approach being taken as opposed to agreeing the report or the timeframe it currently indicates .

Mr Schiller felt that if the current data error was not corrected it would exacerbate the level of uncertainty in the results. ARM should be robust and comprehensive and adequately proportionate – currently it was none of these and could not be defended by officers in his view.

The Chair reminded Members any decision taken were as a collective decision 'not you, it is 'us'.

Dr Gilliland felt it was a good effort so far to get the data, however, he felt the question was how to analyse the data and that NE and EIFCA needed to agree on an approach, as well as determining the principles to reach a decision. Dr Gilliland also asked what intervention would look like if the data was not considered robust enough. EIFCA needed to do the best with the available evidence.

Mr Williamson thought it likely that the precautionary approach would eventually be applied to the fishery and felt he had only heard negativity at this meeting. It was his belief the Authority were meant to be trying to save the fishery and NE and EIFCA needed to work together.

Ms Love believed NE and EIFCA were working together but on this occasion, it would be easy for NE to say the Precautionary Approach was appropriate in this case because the feature was not recoverable. Ms Love wished to reassure Members NE were working in partnership with EIFCA but there was also sometimes healthy disagreement.

Members gave a great deal of consideration to the level of data, whether it was sufficient, ways to improve it, methods of proving damage or otherwise and whether the current approach was the correct one or what the consequences would be of a closure, whether it would apply to a large or small area, and when would NE consider there was sufficient evidence to draw a conclusion.

The CEO suggested that having reflected on the discussion members might want to consider alternative recommendations, which he had drafted and presented to members for consideration.

Alternative recommendations were proposed as follows:

- **Agree to endorse the continued assessment and development of the approach set out in the rate of damage report in conjunction with NE.**
- **Direct Officers to further consider and develop the approach to options for Phase 2 permit conditions, dependent on what will be required, for consideration by the Authority.**

Proposed: Mr Schiller

Seconded: Cllr Chenery

The proposed alternative recommendation was Agreed on.

Members Resolved to:

- **Note the contents of the report**
- **Agree to endorse the continued assessment and development of the approach set out in the rate of damage report in conjunction with NE.**

- **Direct Officers to further consider and develop the approach to options for Phase 2 permit conditions, dependent on what will be required, for consideration by the Authority.**

Proposed: Mr Schiller

Seconded: Cllr Chenery

Agreed by those able to vote

At 1227 Members took a 20 minute lunch break

EIFCA25/27 Item 9: Closed Area Byelaw 2021 – update and revisions

Members were updated on the progress towards removing Red Risk fishing / feature interactions through the Closed Area Byelaw 2021. It was noted that the byelaw's development since being made was significantly delayed and that this was in part due to careful consideration of the evidence supporting the need for closures within the district.

Recent reviews had resulted in a proposal to revise some of the closed areas within the byelaw and that there was a case to include additional closures also. It was noted that the initial impact assessment has indicated that a low impact on fisheries.

If Members agree to the amendments the next step would be to carry out a full formal consultation and an update of the Impact Assessment.

Mr Goldson queried whether any closed areas would be reviewed in 3 years. ACO Godwin advised these byelaws had to be reviewed at least every 6 years.

Mr Williamson felt no closure was good, but the evidence provided suggested there was currently no fishing in these areas, his concern was for the future if there proved to be fisheries in the closed areas.

Questions were raised as to whether or not windfarm sites were surveyed for presence of *Sabellaria*, it was felt there was limited access due to cables. Mr Schiller advised there would be baseline surveys before work started. Ms Love advised windfarms were not obliged to share their baseline data. MSO Jessop informed members there was currently no management in the area of the windfarms, he believed the windfarm was outside the boundary of the SAC.

Members Resolved to

- **Note the contents of the report including the review of previous proposals, the perspective of Natural England with regard to Inner Dowsing, Race Bank**

and North Ridge SAC and the consideration of potential impacts of proposed revisions.

- Agree to the amendments to the management measures set out in Appendix A and to the revised Closed Areas Byelaw 2021 at Appendix G.
- Direct officers to undertake a formal consultation for the revised Closed Area Byelaw 2021.
- Agree to delegate authority to the CEO in consultation with the Chair or Vice-Chair to make changes to the byelaw which did not substantially alter the intended effects of the byelaw, taking into account responses from the formal consultation and any amendment advised through the formal QA process.

Proposed: Cllr Back

Seconded: Mr Goldson

All agreed

EIFCA25/28 Item 10: Wash Cockle Fishery 2025

ACO (DD) Butler reminded members the fishery had been opened and was on going. Surveys had identified the fishery was likely to target areas of juvenile stocks, therefore some closures had been put in place to protect stocks for future years.

Uptake of the fishery had been similar to previous years, with an average of 43 vessels actively fishing on most days. Most of the vessels were managing to catch the two-tonne daily quota, with only a few struggling to catch this amount.

At this point approximately 1604 tonnes of the TAC had been taken with about 102t of missing returns data. The fishery is approximately halfway through the TAC, concern had been expressed that the cockles were too small and consequently were only attracting a low price.

As part of the Management Measures, Officers were actively surveying areas where cockles may be ridging out, and would continue to monitor this over the coming months. The closure on the Roger Sand had been removed to avoid potential ridging out and number of vessels had subsequently targeted this sand.

Members Agreed to note the contents of the report.

EIFCA25/29 Item 11: Annual Report 2024-25

Members were reminded that EIFCA was mandated to produce an annual report, which ordinarily would be tabled at this meeting. However the report was slightly behind schedule,

consequently Members were asked to delegate to the CEO in consultation with the Chair of the Authority, the approval of the report .

Dr Gilliland felt slightly uncomfortable about delegating the approval to the CEO and felt he would prefer to see the Report before it was published and he requested that as a minimum it be sent round to Members to give them a two-week window to provide comments and feedback.

Both the CEO and the Chair were more than happy to circulate the report to Members in advance of finally approving it for publication.

Members Resolved to:
Note the content of the report.
Agree to delegate authority to approve the report and subsequent publication to the CEO in consultation with the Chair of the Authority.
Proposed: Cllr Adams
Seconded: Cllr Chenery of Horsbrugh
All agreed.

EIFCA25/30 Item 12: Review of Annual Priorities and Risk Register

ACO Godwin briefly took Members through the provided paper. Members were advised the Amber and Green priorities were progressing well, there was still a delay with the Wash Several Fishery as it was still waiting for Defra to review the application.

Generally Members were happy with the report, Dr Gilliland requested an indication (using arrows) of the length of time a priority/risk has remained on the register.

Members Agreed to note the content of the report.

EIFCA25/31 Item 13: CEO Update

The CEO provided members with a verbal update of activities during the last quarter.

Cromer MCZ ARM: Members were advised a small NGO had been seeking support to bring a legal challenge against the Authority's management of the Cromer MCZ. The narrative that supported this inaccurately characterised and advice letter from NE to EIFCA as being criticism. EIFCA & NE had prepared a joint statement correcting the inaccurate narrative. A detailed response was also provided to an MP who had been in contact with EIFCA as a result of correspondence from the NGO.

AIFCA: At a meeting held on 2nd September AIFCA agreed to continue to participate in the Coastal Health Programme.

Jurisdiction of IFCAs was also discussed and the possibility of extending out to 12nm. The CEO emphasised this was just an internal exploration of the issue by AIFCA and was not a proposal at this point. Some Members were concerned it would double the workload and questioned why it would be considered.

It was agreed AIFCA would lead on engagement on Scottish inshore fisheries knowledge exchange.

AIFCA had recruited a Communications & Engagement Manager to support IFCAs in getting key information out and to assist in progressing workstreams.

Defra Funding: The CEO was able to confirm workstream funding amounting to £130k would be paid in this financial year, however future funding was unknown, the CEO would keep members up to date when there was any further information.

EIFCA25/32 Item 14a: Marine Protection Quarterly Reports

Members were circulated the Marine Protection Reports on a monthly basis. The last quarter had seen the opening of the annual cockle fishery, decreased crab landings but slightly better lobster landings and very short runs of Bass and Mackerel.

IFCOs continue to monitor the RSA activity on the beaches as well as investigating reports of sales of fish on the black market.

Dr Gilliland noted the report layout had been slightly amended to show the annual targets against how much progress had been made, but felt it needed to also show an indication against the Business Plan requirements.

It was questioned whether grey seals were having an impact on catches, it was noted that Officers had picked up reports of seals taking catch from pots which has an impact on landings. Members were advised DEFRA were looking into a trial for bass fishing, maybe using drift nets rather than fixed netting, in an attempt to alleviate the problem. It was also felt a possible change in pot design might deter the seals. The CEO reminded members it was not in the EIFCA remit to restrict the seal population, which were a protected species.

Mr Davies questioned the report showing an increased level of fishing, which was down to Officers observations as they had

seen more activity. Mr Davies felt this information was incorrect, there was no more fishing effort than there had been previously.

Members Agreed to note the contents of the report.

EIFCA25/33 Item 14b: Marine Science Quarterly Report

ACO Godwin gave members an overview of activity in the last quarter:

Members Agreed to note the contents of the report

EIFCA25/34 Item 15: Any Other Business

No items of Other Business had been provided to the Chair.

There being no other business the Chair thanked members for attending and closed the meeting at 1345 hours.

Vision

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Action Item 6

62nd Eastern Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority meeting

10 December 2025

Health and Safety update

Report by: Jon Butler, Assistant Chief Officer (DD)

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 to 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 **4** incidents and **1** near miss since the last Authority meeting.

Risks/Mitigation

There have been a number of minor vessel related incidents and one near miss in the last reporting period, this is reflective of a very active period at sea.

Damage to C Runner was caused whilst the vessel was being carried on the A-frame across the transom of *FPV Protector IV* when a combination of human error and a design flaw led to the winch operating when un-manned resulting in the weight of the vessel being taken by securing lines on the guardrails of PIV. The incident could have been more serious had the crew not acted quickly, and some modifications will need to be made to Protector IV to prevent this happening again.

The near missed related to ice on Protectors IV deck, staff have been reminded to be cautious especially in the early mornings and evenings when moving around vessels and the pontoons.

The risk in Appendix 2 relating to the Building Fire Risk assessment are all currently being addressed and will be discussed with our H&S advisor at the next quarterly meeting.

Appendix 1

| Date | Nature of incident | Injury / damage occurred | Action Taken | RIDDOR MAIB Y/N | Investigation complete Y/N | Name of investigating Officer | Follow-up action required Y/N. If Y then what? |
|------------|--------------------|---|---|-----------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------|---|
| 30/09/2025 | Injury | Sprained arm, officer sprained arm whilst attempting to lift pots of Pot Hauler on vessel | Officer continued with duties | No | Yes | Jon Butler | Officer to assess if operation can be carried out safely or if other officers are needed to assist with lift. |
| 12/10/2025 | Vessel | Damage to vessel, C Runner accidentally dropped on A-Frame when Hydraulics switched on | RIB recovered, damage assessed | No | Yes | Jon Butler | Modifications to Protector IV to prevent accidental deployment |
| 6/11/2025 | Vessel | Discharge of fire extinguisher | Officer inhaled dry power, no lasting effect, continued with duties, extinguishers replaced | No | Yes | Ron Jessop | None required |

| | | | | | | | |
|------------|--------|---|--|----|-----|------------|---|
| 7/11/2025 | Vessel | Damaged hull, C Runner hull damaged whilst dropping off and picking up survey team. | Continued with survey, known risk when working on Welland Wall | No | Yes | Simon Lee | Keel protection to be added to C Runner |
| 21/11/2025 | Vessel | Near Miss Ice on deck when officers arrived and were trying to climb on vessel and load for days operation. | Continued with survey | No | Yes | Jon Butler | Officers reminded to be careful on vessels during cold periods and low light situations |

Appendix 2

Eastern IFCA Organisational Health and Safety risks

| Risk | Intervention | Residual Risk | Risk rating* (Current) | Risk rating* (Previous) | Date added |
|--|--|--|---------------------------|----------------------------|------------|
| 1. Whole Body Vibration | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Risk awareness training to manage impacts. Health monitoring process to be developed. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Personal injury from boat movement owing to lower resilience as a result of individual physiology | Tolerate | Treat | 26/08/2025 |
| 2. Staff stress through exposure to unacceptable behaviour of stakeholders | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduction of Unacceptable Behaviour policy Stakeholder engagement plan and activity delivered in pursuit of corporate communications strategy. Dialogue with Stakeholders to ensure appropriate tone of communications. Conflict resolution training for “front line” Officers Introduction of Body worn Camera’s and Sky Guard Alarms. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No change in behaviour of some stakeholders. Long term sickness caused by stakeholder hostility | Tolerate | Treat | 26/08/2025 |
| 3. Working at Height | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff briefing Scoping of all quayside ladders Risk Assessment Training to be provided if required | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Failure of quayside ladders Ownership of quayside ladders not clear | Tolerate | Treat | 26/08/2025 |
| 4. Building Fire Risk Assessment | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> External Fire Risk Assessment | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fire Warden Training | Tolerate | Treat | 28/08/2025 |

| | | | | | |
|--|--|---|--|--|--|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Action identified risks/corrective actions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Share assessment with NCC H&S advisor | | | |
|--|--|---|--|--|--|

*

| Risk Rating |
|-------------|
| High |
| Medium |
| Low |

| Risk Treatment | |
|------------------|---|
| 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 outside Eastern IFCA ability to treat and is transferred to higher/external level |

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Action Item 7

62nd Eastern Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority meeting

10 December 2025

Report by: Julian Gregory, CEO

Meeting of the Finance & HR Sub-committee held on 4 November 2025

Purpose of report

To inform members of the key outputs and decisions from the Finance & HR Sub-Committee meeting held on 4 November 2025.

Recommendations

Members are asked to:

- **Note** the content of the report.
- **Note** the decision taken by the CEO, Chair and Vice-Chair to revise Financial Regulations relating to fixed assets.

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 4 November 2025. Unconfirmed minutes of the meeting can be found at Appendix A.

Agenda item 10 of the meeting considered proposed revisions to the Financial Regulations in relation to recording fixed assets and the supporting paper can be found at Appendix B. Whilst decisions on such matters ordinarily fall to the full Authority it was felt necessary to get new provisions in place quickly and so the recommendation was agreed by CEO, in conjunction with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Authority in accordance with Scheme of Delegations set out in the Constitution and Standing Orders.

Appendices

Appendix A - Unconfirmed minutes of the Finance and HR sub-committee meeting held on the 4 November 2025.

Appendix B – Paper supporting agenda item 10 of the Finance and HR sub-committee meeting held on the 4 November 2025.

Appendix A

Unconfirmed minutes of a meeting of the Finance & HR sub-committee held on 4 November 2025.

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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 4th November 2025 at 1030 hours.

Members Present:

| | | |
|-----------------------------|------------|-----------------------------|
| Cllr T FitzPatrick | Chair | Norfolk County Council |
| Cllr E Back | Vice Chair | Suffolk County Council |
| Cllr M Chenery of Horsbrugh | | Norfolk County Council |
| Cllr K Robinson | | Suffolk County Council |
| Ms I Smith | | MMO Appointee |
| Cllr R Whittaker | | Lincolnshire County Council |
| Mr S Williamson | | MMO Appointee |

Eastern IFCA Officers Present:

| | |
|-----------|------------------------------|
| J Butler | Assistant Chief Officer (DD) |
| J Gregory | CEO |

Joanne Sams Aston Shaw Accountants

FHR25/25 Welcome

The Chair welcomed members to the meeting, with introductions made to ensure new members were aware of the roles of Officers.

FHR25/26 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Adams (NCC).

FHR25/27 Declarations of Members Interest

No Declarations of Interest were received.

FHR25/28 Minutes of the Finance and Personnel Sub-committee meeting held on 6th May 2025

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

FHR25/29 Matters Arising

FHR25/20 INTERNAL AUDIT REPORT: it was noted the External Audit Annual Return had been completed, it was felt the lay out of the table was not in line with the End of Year accounts, Ms Sams had suggested a re-design of the Annual Return to bring it in line with the End of Year Accounts. Members were advised it had been decided to postpone the redesign to avoid any confusion.

FHR25/30 Quarter 2 Payments and Receipts

The report provided a breakdown of actual income and expenditure during the second quarter, it was questioned why the payments attributable to Legal & Professional Fees appeared to be steadily increasing each month, it was explained Legal fees were ad hoc when advice was required and it did not indicate a trend of increased cost. It was noted there was ongoing legal advice being provided in connection with replacement engines for Thunderstruck.

Members Agreed to Note the report.

FHR25/31 Quarter 2: Management Accounts

Members were advised the underspend in Salaries & Wages was as a result of consciously gapping two posts in an effort to make savings. It had been established that moving forwards one of these posts would need to be recruited. Whilst Vessel Fuel appeared to be under budget this was partly due to timing of invoices and also an indication of Thunderstruck being out of the water, and the fuel usage of Protector IV not being known at the time the budget was calculated.

Slightly more than anticipated had been spent on Vessel Maintenance, this was partly due to small items associated with the new vessels.

Cllr Chenery queried the level of Members Expenses; it was noted that some members claim after each meeting whilst others claim after several meetings.

Members Agreed to note the Management Accounts

FHR25/32 Provisional Budget 2026-27 and Budget Forecast to 2030

Members were advised this was the third budget compiled by Officers and the CEO, with the assistance of Ms Sams, since the Resignation of the Head of Finance. The CEO felt the process was beginning to slot into place, and he was confident in the process followed.

Members were reminded this was a Provisional Budget for the sub-committee to consider, and if they were happy, they would then recommend it to the Full

Authority at the next meeting, along with the five year forecast figures, which were really just an illustration of what might occur in the following 5 years.

The CEO referred to the supporting paper and advised that in a change from previous years the Budget had been split into Revenue and Capital budget, which would hopefully make the figures easier to understand.

The CEO summarised the key points in the paper that addressed the estimates of expenditure for 2026-27, the basis of projections for the subsequent four years and the rationale for the proposed above inflation (12%) uplift in levies in accordance with the approach agreed at the last meeting of the sub-committee. He also advised of the ongoing lack of clarity as to what funding would be provided by Defra in the future and that given the absence of inflationary increases to the New Burdens Funding as part of the current government spending review the Association of IFCAs had put in a bid for an uplift in New Burden funding to address the effect of inflation, as well as continuation of the workstream funding at circa £150k per year.

As there was no planned capital expenditure in the next year, it was suggested that it may be possible to offset some levy increase with some of the asset replacement funding in future years.

In summary a 12% increase on levies was requested for the 26/27 financial year, and the same for 27/28, followed by increases in line with inflation for future years. However, if Defra funding was forthcoming it would not be necessary to request a further 12% increase in levies for 2027-28.

Members Agreed to Note the content of the report and that there may be relatively minor revisions to the budget and budget headings prior to the full Authority.

Members Resolved to:

- **Approve and recommend the draft budget 2026/2027 to the full Authority at their next meeting on 10th December 2025**
- **Approve and recommend the Levies for 2026/27 to the full Authority at their next meeting on 10th December 2025**
- **Approve the Forecast for the following 4 years to 2030/31 for presentation to the full Authority at their next meeting on 10 December 2025**

Proposed: Cllr Back

Seconded: Cllr Robinson

All Agreed

FHR25/33 Appointment of Auditors

Members were reminded that whilst there was no longer a legal obligation to have the accounts audited for the sake of probity EIFCA continued to have both an internal auditor and an external auditor examine the accounts.

Members were asked to approve the appointment of Norfolk Audit Services for the internal audit and Aston Shaw Accountants for the external audit.

Members Resolved to approve the engagement of Norfolk Audit Services to carry out the internal audit and the appointment of Aston Shaw Accountants to audit the Annual Return.

Proposed: Cllr Chenery of Horsbrugh

Seconded: Mr Williamson

All Agreed

FHR25/34` Amendment to Financial Regulations

As a result of matters highlighted during the Internal Audit for 2024/25 the CEO put forward proposals set out in the supporting paper to amend the Financial Regulations to clarify the asset recording and disposal process.

Members Agreed to note the content of the report and that the decision-making mandate on this matter would effectively fall to the Chair and Vice-Chair in the circumstances set out in the paper, as opposed to the full sub-committee.

The Chair and Vice-Chair Agreed to the proposed amendment to the Financial Regulation.

The decision was made as per the Constitution and Standing Orders.

FHR25/35 Resolution

Members Resolved that under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for item 11 on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information) which is exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A of the Act; and Item 12 on the grounds that it involves the disclosure of information which is likely to reveal the identity of an individual which is exempt information as defined in paragraph 2 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

Proposed: Chair

Seconded: Cllr Back

All Agreed

HR25/36 Vehicle Procurement

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

The purpose of the paper was to advise members of the decision to purchase a vehicle, the decision having been made by the CEO in conjunction with the Chair and Vice Chair. The Vehicle had been purchased using funds in the Vehicle Replacement Reserve which were ear-marked for this purpose.

The decision to purchase the vehicle had been made in line with the Authority standard practice to replace vehicles every 7 years, the process gone through to ensure best value was outlined for Members.

It was questioned why the Authority replace vehicles after 7 years, this was explained to be as a result of finding vehicles tend to become more expensive in terms of needing repairs after a 7-year period and falling outside of warranty periods. It was added that whilst the paper stated vehicles were anticipated to be replaced after 7 years, each vehicle was reviewed before a decision was made and there were no plans to replace any vehicle in the next two financial years.

Members Agreed to note the content of the report

HR25/37 HR Update

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

- Since the previous meeting there had been 4 resignations within the organisation, two IFCO's, Senior Skipper and administrator. A further IFCO vacancy continued to be held open. It has been decided that due to workload and capacity across the team all three IFCO posts would be recruited to. It was hoped interviews could be held in December with a view to a start date in January.

Other vacated positions would be addressed in slower time when the person spec and job descriptions had been reviewed to ensure they were fit for purpose.

Cllr Chenery questioned whether those who resigned were asked why and it was noted our HR consultant would be carrying out exit interviews in future to ensure open and frank feedback.

- Sickness levels were slightly higher, there were two incidents of work-related stress, one of which had returned to work after a conversation with the Assistant Chief Officer and HR Consultant, the other remained ongoing with support from HR. One of these staff members had also had two weeks off with a muscular skeletal injury. Although absences have been higher it related to a small number of staff.
- Backpay as a result of the agreed pay rise was processed in August.
- The second meeting of the Women's Forum had taken place; this was a safe space to discuss any issues with direct access to the senior leadership team with HR support provided. As a follow on from the Women's Forum an Employees Forum was in the process of being established which would have direct feedback to the CEO.

Members Agreed to note the content of the Report.

FHR25/38 Any Other Business

There were no other matters for discussion.

The meeting closed at 1135 hours, the Chair thanked members for attending.

Appendix B

Paper supporting agenda item 10 of the Finance and HR sub-committee meeting held on the 4 November 2025

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



Action Item 10

Finance and HR Sub-Committee Meeting

04 November 2025

Amendment to Financial Regulations

Report by: J. Gregory, CEO

Purpose of Report

To propose a revision to the Financial Regulations set out in the Constitution and Standing Orders insofar as they relate to fixed assets.

Recommendations

It is recommended that members:

Note the content of the report and that the decision-making mandate on this matter effectively falls to the Chair and Vice-Chair in the circumstances set out in the paper, as opposed to the full sub-committee.

It is recommended that the Chair and Vice-Chair:

Agree to the proposed amendment to the Financial Regulations.

Background

The report of the annual internal audit reported to the sub-committee at its meeting of 5 August 2025 included the following finding and recommendation:

A review of the Asset Register concluded: -

- *The information regarding recording the location, extent, plan, reference, tenancies granted, rents payable and purpose for which held could not be located. This has been raised in previous years audits*

Risks: -

- *Accounting records may be incorrect.*
- *Non-compliance with the Authority's Financial Regulations.*

Recommendation: -

1. The CEO ensures that all required Asset Register details, as documented in FR 13.1, should be recorded in the Asset Register.

Report

As a consequence of the finding of the Internal Audit a review of policy (Financial Regulations) and process has been undertaken with the intention of addressing the matter.

The review concluded that the relevant section in Financial Regulations should be updated to clarify what is a fixed asset, how it should be valued, how an asset should be recorded, when the asset register should be updated, valuation on disposal and confirming the long-standing practice of not depreciating such assets.

The proposed amendment to the relevant section of the Financial Regulations can be found at Appendix A.

Scheme of Delegations set out in the Constitution and Standing Orders provides that approval of and amendments to that document falls to the full Authority. However, section 26 of the Scheme of Delegations provides the following:

26. Where, in the opinion of the CEO (or their nominated deputy in their absence) a decision which is within the powers of the Authority or a Sub-Eastern IFCA Constitution 34 Committee, but is not within the CEO's delegated powers, is urgently required by the Eastern IFCA, and cannot be delayed until an the next scheduled meeting of the Authority or relevant Sub-Committee, the CEO (or their nominated deputy in their absence) may take the decision, having first consulted the Chair and the Vice-Chair of the Authority or the relevant Sub-Committee. All such decisions must be reported to the next meeting of the Authority or the relevant Sub- Committee.

In order to implement improved policy and process promptly it is considered appropriate for the CEO, in conjunction with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Authority, to approve the amendment as opposed to waiting for the next full Authority meeting in December.

Whilst ordinarily such decisions would be dealt with directly between the CEO, Chair and Vice-Chair it is considered appropriate to enable members of the sub-committee to comment as the recipients of the Internal Audit Report.

Financial Implications

None identified.

Legal Implications

None identified.

Appendices

Appendix A - Proposed Revisions to the Financial Regulations in the Constitution and Standing Orders.

Background Documents

Eastern IFCA Annual Internal Audit Report 2024/25 by Norfolk Audit Services.
Papers and minutes of the meeting of the Finance & HR sub-committee held on 5 August 2025.

Appendix A

| Proposed Revisions to the Financial Regulations in the Constitution and Standing Orders | | | |
|---|--|--|---|
| Ref | Original Text | Revised Text | Rationale |
| CHAPTER 5: Financial Regulations Section 13: Assets | <p>13.1 The RFO shall make appropriate arrangements for the custody of all title deeds or assets owned by the Authority. The RFO shall ensure a record is maintained of all assets owned by the Authority, recording the location, extent, plan, reference, purchase details, nature of the interest, tenancies granted, rents payable and purpose for which held in accordance with Regulation No.4(3)(b) of the Account and Audit Regulations 1996.</p> <p>13.2 No asset exceeding the £10,000 de-minimis level recommended by District Audit shall be sold, leased or otherwise disposed of without the authority of the Finance & HR sub-committee (NB the value of vehicles is the market value at the time of disposal as determined by obtaining at least one quote a relevant and reputable source).</p> | <p>13 Assets</p> <p><i>13.1.1 The RFO will maintain an asset register for 'fixed assets' to ensure that they are appropriately safeguarded and ultimately disposed of appropriately.</i></p> <p><i>13.1.2 The term 'fixed assets' refers to physical items of a capital nature where values exceed the £10,000 de minimis level for capitalisation recommended by District Audit and which have a useful life of more than one year.</i></p> <p><i>13.1.3 The value of fixed assets will be the value at the point of purchase (excluding VAT) and the value will not be depreciated. Where it is not possible to trace the purchase price other sources such as the insurance valuation or formal valuation by suitably qualified persons should be used where available. As a last resort an estimated value at the point of purchase or nominal value of £1 may be applied.</i></p> <p><i>13.1.4 The asset register will include, as so far as is possible, the date of purchase, the value (including the</i></p> | <p>To provide clarity on the nature of fixed assets and to support improvements to the process of recording and managing such assets.</p> |

| | | | |
|--|--|---|--|
| | | <p>source of the valuation) and the usual location of the asset.</p> <p>13.1.5 The asset register will be updated annually alongside the year-end accounts to reflect additions and disposals.</p> <p>13.1.6 No asset exceeding the £10,000 de-minimis level recommended by District Audit shall be sold, leased or otherwise disposed of without the authority of the Finance & HR sub-committee. The disposal should be based upon the market value for each item, with the price taking account of the age and condition of the item and, where practicable, using external reputable sources for a valuation. The market value at the time of disposal will be the value applied to the asset for the purposes of this paragraph.</p> | |
|--|--|---|--|

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.



Action Item 8

62nd Eastern Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority meeting

10 December 2025

Report by: Julian Gregory, CEO and Joanne Sams, Aston Shaw Accountants

Proposed Budget for the period 1 April 2026 to 31 March 2027 and Forecast to March 2031

Purpose of report

To present for consideration and approval the proposed Budget and Levies for the 2026/27 financial year together with the Forecast for the following 4 years to 2031.

Recommendations

Members are asked to:

- **Note** the content of the report.
- **Approve** the Budget for 2026-27.
- **Approve** the Levies for 2026-27.
- **Approve** the Forecast for the following 4 years to 2030-31.

Background

It is a requirement of the Authority's Constitution and Standing Orders (Financial Regulations) that detailed estimates of income and expenditure on revenue services, and receipts and payments on capital account, shall be prepared as directed each year by the Responsible Finance Officer (RFO). Proposals in respect of revenue services and capital projects in a rolling five-year forecast shall also be prepared as directed each year by the RFO.

It is the responsibility of the Finance and HR Sub-Committee to review the estimates and make a recommendation to the Authority not later than the end of December in each year on the precept to be levied on the three funding authorities for the ensuing financial year.

The Authority's Financial Regulations also provide the following in relation to capital funds:

3.6 No expenditure shall be incurred in relation to any capital project and no contract entered into or tender accepted involving expenditure on capital account unless the Finance & HR sub-committee are satisfied that it is contained in the rolling capital programme and that the necessary capital funds are available.

Previously only the revenue budget has been included in the annual budget setting process, and the use of capital funds has tended to be addressed by specific papers to the sub-committee.

At its meeting of 4 November 2025, the Finance & HR sub-committee considered and approved for recommendation to the full Authority for final approval, the proposed budget and levies for 2026-27 together with the forecasts to 2031 set out in this paper.

Report

This is the third budget that has been prepared by the RFO and officers in conjunction with the Authority's outsourced accountant, whereas previously it would have been prepared by the Head of Finance & HR. In the last two years changes in accounting methods and accounting software presented challenges but work to rationalise budget headings and introduce new accounting software has progressed, and this is reflected in the estimates of expenditure.

Financial projections produced during the annual budget setting process for 2025-26 indicated that next year there will be a shortfall of circa £248k in income over expenditure. This was predicted to rise to £294k by 2029-30. These figures are based upon a 2% inflationary increase on levies each year alongside a 2% inflationary increase on expenditure each year and assumed that Defra workstream funding of circa £130k per annum would not continue.

At the meeting of the Finance & HR sub-committee held on 5 August 2025 members considered options to address the funding shortfall and agreed that the principles of the following option be applied in preparing the budget and levies for 2026-27:

Option 2 – Staged increase in levies and monitor

Noting the uncertainty with Defra workstream funding this option would see an increase in levies to address 50% of the projected shortfall. This would mean that the increase in levies would be circa 12% with the potential for a similar increase in subsequent years if the Defra funding is not continued.

Development of the draft estimates of expenditure for the financial year 2026/2027 was informed by the annual meeting between officers and the Finance Directors (or their nominated representatives) of the three funding authorities held on 30 September 2025. At this meeting officers were advised that one funding authority was allowing for a pay increase of 4% in 2026-27 whereas the other two were budgeting for a 3% increase, albeit one indicated that might increase to 4%.

Officers advised the funding authorities that it was anticipated that a 12% increase in the general levy would be applied alongside the previously agreed annual uplift of 3% on the contribution to asset replacement. The rationale behind 'Option 2' was also shared and whilst observing that the percentage figure was relatively high it was noted that the actual amounts were very modest in the context of county council expenditure. The uncertainty of the future of workstream funding from Defra was discussed and it was agreed that asset replacement would be profiled in advance of next year's meeting so that the level of both the general levy and the contribution to asset replacement could be considered collectively.

Draft estimates of expenditure for this financial year (2025-26) against budget and income are summarised under the main budget headings in Table 1. It should be noted that projections are based in part upon expenditure to date being multiplied up to reflect the year together with careful analysis of each budget heading and officers informed estimates. The same approach has informed estimates for 2026-27 with a 4% inflationary uplift being applied where considered appropriate. These are set out in the final column in Table 1, which shows the draft budget for expenditure under the main budget headings and anticipated income.

More detailed estimated expenditure for both 2025-26 and 2026-27 is shown in Table 2.

A consideration as part of 'Option 2' discussed at the meeting of the Finance & HR sub-committee in August 2025 included the continued gapping of the vacant grade 5 MSO and IFCO posts. Subsequent consideration by officers concluded that the MSO posts can continue to be held vacant but that the IFCO post should probably be filled. This is reflected in the budget for 2026-27 as the MSO post has been deleted and the vacant IFCO post has been included. It is relevant to note that due to recent resignations there are currently three IFCO posts vacant, and recruitment is a priority.

To provide clarity and to enable any capital expenditure to be planned, approved and monitored it is proposed that a set of capital accounts, which will include reserves and anticipated capital expenditure will be presented in future. This has been included in this paper, albeit no significant capital expenditure is envisaged in the forthcoming year.

Revenue Budget Assumptions

An amount described as Defra Base Funding (New Burdens Funding) has been included for 2026-27 and in the projections for subsequent years. Whilst future Government spending reviews might re-consider this funding it has long been argued by the IFCAs, and to date accepted by Defra, that the 'New Burdens' were a permanent addition of responsibility and that the funding should continue permanently.

The Defra funding of circa £150k per annum for specific work streams was for three years and 2024-25 was the final year. A bid for continuation, with some variations, of this funding was submitted to Defra and it was recently confirmed that £130k will be received this year.

The Association of IFCAs recently submitted a further bid under the Government's current spending review, which includes a bid to restore the value of New Burdens Funding as it has had no inflationary increases since inception. This would equate to an increase in excess of 70%. The bid also includes proposals to continue the workstream funding relating to Fisheries Management Plans, protecting and enhancing the marine environment and community engagement & permitting, consents and licensing (circa £50k per annum each workstream so £150k in total). Relatively recent indications from Defra on additional funding have been that money is being carefully managed and as such there is no certainty that anything additional will be forthcoming. As such no funding other than existing level of 'Base Funding' from Defra it has been included in the budget for 2026-27.

Whilst difficult to predict what local authority cost of living pay awards will be, an uplift of 4% in salary is assumed in the estimates for 2026-27, which aligns with the approach being taken by one or possibly two of the three funding authorities.

Recent reporting from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) indicates that inflation in the UK is expected to average 3.4% in 2025 and to reduce to 2.5% in 2026¹, whilst in August 2025 the Bank of England predicted that inflation would increase to 4% by September before falling back to the target rate of 2%². Given the variation in forecasts and to align with assumed uplift in salaries an inflationary uplift of 4% has, where appropriate, been applied to the estimates of expenditure for 2026-27. To put this into context, 1% of anticipated non-salary related expenditure is circa £5.5k.

Table 1.

Estimated expenditure 2025-26 and draft budget 2026-27

| | 2025/2026 | 2025/2026 | 2026/2027 |
|------------------------------|------------------|-------------------|---------------------|
| | Budget | Projection | Draft Budget |
| EXPENDITURE | £ | £ | £ |
| Salaries & Wages | 1,396,433 | 1,283,479 | 1,395,016 |
| General Expenditure | 308,953 | 275,593 | 329,685 |
| Departmental Op Costs | 21,857 | 23,329 | 23,800 |
| Vessels | 159,535 | 152,841 | 166,452 |
| Vehicles | 43,918 | 44,553 | 42,604 |
| TOTAL | 1,930,696 | 1,779,796 | 1,957,558 |
| INCOME | | | |
| Other income | 112,506 | 112,506 | 112,506 |
| Levies | 1,191,071 | 1,191,071 | 1,334,001 |
| Defra core funding | 394,145 | 394,145 | 394,145 |
| Defra workstream funding | 140,000 | 130,000 | 0 |
| TOTAL | 1,837,722 | 1,827,722 | 1,840,652 |
| SURPLUS / (SHORTFALL) | (92,974) | 47,927 | (116,906) |

¹ [United Kingdom and the IMF](#)

² [Monetary Policy Report - August 2025 | Bank of England](#)

Levies

As agreed at the Finance & HR sub-committee meeting on 5 August 2025 and subsequently discussed with the County Councils' finance representatives, it is proposed that general levies are increased by 12% for 2026/27. The proposed general levies on the constituent County Councils for 2026/2027 are as follows:

| | Norfolk County Council | Suffolk County Council | Lincolnshire County Council |
|----------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| | 38.50% | 28.90% | 32.60% |
| | £ | £ | £ |
| General Levies | 513,588 | 385,526 | 434,886 |
| Defra Funding (base) | 151,999 | 114,420 | 127,726 |
| Total | 665,587.32 | 499,946.40 | 562,611.92 |

Total levies £1,728,146

It should be noted that the asset replacement element of levies is not shown as 'in-year' income above or in Table 1 as this will be directly ascribed to earmarked reserves in the capital/reserves account set out later in this paper.

To put the 12% increase in the general levies into context the cost to each County Council together with what the levies would be if an inflationary uplift of 4% was applied and what that cost to each council would have been is shown below:

| | Norfolk County Council | Suffolk County Council | Lincolnshire County Council |
|------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| | £ | £ | £ |
| Actual increase at 12% | 55,027 | 41,306 | 46,595 |
| Levy at 4% | 476,903 | 357,989 | 403,823 |
| Actual increase at 4% | 18,342 | 13,769 | 15,532 |

Notes on Expenditure and income

Members may find the notes below helpful in relation to tables 1 and 2. The figures in the 2025-26 projection reflect the anticipated under or (over) spend and the figures under the 2026-27 draft budget reflect the increase or (decrease) in comparison with this year's budget.

| Salaries & Wages | |
|--|--|
| 2025-26 Projection £112,954 | 2026-27 Draft Budget (£1,417) |
| Likely underspend due to two vacancies being gapped due to projected budget shortfall. | All posts filled and accounted for with an estimated 4% cost of living pay rise. The small decrease on the budget for this year reflects that the grade 5 MSO post will remain vacant and is not included in the budget. |

| General Expenditure | |
|--|--|
| 2025-26 Projection £33,360 | 2026-27 Draft Budget £20,732 |
| Slightly lower expenditure than anticipated primarily due to less than budgeted expenditure on budget headings such as electricity, maintenance & re-decoration, subscriptions and legal & professional fees | 4% inflationary increase applied to some budget headings with known information or judgement being applied to some. IFCA funded national training post subscription added for this year. |

| Departmental Operational Costs | |
|--|---|
| 2025-26 Projection (£1,472) | 2026-27 Draft Budget £1,943 |
| A modest overspend is predicted due to slightly higher than anticipated costs under Marine Protection. | Slightly higher than inflationary increase to reflect anticipated costs in Media & Adverts. |

| Vessels | |
|--|--|
| 2025-26 Projection £6,694 | 2026-27 Draft Budget £6,917 |
| Whilst indicating an underspend it is quite possible that there will be an overspend in this area due to higher than anticipated running costs for <i>FPV Protector IV</i> . Some of these may be associated with a new vessel being made fully operational. | Inflationary increases applied where considered appropriate. |

| Vehicles | |
|--|--|
| 2025-26 Projection (£635) | 2026-27 Draft Budget -£1,314 |
| Virtually on track with only a very small overspend predicted. | Modest reduction in budget to reflect predicted costs. |

| Income | |
|--|---|
| 2025-26 Projection (£10,000) | 2026-27 Draft Budget £2,930 |
| £10k less in one element of Defra workstream funding than originally anticipated . | Whilst the general levy is increased by 12% this is largely offset by not including Defra workstream funding. |

Table 2.
Estimates of Expenditure 2025-2026 and Draft Budget 2026-27

| | 2025/26 Budget £ | 2025/26 Projection £ | 2026/27 Draft Budget £ |
|--|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| STAFF COSTS | | | |
| Salaries | 1,029,040 | 949,013 | 1,040,072 |
| Pension | 231,876 | 209,392 | 228,103 |
| Employers NI | 135,517 | 125,074 | 126,841 |
| TOTAL STAFF COSTS | 1,396,433 | 1,283,479 | 1,395,016 |
| GENERAL EXPENDITURE | | | |
| Accommodation | | | |
| Rent | 38,745 | 39,217 | 40,226 |
| Rates | 17,188 | 17,071 | 18,369 |
| Electricity | 10,552 | 6,058 | 9,660 |
| Water | 724 | 1,378 | 1,035 |
| Service charges - office | 6,065 | 6,343 | 6,597 |
| Cleaning | 3,000 | 2,180 | 3,000 |
| Maintenance & redecoration | 5,500 | 1,011 | 5,200 |
| Insurance Business / Premises | 20,361 | 20,911 | 21,748 |
| TOTAL | 102,135 | 94,170 | 105,834 |
| GENERAL ESTABLISHMENT | | | |
| Subscriptions | 46,092 | 31,396 | 42,575 |
| Recruitment | 1,000 | 0 | 1,000 |
| Legal & Professional fees (inc bank charges) | 47,504 | 37,383 | 49,740 |
| Telephones | 12,000 | 11,106 | 11,550 |
| Postage & Stationery | 8,700 | 3,769 | 4,357 |
| IT Support | 36,874 | 36,709 | 38,349 |
| Uniforms & Protective Clothing | 8,652 | 9,472 | 20,798 |
| Medical costs | 1,236 | 1,236 | 957 |
| Sundry costs (inc meeting costs) | 4,605 | 11,003 | 15,390 |
| TOTAL | 166,663 | 142,074 | 184,716 |
| OFFICERS TRAVEL & SUBSISTENCE | | | |
| General Travel - Fares,Taxis, Mileage | 3,307 | 2,500 | 2,540 |
| Subsistence Payments | 5,430 | 5,430 | 5,000 |
| Overnight Subsistence | 1,919 | 1,919 | 2,595 |
| Hotel – Accommodation & Meals | 8,000 | 8,000 | 8,000 |
| TOTAL | 18,656 | 17,849 | 18,135 |
| Members expenses | 1,500 | 1,500 | 1,000 |

| | | | |
|---|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Training | 20,000 | 20,000 | 20,000 |
| TOTAL GENERAL EXPENDITURE | 308,954 | 275,593 | 329,685 |
| OPERATIONAL COSTS | | | |
| Media & Adverts | 1,600 | 0 | 3,000 |
| Marine Science | 10,000 | 10,000 | 10,400 |
| Marine Protection | 10,007 | 13,329 | 10,400 |
| Wash Fisheries/ lays | 250 | 0 | 0 |
| TOTAL OPERATIONAL COSTS | 21,857 | 23,329 | 23,800 |
| MOORING & HARBOUR DUES | | | |
| Rent -Sutton Bridge Moorings | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Maintenance | 500 | 0 | 500 |
| Berthing & Harbour Dues | 9,000 | 8,623 | 9,000 |
| TOTAL | 9,500 | 8,623 | 9,500 |
| VESSELS | | | |
| Protector IV / Thunderstruck | | | |
| Maintenance & Repairs | 22,145 | 31,612 | 25,808 |
| Refit | 10,000 | 3,009 | 10,400 |
| Insurance & Certification (all Vessels) | 48,410 | 41,406 | 50,346 |
| Fuel (all vessels) | 51,500 | 51,500 | 51,500 |
| TOTAL | 132,055 | 127,528 | 138,054 |
| RIBS - Sebastian | | | |
| Terrelinck/SeaSpray/Sea Runner | | | |
| Maintenance & Repairs | 17,980 | 16,691 | 18,898 |
| VESSELS TOTAL | 159,535 | 152,841 | 166,452 |
| VEHICLES | | | |
| Insurance & Road Fund Tax | 13,699 | 21,644 | 13,165 |
| Fuel & Sundries | 23,000 | 13,837 | 19,864 |
| Repairs & Servicing | 4,500 | 5,865 | 6,240 |
| Vehicle tracking | 2,719 | 3,207 | 3,335 |
| TOTAL VEHICLES | 43,918 | 44,553 | 42,604 |
| EXPENDITURE TOTAL | 1,930,697 | 1,779,796 | 1,957,558 |

Capital Account and Reserves

Overall reserves are healthy but with unanticipated costs for repair and maintenance of vessels and potential shortfalls in revenue budgets projected in recent years they may reduce over time.

Anticipated income and expenditure in capital accounts and reserves are shown in Table 3 with the initial figures being based upon the 2025 year-end accounts. The Vessel Replacement Fund has been renamed the Vessel Fund to reflect that in reality it covers both vessel replacement and significant costs such as vessel repairs that cannot be covered by revenue budgets. It is relevant to note that informal practice has been to maintain circa £60k in the Vehicle Renewal reserve and to fund such purchases from this reserve as opposed to from the revenue budget.

At year end any surplus in revenue funding has, with the agreement of the Finance & HR sub-committee, been moved to reserves with the default position being to supplement the Vessel Fund but noting the necessity to maintain sufficient monies in the Vehicle Renewals fund.

Asset Replacement Levies

Anticipated income to capital accounts/reserves in 2026-27 is set out below.

| | Norfolk County Council | Suffolk County Council | Lincolnshire County Council |
|------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------------|
| | 38.50% | 28.90% | 32.60% |
| | £ | £ | £ |
| Asset replacement levy | 71,025 | 53,316 | 60,142 |
| Total levies | £184,483 | | |

Table 3.**Reserves and Capital Account Estimates 2025-2026 and Draft Estimates 2026-27**

| | 2025/26 Opening Balance | 2025/26 Changes | 2026-27 Changes |
|-------------------------------|--|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| | £ | £ | £ |
| IT Fund | 10,000 | 0 | 0 |
| FAP Fund | 22,750 | 0 | 0 |
| Legal and Enforcement Fund | 75,000 | 0 | 0 |
| Office Improvement Fund | 10,000 | 0 | 0 |
| Operational Fund | 250,000 | (150,000) | 0 |
| Science Fund | 62,251 | 0 | 0 |
| Vehicle Renewals | 60,000 | 10,252 | 0 |
| Vessel Fund | 1,461,093 | 179,109 | 67,577 |
| Wash Fishery Order Fund | 85,429 | 0 | 0 |
| Environmental Grants | 18,292 | 0 | 0 |
| TOTAL Reserves | 2,054,815 | 2,094,176 | 2,161,753 |
| <i>National IFCA fund</i> | <i>221,000</i> | <i>n/a</i> | <i>n/a</i> |

Notes on estimated changes to reserves

The notes below relate to the earmarked reserve where income and expenditure will result in a net increase or (decrease). No capital expenditure is currently planned for 2026-27 as vessels have all been replaced or refitted relatively recently and similarly vehicle replacements have been undertaken.

| |
|---|
| Operational Fund |
| 2025-26 change (£150,000) |
| Reflects payment of £150k to Fenland DC for Sutton Bridge moorings. |

| |
|---|
| Vehicle Renewals |
| 2025-26 change £10,252 |
| Reflects £37,675 being expended on the purchase of a new 4x4 vehicle and the currently projected surplus of £47,927 from the 2025-26 revenue being allocated to top up the vehicle replacement reserve. |

| <i>Vessel Fund</i> | |
|--|---|
| 2025-26 estimated change £179,109 | 2026-27 estimated change £67,577 |
| Reflects the addition of the asset replacement element of the levies for the year. | Reflects the addition of asset replacement element of levies for the year minus the estimated shortfall in the revenue budget of £116,906 |

It should be noted that in the absence of any increase in New Burdens funding or the provision of workstream funding from Defra the estimated shortfall in income against expenditure in 2026-27 of **£116,906** will be debited to reserves. As an illustration, in the absence of any other changes this would leave total reserves of **£2,161,754** at the end of 2026-27.

In future the capital account and reserves will become a standard item for inclusion in quarterly management accounts and any planned capital expenditure will be shown in these accounts as opposed to the revenue accounts. It is intended that this separation of revenue and capital accounting will provide improved clarity for members, particularly when significant capital programmes such as vessel builds involving multiple stage payments are taking place.

Forecast to March 2031

Because the outcome of the bid by AIFCA to the Government's Spending Review is unknown at the time of writing no funding from Defra aside from 'Base Funding' is included in the forecasts. If no additional funding is forthcoming, then as presented to the August meeting of the Finance & HR sub-committee and acknowledged in the adoption of 'Option 2', it is likely that another above inflation uplift in levies of circa 12% would be required in 2027-28 to address projected shortfalls in funding.

For illustrative purposes, the forecast in Table 4 includes an uplift in the general levies of 12% for 2027-28 followed by 2% increases in subsequent years whilst asset replacement element of the levies assumes the previously agreed 3% uplifts annually for each of the five years in the forecast. Any increase in Defra funding will have a positive impact on the forecast and would be likely to render the above inflation uplift in general levies in 2027-28 unnecessary. Inflationary increases of 2% per annum are shown for all expenditure.

It is likely that 'Other' income will see modest increases as new permit scheme come into effect and annual inflationary increases and a review of fees under the Wash Cockle and Mussel Byelaw 2021 is undertaken. However, as the effect of these are not currently known and because they are unlikely to be significant in budgetary terms they have not been included in the forecast.

Table 4**Revenue Budget Forecast to March 2031**

| | 2026/27 | 2027/28 | 2028/29 | 2029/30 | 2030/31 |
|----------------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| <u>Income</u> | £ | £ | £ | £ | £ |
| Levies | 1,334,001 | 1,494,081 | 1,523,963 | 1,554,442 | 1,585,531 |
| Defra Funding | 394,145 | 394,145 | 394,145 | 394,145 | 394,145 |
| Other | 112,506 | 112,000 | 112,000 | 112,000 | 112,000 |
| Total Income | 1,840,652 | 2,000,226 | 2,030,108 | 2,060,587 | 2,091,676 |
| <u>Expenditure</u> | | | | | |
| Staff cost | 1,395,016 | 1,422,916 | 1,451,375 | 1,480,402 | 1,510,010 |
| General Expenditure | 329,685 | 336,279 | 343,004 | 349,864 | 356,862 |
| Operations | 23,800 | 24,276 | 24,762 | 25,257 | 25,762 |
| Vessels | 166,452 | 169,781 | 173,177 | 176,640 | 180,173 |
| Vehicles | 42,604 | 43,456 | 44,325 | 45,212 | 46,116 |
| Total | 1,957,557 | 1,996,708 | 2,036,642 | 2,077,375 | 2,118,923 |
| Surplus/(Shortfall) | (116,905) | 3,518 | (6,535) | (16,788) | (27,247) |

Capital Expenditure Estimates to March 2031

The table below sets out anticipated capital expenditure over the next five years. No vessel replacements or major refits are anticipated during this period but the life extending refit of *FPV Sebastian Terelinck* undertaken early in 2025 means that consideration of a replacement will be due towards the end of the forecast period.

| | 2026/27 | 2027/28 | 2028/29 | 2029/30 | 2030/31 |
|-----------------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------------------|---------------------|----------------|
| Vehicle Renewals | £0 | £0 | £96,000 4 x vehicles | £24k 1 x vehicle | |
| Vessel Replacement or Major Refit | £0 | £0 | £0 | £0 | £0 |

Forecast movement in reserves to March 2031

| | 2026/27 | 2027/28 | 2028/29 | 2029/30 | 2030/31 |
|---|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| | £ | £ | £ | £ | £ |
| Opening | 2,094,176 | 2,161,753 | 2,355,288 | 2,640,470 | 2,849,271 |
| Asset rep levy | 184,483 | 190,017 | 195,718 | 201,590 | 207,637 |
| Utilised | 0 | 0 | 96,000 | 24,000 | 0 |
| Revenue budget surplus/(shortfall) | (116,906) | 3,517 | (6,535) | (16,789) | (27,248) |
| Balance | 2,161,753 | 2,355,288 | 2,640,470 | 2,849,271 | 3,029,660 |

Background documents

Papers and minutes of the meeting of the Finance & HR sub-committee held on 5 August 2025.

Papers and minutes of the meeting of the Finance & HR sub-committee held on 4 November 2025.

Eastern IFCA Constitution and Standing Orders.

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



Action Item 9

62nd Eastern Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority Meeting

10 December 2025

Wash Mussel Fishery 2025/26

Report by: Luke Godwin (ACO)

Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to present members with the outputs of the 2025 Wash Mussel Surveys and to propose an approach to manage the mussel fisheries through 2025 and 2026.

Recommendations

It is recommended that members:

- **Note** the outputs of the mussel 2025 mussel survey and the decision to maintain the fishery as open as agreed by Natural England.
- **Agree** in principle to maintain The Wash harvestable and re-laying fisheries as open, subject to a Habitat Regulation Assessment and consultation with fishing industry.
- **Agree** to delegate authority to the CEO in consultation with the Chair or Vice-Chair to make a final decisions relating to the status of the fisheries (opening and closures) on the mussel fisheries and to introduce, vary or revoke flexible management measures referred to in Schedule 4 of the Wash Cackle and Mussel Byelaw 2021.
- **Agree** to delegate authority to the CEO in consultation with the Chair or 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 Cackle and Mussel Byelaw 2021.

Background

The Authority manages mussel fisheries in The Wash under the Wash Cackle and Mussel Byelaw 2021. At the 58th Eastern IFCA meeting, members agreed in principle to open both a harvestable (targeting adult mussel) and re-laying (targeting juvenile mussel for aquaculture purposes) mussel fisheries and delegated authority to the CEO, in consultation with the Chair or Vice-Chair, to manage the fisheries. This was the first such harvestable mussel fishery in The Wash since 2007.

As reported at the 60th Eastern IFCA Meeting, the fishery had opened on 29 January 2025 with management measures for the fishery, including a Total Allowable Catch (TAC), open and closed beds and other management measures agreed by the CEO and Chair under the delegated authority provided at the 58th meeting. Separate

TACs were set for the harvestable and mussel fisheries of 1,100 tonnes each, both of which being set well below the maximum which would have been permissible under the mussel management policies³ (which was circa 5000 tonnes in total) in accordance with the preferences of industry identified during the consultation on management measures. Additional management measures included biosecurity measures which prevent the re-laying of adult mussel without the prior consent of the Authority as a consequence of identifying that Chinese Mitten Crab are likely to be present in mussel catch.

During the consultation on management measures for the harvestable mussel fishery in particular, stakeholders identified that it would be preferable to have the harvestable mussel fishery open during November in future years, particularly in order to establish a market for the catch.

The Authority undertakes an annual stock assessment of the intertidal mussel stocks in The Wash to determine if mussel biomass is sufficient to support a fishery, including in the context of The Wash supporting multiple Marine Protected Area designations. The survey is undertaken during autumn each year.

Report

Ordinarily, mussel fisheries close prior to the annual mussel survey to enable a stock assessment to be undertaken. However, because there was a significant amount of TAC remaining in both fisheries, both of which were also set well below the maximum which could have been taken, and a very low level of fishing activity (up to 4 vessels with only one active), the fishery was maintained as open. The intention of doing so was to provide continued access, noting the feedback received during the last mussel fishery consultation, and facilitate the establishment of a mussel market.

Because this represented a deviation from the normal practice as set out in the Habitat Regulation Assessment (HRA) agreed with Natural England, advice was sought from Natural England as to whether such would constitute a risk to The Wash MPAs. Natural England provided written advice confirming that there would be no significant adverse effect in site integrity to Wash MPAs (Appendix A refers).

As such, the fishery is presently still open under the established management measures previously reported.

The annual mussel survey commenced in mid-September 2025 and concluded on 20 November. The survey has identified that the biomass of mussel in the Wash continues to be sufficient to support both a harvestable and re-laying fishery. Mussel stock biomass has benefitted from a further year where mussel mortality has been minimal resulting in the largest stocks since the mid-1940s. The survey report is at Appendix B.

It is noteworthy that the survey indicates that the maximum TAC for the harvestable fishery would be **3,075 tonnes** (plus **308 tonnes** for the hand-worked fishery) and that the maximum TAC for the re-laying fishery would be **2,178 tonnes** (plus **218 tonnes** for the hand-worked fishery).

³ [The Wash Shellfish Management Policies 2008](#)

If both the harvestable and re-laying fisheries were opened to their maximum potential, their combined TAC would be **5,779 tonnes** (including hand-worked components). Even with this quantity of mussels removed, the total mussel biomass would still exceed its 12,000 tonnes Conservation Objective target.

Consultation with fishing industry and the completion of a Habitat Regulation Assessment are required to determine if revisions to the existing management measures are needed, including revision to the TAC and open beds.

On the matter of the TAC, consultation with industry is particularly important because there is usually some concern about the size of the proposed mussel fisheries because both cockles and mussels contribute towards the calculations used in the Bird Food Model when determining food availability for the over-wintering wader populations, which could impact on the TAC of the subsequent cockle fishery.

The timing of the December Authority meeting in relation to the annual survey does not provide sufficient time to undertake the work to make a final decision at the Authority meeting. As such, it is proposed that authority is delegated to the CEO, in consultation with the Chair or Vice-Chair to make decisions on the continuance of the fisheries and their associated management measures outside of Authority meeting. This will have the benefit of maintaining access to the fishery whilst also ensuring that management measures are sufficient to protect the fishery and the Wash MPAs.

Financial Implications

None identified.

Legal Implications

Implementing management measures in accordance with the associated Wash Shellfish Management Policies and the provisions of the Wash Cockle and Mussel Byelaw 2023 (including undertaking consultation and assessing impacts on fishing industry) in addition to assessment via a Habitat Regulation Assessment is considered sufficient to mitigate risk of successful legal challenge.

Appendices

Appendix A – Natural England advice relating to maintaining the Wash mussel fisheries as open during and beyond the completion of the annual mussel survey.

Appendix B – Wash Mussel Survey Report

Background Documents

Papers and minutes for Action Item 10 of the 58th Eastern IFCA meeting held on 11 December 2024.

Papers and minutes for Action Item 12 of the 60th Eastern IFCA Meeting held on 11 June 2025.

Current management measures for the Wash Mussel Fisheries - [Wash Mussel Fisheries 2025 - Eastern IFCA](#)

Appendix 1 - Natural England advice relating to maintaining the Wash mussel fisheries as open during and beyond the completion of the annual mussel survey

Date: 9th September 2025

Our ref: 525414

Your ref: 2025_08_Wash mussel fishery extension HRA



Eastern Inshore Fisheries & Conservation Authority,
6 North Lynn Business Village,
Bergen Way,
King's Lynn,
Norfolk,
PE30 2JG
BY EMAIL ONLY

Dragonfly House,
2 Gilders Way,
Norwich,
NR3 1UB

Re: Habitats Regulations Assessment for extension to dredged and hand-worked mussel harvestable and relaying fishery in The Wash 2025

Dear Ella,

Thank you for your Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) for the proposed extension to the mussel fishery (harvest and relay, dredged and hand-worked), which we received by email on the 28th August 2025.

Natural England responded on 4th September 2025 with initial questions, and a revised HRA was received on 5th September 2025 following a phone conversation with Samantha Hornbrey.

This letter may be taken to be Natural England's formal consultation representations on the proposed extension to the dredged and hand-worked relay fishery under Regulation 63 of The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended).

It should be noted that this consultation was for an extension to the opening time of the 2025 mussel fishery which was originally consented until 31st August 2025. Natural England's advice with regards to the original consultation can be found in Appendix I.

Summary

The activity as proposed will take place within the:

- The Wash & North Norfolk Coast Special Area of Conservation (SAC)
- The Wash Special Protection Area (SPA)
- The Wash Ramsar
- The Wash Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)

Natural England agrees that the proposed extension is likely to have a significant effect on The Wash and North Norfolk Coast SAC, The Wash SPA and The Wash Ramsar Site. We also consider that the proposal is not directly connected with management of the site for nature conservation.

We note that your authority, as competent authority under the provisions of the Habitats Regulations, has undertaken an Appropriate Assessment of the proposal in accordance with Regulation 63 of the Regulations.

Your appropriate assessment concludes that your authority is able to ascertain that the proposal will not result in adverse effects on the integrity of any of the sites in question.

Natural England note that:

- All thresholds and management measures previously outlined in the mussel fishery HRA, received in December 2024, continue to apply during the extension period considered in this addendum.
- Only four permits are currently active (1 handwork and 3 dredge) and only one vessel is currently targeting the fishery (via a dredge) on a monthly basis. This activity is not anticipated to increase over the extension period.
- The harvestable fishery will take place during the overwintering period, but adverse effect to SPA species has been ruled out. Although there is a potential for disturbance to feeding waders from the hand-worked elements of the fishery, the activity is relatively small scale and does not overlap with high-use feeding areas.
- If Eastern IFCA's September / October mussel surveys reveal that the stocks are not sufficient to support a fishery for 2025/2026 then the current 2025 fishery would also be closed, regardless of how much of the original TAC remains.
- Any mussel stock removed from the system, subsequent to the mussel surveys concluding and prior to the 2025/2026 fishery commencing, will be accounted for and subtracted from the TAC for the 2025/2026 fishery.

Conclusion

Having considered the assessment, and the measures proposed to mitigate for all identified adverse effects that could potentially occur as a result of the proposal, Natural England agrees with the conclusion of the assessment. It is our opinion that the proposal in relation to the extension to the dredged and hand-worked harvestable and relay mussel fishery, as specified, **would not have an adverse effect** on the integrity of the above European sites in terms of Regulation 63 of The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended).

Natural England also confirm that the proposed fishery will not have a significant impact upon the features of special interest of The Wash SSSI and therefore has no objection to the proposed authorisation of the fishery in terms of Section 28I of The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended).

We would draw your attention to your duty, under Section 28G of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, as amended, to take reasonable steps, consistent with the proper exercise of your functions, to further the conservation and enhancement of the SSSI.

For any queries relating to the content of this letter please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Jen Love

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jen Love', followed by a horizontal line.

Marine Senior Officer
E-mail: Jennifer.Love@naturalengland.org.uk

Date: 17th January 2025

Our ref: 496842

Your ref:

2024_12_Wash_Mussel_Harvestable_and_Relaying_HRA_FINAL_v2.0



Eastern Inshore Fisheries & Conservation Authority,
6 North Lynn Business Village,
Bergen Way,
King's Lynn,
Norfolk,
PE30 2JG

BY EMAIL ONLY

Dragonfly House,
2 Gilders Way,
Norwich,
NR3 1UB

Re: Habitats Regulations Assessment for dredged and hand-worked mussel harvestable and relaying fishery in The Wash 2025

Dear Sammy,

Thank you for your Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) for the proposed mussel fishery (harvest and relay, dredged and hand-worked), which we received by email on the 13th December 2024. Natural England responded on 24th December 2024 with initial questions, and a revised HRA was received on 9th January 2025. Further clarifications were received in a meeting on 14th January 2025. This letter may be taken to be Natural England's formal consultation representations on the proposed dredged and hand-worked relay fishery under Regulation 63 of The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended).

Summary

The activity as proposed will take place within the:

- The Wash & North Norfolk Coast Special Area of Conservation (SAC)
- The Wash Special Protection Area (SPA)
- The Wash Ramsar
- The Wash Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)

Natural England agrees that the proposal is likely to have a significant effect on The Wash and North Norfolk Coast SAC, The Wash SPA and The Wash Ramsar Site. We also consider that the proposal is not directly connected with management of the site for nature conservation.

We note that your authority, as competent authority under the provisions of the Habitats Regulations, has undertaken an Appropriate Assessment of the proposal in accordance with Regulation 63 of the Regulations.

Your appropriate assessment concludes that your authority is able to ascertain that the proposal will not result in adverse effects on the integrity of any of the sites in question. Having considered the assessment, and the measures proposed to mitigate for all identified adverse effects that could

potentially occur as a result of the proposal, Natural England advises that we concur with the assessment conclusions, providing that all mitigation measures are appropriately secured in any permission given.

Natural England support the management measures proposed for this dredged and hand-worked fishery as set out in the HRA. We note that proposed measures follow Eastern IFCA's 2008 Shellfish Management Policies in most cases, but that some of the proposed measures deviate from these policies. We understand the need for these deviations, given significant changes in mussel population dynamics since the 2008 policies were written. We do however advise that these policies are revised in 2025/26 to reflect the current state of the mussel population and ensure that fishing activities are undertaken in a manner which ensures that the sites' conservation objectives are met.

Natural England note that:

- Eastern IFCA intends to open a dredged and hand-worked harvestable fishery for the 2025 season (from January 2025 to 31 August 2025) with a TAC of 2,410 tonnes (t). Eastern IFCA also intends to open a relaying seed mussel fishery for the 2025 season (from mid-April to 31 August) with a TAC of 2,220 t. This is a **combined TAC of 4,630 t**.
- The proposed fisheries will close on exhaustion of the Total Allowable Catch (TAC) or on 31st August 2025 if the TAC is not exhausted prior.
- Clarification was provided via email (see appendix 1) that it is likely that these fisheries will not overlap temporally, with the harvestable fishery concluding in spring before the relay fishery commences. It is also likely that the TAC will be lower than 4,630 t, but this has been set as a maximum threshold.
- This is the first time a harvestable mussel fishery has been proposed since 2008 as it is the first time since then that stocks have exceeded the conservation targets.
- The 2024 Eastern IFCA surveys found a total stock of 23,149 t of mussels on the intertidal beds: 12,049 t of adult mussel and 11,100 t of juvenile mussel.
 - The TAC will not reduce the mussel biomass below conservation thresholds: 12,000 t total biomass, 5000 t juvenile biomass and 7000 t adult biomass.
 - The TAC will not reduce the total extent of mussel beds to less than 500 ha, or reduce the densities below 25 t/ha. Recommended maximum harvest rates for each bed have been identified.
 - The TAC will not reduce the total stock of mussel and cockle below 40kg Ash Free Dry Mass per bird required at the start of the winter as set out in the Conservation Objectives.
- The fisheries will operate in line with the Wash Fishery Order 1992 Regulations, though the mechanism for this is currently an exemption to Byelaw 8: temporary closure of shellfish fisheries. This byelaw enables the cockle and mussel fishery in the Wash to be managed as under The Wash Fishery Order, during the transition period to a new byelaw.
 - During the harvestable fishery, a minimum landing size (MLS) of 45 mm is in place. Juvenile mussels will be riddled in-situ and returned to beds.
 - Mussels harvested for the relay fishery will not be immediately removed from the SAC or SPA but instead transferred to the Wash Several Fishery Order shellfish lays for on-growing.
 - Fishing vessels will be limited to two dredges per vessel, each measuring no more than one metre in width, and will be limited to a daily catch of four tonnes of harvestable mussel, or eight tonnes of relay seed mussel.
- The harvestable fishery will take place during the overwintering period, but adverse effect to SPA species has been ruled out. Although there is a potential for disturbance to feeding

waders from the hand-worked elements of the fishery, the activity is relatively small scale and does not overlap with high-use feeding areas.

- Harbour seal haulouts within 100m of the mussel beds were scoped in for disturbance assessment. There is limited overlap between fishing areas and haulout sites (i.e. Herring Hill, Holbeach and North Mare Tail overlap slightly with 'high use' haulouts), and these areas will be closed to the hand-worked fishery during the sensitive breeding and moulting season.

Stock composition of beds

Twelve beds have been assessed as suitable to be opened to the fishery. It is important to note that seven of the beds proposed for opening contain 'mixed' age and size structures. Historically, beds were targeted based on stock composition (i.e. only beds supporting $\geq 70\%$ adult mussel biomass would be opened to a harvestable fishery), and EIFCA's 2008 shellfish management policies contain the following paragraph:

"Protection of mussel bed areas that contain a mix of year classes: Size composition of mussels is assessed during stock surveys, which enables identification of heterogeneous mussel bed areas in terms of age and size structure that support high levels of biological diversity. These areas will be excluded from the mussel fishery, as appropriate, through liaison with Natural England".

This proposal does not follow these policies, due to a significant shift in the population dynamics of mussel since mortalities began in 2009. These policies were developed at a time when heterogeneous beds were rarer and required specific protections. Eastern IFCA propose that opening these mixed beds will be beneficial to the stock and mussel bed habitat. Natural England agree that the 2008 policies may no longer be applicable, and we advise that these policies are revised to reflect the current state of the mussel population. This will ensure that future fishing activities are consistently undertaken in a manner which ensures that the site's conservation objectives are met.

Comments for further consideration

Whilst we support the conclusion of the assessment, there are some areas where we do not agree with the arguments provided to come to these conclusions. These are highlighted below so that they can be considered further for future HRAs:

- Several sections claim that disturbance to SPA species is unlikely, as they are habituated to the activity. The relay fishery of previous years has occurred at a much smaller scale and not during the sensitive overwintering period, so it should not be assumed that overwintering birds would be habituated to this activity.
- Appendix 1 of the HRA scopes out 'Littoral sediment' from The Wash SSSI as a 'feature that does not exist within the site, or not near the proposed fishery'. It is assumed that this feature is scoped out because it is adequately covered by the SAC assessments, rather than it not being present, but this could be clarified in the table.
- Some sections may have been copied from previous years that are not applicable to the scale or timing of this fishery e.g. 'Mussel dredging occurs over high water, outside of the key bird feeding period' (p.27), 'The limited quota for the 2024 mussel relaying fishery further limits the possibility for the vessel-based spread of INIS' (p.14).
- Collision above water is ruled out as 'there is highly unlikely to be an increase in the number of vessels in the area' due to fishers also participating in the cockle fishery. We disagree with this point; that is a hand-worked fishery, and we suggest that there is likely to be increased

vessel activity occurring from a larger scale dredge fishery being introduced during the overwintering period.

- 'Restrict aqueous contaminants to levels equating to High Status according to Annex VIII and Good Status according to Annex X of the Water Framework Directive, avoiding deterioration from existing levels' (p.7) - this target is set to 'reduce', rather than 'restrict'.

Conclusion

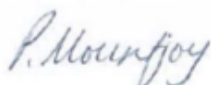
Natural England agrees with the conclusion of the assessment that the proposal in relation to the dredged and hand-worked harvestable and relay mussel fishery, as specified, **would not have an adverse effect** on the integrity of the above European sites in terms of Regulation 63 of The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended).

Natural England also confirm that the proposed fishery will not have a significant impact upon the features of special interest of The Wash SSSI and therefore has no objection to the proposed authorisation of the fishery in terms of Section 28I of The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended).

We would draw your attention to your duty, under Section 28G of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, as amended, to take reasonable steps, consistent with the proper exercise of your functions, to further the conservation and enhancement of the SSSI.

For any queries relating to the content of this letter please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,
Pip Mountjoy



Marine Lead Adviser
E-mail: Philippa.Mountjoy@naturalengland.org.uk
Telephone: 07876006143

Appendix B – Wash Mussel Survey report

Summary of the 2025 Wash intertidal mussel surveys and fishing opportunities

Introduction

The 2025 Wash inter-tidal mussel surveys were conducted between September 20th and November 20th, during which 21 inter-tidal beds, plus the Welland Bank were surveyed. These included 3 small beds on the Ferrier, Wrangle and Blue Back that were surveyed for the first time this year. Two other small beds on the Roger and Pandora were not surveyed this year, having previously been removed from the survey programme due to their small stock size and general deterioration. Of these, the Pandora bed was observed in spring to support very few mussels, while the Roger bed was estimated in summer to support approximately 40 tonnes of mussels.

Figure 1 shows the beds that were surveyed during the 2025 programme.

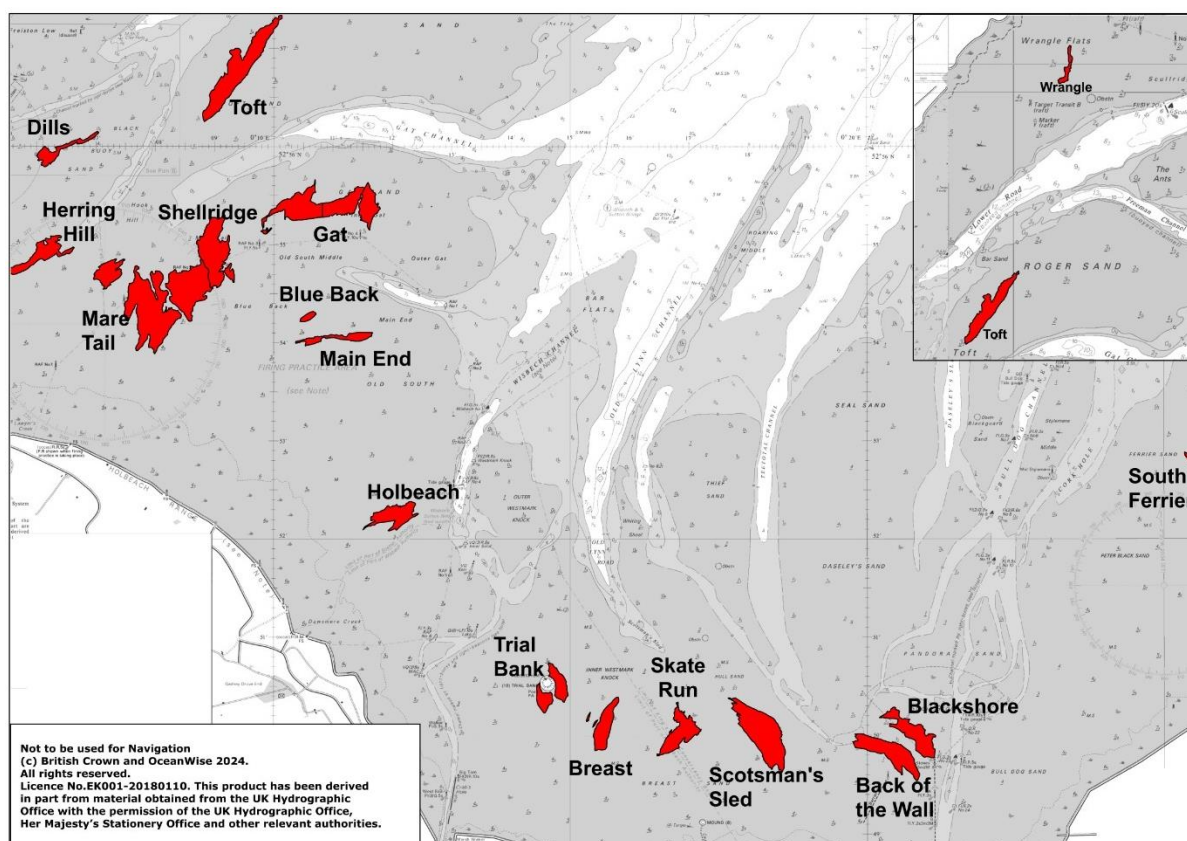


Figure 1 – Mussel beds surveyed during the 2025 inter-tidal surveys

Survey results

- Adult mussel (≥ 45 mm length) biomass – 15,373 tonnes
- Juvenile mussel (< 45 mm length) biomass – 10,889 tonnes
- Total mussel biomass – 26,263 tonnes

Between 2009 and 2022, the mussels on the intertidal beds in The Wash suffered unusually high levels of annual mortality and poor recruitment. The cause of these die-offs has not been identified but they resulted in a steady deterioration of the beds and the decline in mussel stocks – particularly among the adult mussel populations. In

2023, however, the anticipated die-off did not occur and good growth on the majority of the beds resulted in the stock biomass increasing significantly to its highest level since 2002. Since 2023, mortalities have remained low. Coupled with recruitment and good growth, this has enabled the stocks to increase further, to levels last recorded in 1945⁴. Recovery has been particularly noticeable among the stocks of adult mussels. As the populations of 2-3 year-old juvenile mussels had been particularly vulnerable to the die-offs, disproportionate numbers of them had died before they reached the 45mm size at which they would have recruited into the “adult” population. Therefore, while occasional good recruitments had produced sufficient juvenile stocks for the total mussel biomass to achieve the 12,000 tonnes threshold required to open occasional relaying seed fisheries, the adult stock biomass had remained below the 7,000 tonnes Conservation Objective target required to open a harvestable fishery. The recent survival of the vulnerable 2-3 year-old mussels has enabled them to recruit into the adult population, which now exceeds 15,000 tonnes.

Figure 2 shows how the current stocks, including the total area of the beds, compared to those from 2002 onwards.

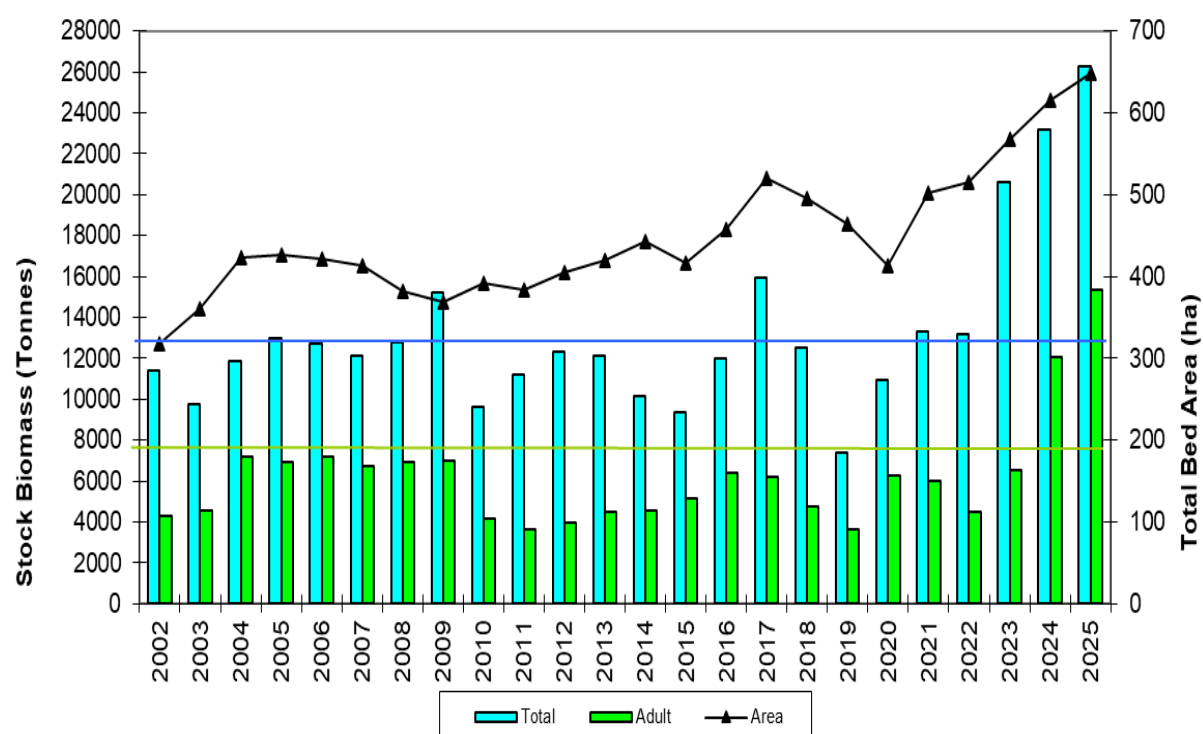


Figure 2 – Intertidal mussel stock levels in The Wash since 2002 and the Conservation Objective targets

Table 1 provides a summary of the stocks present on each of the beds at the time of the surveys.

⁴ It should be noted that there were few surveys conducted between 1955 and when the current programme of annual surveys commenced in the early 1980s. It is possible, therefore, that higher stock levels went unrecorded during that period.

Table 1 – Summary of the stocks present on the inter-tidal mussel beds at the time of the 2025 autumn surveys.

| BED | Summary of the Wash inter-tidal mussel stocks - 2025 | | | | |
|-----------------------|--|-----------------|-------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| | AREA (ha) | COVERAGE (%) | DENSITY (t/ha) | TOTAL STOCK (tonnes) | STOCK >45MM (tonnes) |
| Mare Tail North | 52.9 | 37 | 0.91 | 1790 | 989 |
| Mare Tail Relay | 0.5 | 62 | 0.93 | 32 | 17 |
| Mare Tail South | 86.4 | 28 | 1 | 2458 | 937 |
| Mare Tail West | 17.5 | 26 | 0.51 | 232 | 52 |
| Shellridge | 51.9 | 47 | 1.52 | 3686 | 2792 |
| Wrangle | 10.9 | 35 | 1.06 | 406 | 275 |
| Toft | 64.3 | 42 | 1.12 | 3023 | 2323 |
| Gat, West | 34.9 | 46 | 1.13 | 1828 | 1267 |
| Gat, Mid | 22.6 | 36 | 0.81 | 667 | 588 |
| Gat, East | 18.4 | 43 | 1.09 | 865 | 819 |
| Main End | 12.8 | 28 | 9.69 | 344 | 229 |
| Blue Back | 3.0 | 41 | 0.35 | 44 | 6 |
| Holbeach | 24.7 | 53 | 1.31 | 1710 | 738 |
| Herring Hill | 24.7 | 32 | 0.57 | 450 | 50 |
| Trial Bank | 22.1 | 41 | 1.53 | 1391 | 719 |
| Breast, East | 22.3 | 26 | 0.69 | 407 | 83 |
| Scotsman's Sled, East | 63.4 | 23 | 1.18 | 1718 | 824 |
| Blackshore | 31.2 | 26 | 1.37 | 1123 | 549 |
| Back of the Wall | 39.1 | 39 | 1.42 | 2180 | 1187 |
| Dills | 13.9 | 24 | 0.71 | 239 | 75 |
| South Ferrier | 2.9 | 29 | 0.57 | 48 | 7 |
| Skate Run | 28.3 | 33 | 1.71 | 1622 | 847 |
| TOTAL | 648.6 | | | 26263 | 15373 |
| Welland Bank | 2.1 | 72 | 2.28 | 339 | 282 |

Between the 2024 and 2025 surveys, there has been an overall increase in total mussel biomass of 3,114 tonnes and in adult mussel biomass of 3,324 tonnes. The changes seen in total biomass on individual beds is shown in figure 3. 12 beds have increased in biomass since the previous survey, and compared to a few years ago, now appear to be in good condition, with good mussel coverage and dense patches of clean mussels. During the year, 5 beds have declined in biomass. Four of these beds (the Tofts, West Gat, West Mare Tail and Herring Hill) are on the west side of The Wash and are older, established beds. The other bed that has shown a slight decline in stock biomass is the Back of the Wall bed. Unlike the others, this is a relatively young bed that has shown good recruitment and growth in recent years. This was one of the beds predominantly targeted during the 2025 fishery, however, and evidence of dredge tracks during the survey suggest its recent decline in biomass is due to fishing activity rather than natural mortality. It should be noted, that of all of the beds surveyed this year, only the West Mare Tail showed evidence of high natural mortality similar to that seen between 2009-2023 occurring (e.g. relatively high proportions of recently-dead 2-3 year-old mussels). While it is good that the mortalities have been limited to this one bed, it does highlight that the issue has not totally gone and could resurface in other beds in the future.

Three beds were surveyed for the first time this year. The Wrangle bed is the largest of these, supporting 406 tonnes. These mussels were first identified during the 2025 spring cockle surveys, but the size ranges of the mussels suggest the bed settled about 3 years ago. The Blue Back bed is in a similar location to a larger bed that used to be present there in the 1990s, and likewise, appears to have settled about 3 years ago. The majority of the mussels on the Ferrier beds are between 15-30mm, suggesting it settled last year.

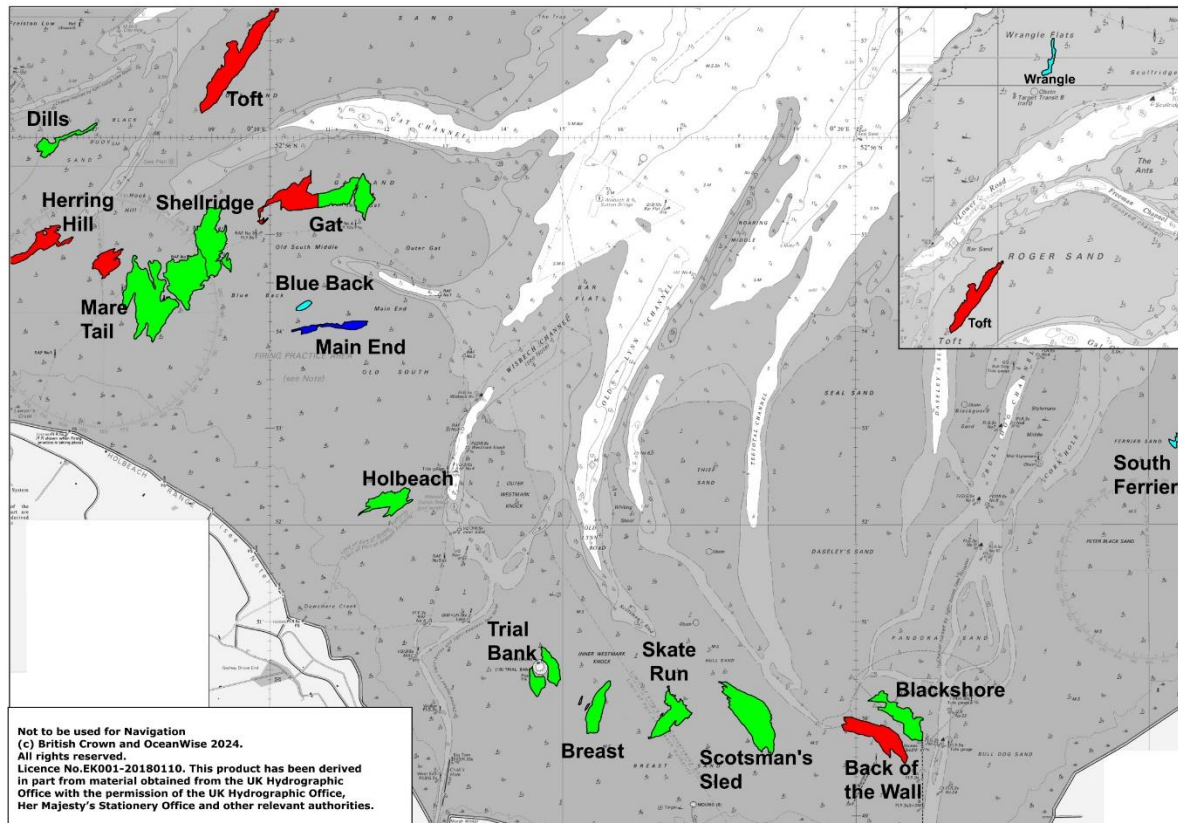


Figure 3 – Changes in mussel biomass found between 2024 and 2025 surveys – Increased biomass (green), decreased biomass (red), unchanged (dark blue), new beds (light blue)

The high mortalities and poor recruitment that occurred between 2009-2022 had left the majority of the mussel beds in poor condition, typically supporting low densities of barnacle-encrusted mussels amidst lots of dead shell and bare patches. The sparsity of mussels on several of these beds meant little pseudo-faeces was being produced to replace sediment being scoured from the beds. This had resulted in areas on several of the beds becoming sandy. The improved survival of the mussels seen in the past three years, particularly among the vulnerable 2-3 year-old cohorts has helped many of the beds to rejuvenate. This has not only been evident in the stock biomass figures, which have increased significantly, but has been evident within the beds, where the mussel coverage and patch densities have visibly improved and the layer of pseudo-faeces has thickened. On some of the beds, particularly the younger ones (e.g. Back of the Wall and Skate Run), or where recruitment has been high (e.g. Shellridge), the mussels are mostly clean and appear good quality. On the older, more established beds, however, that had deteriorated more badly to begin with, survival of new settlements have started to rejuvenate the beds but it will require further surviving

settlements to properly restore their condition to the quality seen prior to the start of the die-offs.

While the overall condition of the mussel stocks has greatly improved over the past three years, the high numbers of dead 2-3 year-old mussels witnessed on the West Mare Tail bed this year suggest the problem might still persist in The Wash and that all of the beds could still be vulnerable to future losses.

Fishery Opportunities

When determining appropriate management measures for the mussel fisheries, the stock assessment is considered in the context of the 2008 Wash Shellfish Policies⁵ which provides guidance to ensure mussel fisheries are managed within environmental parameters. These include measures that aim to:

- Maintain stocks above the Conservation Objective targets of 12,000 tonnes total stock and 7,000 tonnes adult stock,
- Limit the Total Allowable Catch of the dredged harvestable fishery to 20% of the “adult” stock biomass, and the dredged relaying fishery to 20% of the juvenile stock biomass, with an additional 2% added to each for the hand-worked fisheries.
- Restrict exploitation so that fisheries do not reduce stock densities on individual beds below a minimum density of 25 tonnes/hectare (Note – this measure does not apply to vulnerable/ephemeral beds).
- Protect adult stocks from the relaying fishery and juvenile stocks from the harvestable fishery by opening the most appropriate beds for each fishery based on their stock composition.

Harvestable and relaying fisheries

If the stocks allow, the inter-tidal beds support two fisheries; a harvestable fishery, in which adult ($\geq 45\text{mm}$ length) mussels are landed directly for market, and a relaying fishery, in which seed ($< 45\text{mm}$ length) mussels are re-laid onto private lays for growing-on.

The current stocks are:

Adult mussel – 15,373 tonnes

Juvenile mussel – 10,889 tonnes

Total stock – 26,263 tonnes

Because both the adult stock and the total stock exceed their respective 7,000 tonnes and 12,000 tonnes thresholds, there is an opportunity to open both fisheries.

Total Allowable Catch (TAC) for fisheries

Harvestable Fishery

The biomass of adult mussels was found to be 15,373 tonnes. A TAC based on 20% of this would be **3,075 tonnes** (plus **308 tonnes** for the hand-worked fishery). A harvestable fishery of this size would still allow the 7,000 tonnes Conservation Objective target to be achieved, so would not need to be capped.

⁵ https://www.eastern-ifca.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/WFO_Shellfish_management_policies_2008.pdf

Relaying seed fishery

The biomass of juvenile mussels was found to be 10,889 tonnes. A TAC based on 20% of this would be **2,178 tonnes** (plus **218 tonnes** for the hand-worked fishery). A relaying fishery of this size would still allow the 12,000 tonnes Conservation Objective target to be achieved, so would not need to be capped.

If both fisheries were opened to their maximum potential, their combined TAC's would be **5,779 tonnes** (including hand-worked components). Even with this quantity of mussels removed, the total mussel biomass would still exceed its 12,000 tonnes Conservation Objective target.

Because both cockles and mussels contribute towards the calculations used in the Bird Food Model when determining food availability for the over-wintering wader populations, many industry members have raised concerns in recent years about the size of the proposed mussel fisheries, fearing they could impact on the size of the subsequent cockle fisheries. It is, therefore, recommended that the size of the TAC for the relaying mussel fishery should only be determined after consultation with the fishing industry.

Beds to be opened to fisheries

To prevent over-fishing occurring on individual beds, average mussel densities should be maintained above 25 tonnes/hectare within each bed. The following beds support mussel densities that are below this minimum threshold, so should not be opened to either the relaying or harvestable mussel fisheries:

- West Mare Tail
- Blue Back
- Herring Hill
- East Breast
- Dills
- South Ferrier

The 15 beds that do currently satisfy this criterion are listed in Table 2. This table also shows the proportion of the mussel biomass that have attained 45mm length and the maximum permissible TACs that would enable the average density of each bed to remain above 25 tonnes/hectare.

Table 2. Beds that could be opened to the 2025 mussel fisheries and the maximum harvest rates that the policies would allow

| Bed | % adult biomass | Maximum TAC |
|-----------------|-----------------|-------------|
| North Mare Tail | 55.3 | 486 |
| South Mare Tail | 53.3 | 298 |
| Shellridge | 75.7 | 2390 |
| Wrangle | 67.7 | 134 |
| Tofts | 76.8 | 1416 |
| West Gat | 69.3 | 956 |
| Mid Gat | 88.2 | 102 |
| East Gat | 94.7 | 406 |

| | | |
|------------------|------|------|
| Main End | 66.6 | 24 |
| Holbeach | 43.2 | 1093 |
| Trial Bank | 51.7 | 839 |
| Scotsman's Sled | 48.0 | 133 |
| Blackshore | 48.9 | 343 |
| Back of the Wall | 54.4 | 1203 |
| Skate Run | 52.2 | 914 |

The following factors, listed in the 2008 shellfish policies, need to be considered when determining which beds should be opened to each of the fisheries.

- ***Selection of mussel beds to be opened to the fishery (according to stock composition and bed vulnerability):*** *Mussel bed areas containing a significant proportion of juvenile stocks will not be opened to the harvestable fishery. Usually, ESFJC requires that mussel beds contain at least 70% adult stock, but this level can be varied where it can be shown to benefit the stock.*
- *Beds containing <70% adult stock may be opened to the relaying fishery.*

The above measure provides a cut-off, whereby only the beds supporting $\geq 70\%$ adult mussel biomass can be opened to a harvestable fishery, while all beds with under this amount can be opened to the relaying fishery. Importantly, the measure recognises that this level can be varied when doing so will benefit the stock. Prior to 2008, when these measures were being developed, the beds had not been subjected to a long period of high die-offs, so were in much better condition than post-2009. As such, more of the beds supported high proportions of adult mussels than currently. Since 2009, however, the low stocks of adult mussels have prevented any harvestable fisheries from opening and have required those surviving adults to be protected more stringently from the relaying fisheries. To achieve this greater protection, in recent years the Authority has varied the proportion described above so that the relaying fisheries have only been able to target beds that have been composed predominantly ($>50\%$) of juvenile mussels. With only a relaying fishery to consider, this has been a simple solution. The opportunity to open a harvestable fishery in addition to the relaying fishery makes the situation more complex this year, for while there are some beds that are $>70\%$ either adult or juvenile stock, there are several that are more mixed and could support either fishery. It is recommended, however, that the following beds should only be opened to the harvestable fishery:

- Shellridge
- Tofts
- West Gat
- Mid Gat
- East Gat

The remaining beds listed in Table 2 could be opened to either fishery. How the TAC should be allocated between the two fisheries is more complex, however, and requires careful consideration and consultation with the industry.

Fishing methods

While both dredging and hand-working methods can be used for prosecuting the mussel fishery, the majority of the fishery is usually targeted using dredges with a

minority favouring hand-working. Ordinarily, the TAC for the dredge fisheries has been set at 20% of the stock biomass, with an additional 2% reserved for the hand-worked fisheries. In recent years, however, there has been a preference from those targeting the fishery for a larger hand-worked TAC than the usual 2%. Therefore, the allocation of the TAC between the two fisheries should be determined following consultation with the industry.

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



Action Item 10

Eastern Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority Meeting

10 December 2025

Wash Cackle and Mussel Byelaw 2021 permit fees

Report by: Luke Godwin (ACO)

Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to present members with updated costs for managing the Wash cockle and mussel fisheries and seek agreement in principle to increase permit fees subject to a consultation and impact assessment.

Recommendations

It is recommended that members:

- **Note** the revised costs associated with managing the Wash cockle and mussel fisheries.
- **Agree** in principle to increase fees under the Wash Cockle and Mussel Byelaw 2021 to reflect 50% cost recovery as set out in this paper.
- **Direct** Officers to undertake a consultation and Impact Assessment in accordance with the provisions of the Wash Cockle and Mussel Byelaw 2021 and to present results at the next appropriate Authority meeting.

Background

Since the implementation of the Wash Fishery Order 1992 (WFO), the Authority and its predecessor (Eastern Sea Fisheries Joint Committee) has charged fees in relation to providing access to the cockle and mussel fisheries of The Wash.

Between 2017 and 2019, prior to the expiry of the WFO, access fees were reviewed with the intention of improving cost recovery for the Authority in the context that licence fees were negligible when compared to costs to the Authority. The principle of cost recovery was agreed at the 27th Eastern IFCA meeting and revised licence fees were agreed at the 35th Eastern IFCA meeting following cost saving revisions to annual stock survey methods, consultation with fishery stakeholders and an impact assessment. The Authority also determined that costs recovered from industry via licence fees would be capped at 50% of actual costs.

The Authority now manages cockle and mussel fisheries in The Wash under the Wash Cockle and Mussel Byelaw 2021 (hereafter, 'the byelaw'). As was the case under the WFO, the byelaw contains provisions that require permit holders to pay fees each year in order to access the fishery, and the Authority can vary such fees.

Fees are split into two categories. The first related to the cost of undertaking annual surveys for cockle and mussel stocks. These costs occur annually regardless of whether a fishery is opened or not. The associated fee is referred to as the 'Eligibility fee' and is required to be paid regardless of whether a person intends to fish each year (albeit with some exceptions) in accordance with the Eligibility Policy. The second category of fee relates to the cost of managing each individual fishery including in relation to consultation, undertaking habitat regulation assessments and compliance and admin activities. The associated fees are referred to as 'permit fees' and relate to the costs for each of the three individual fisheries in The Wash: the hand-work mussel and cockle fisheries and the dredge mussel fishery.

The fees associated with access to the fishery were maintained from the level agreed in 2019 (which was implemented in phases) during the development of the byelaw and were not reviewed during the byelaw making process. The intention to retain the cap of 50% cost recovery was explicit in developing the byelaw and in dialogue with industry.

Report

Review of costs

Given the amount of time which has passed since the fees were adopted in 2019, and the events during that period including periods of significant inflationary increases, the fees do not represent cost recovery at the agreed 50% and this is illustrated in Appendix 1.

In summary, the estimated cost to the Authority in relation to surveys have increased by 44.3% since 2019. The increased costs relate primarily to increases in staff costs (which are aligned with the Local Government pay awards) and increases in the number of vessel days. Application of the 50% cost recovery results in an associated Eligibility fee of £1,058 per permit holder, an increase of just under 40%, with some of the increase in costs overall mitigated by the total cost being shared between 63 instead of 61 permit holders as was the case in 2019.

With regards to fisheries specific costs, the cost associated with the hand-work cockle fishery has increased by 26% primarily as a consequence of increased staff costs and additional compliance activities compared to that assumed in 2019. The resultant permit fee is increased by 20% from £339.57 to £424.21 to achieve 50% cost recovery.

Costs associated with the mussel hand-work fishery increased marginally, with increases in staff costs being mostly mitigated by a reduction in anticipated vessel-based patrols with the result being that the associated permit fee is overall less than in 2019 (reducing from £101.39 to £97.21). The dredge mussel fishery costs are reduced compared to the 2019 estimates as a result of undertaking fewer sea-borne patrols and as such, the associated permit fee required to achieve 50% cost recovery is also reduced to £107.47 (from £162.48). However, it is important to note that cost estimates are reduced on the basis of the mussel fisheries attracting very little effort (with typically 3 to 4 vessels operating) and that associated permit fees are highly unlikely to achieve 50% cost recovery because of so few permits being taken out each year.

Overall, the estimates in Appendix 1 are considered likely to represent an underestimate in the cost to the Authority because they do not reflect additional, unplanned work, which is undertaken almost annually, including work to consider variation of permit conditions (e.g. extra open areas) which would include undertaking additional Habitat Regulation Assessments, consultations and impact assessments.

In addition, it is unlikely that in any given year the maximum number of Eligibility and permit fees will all be paid. For example, during the 2025 cockle fishery 59 of the 63 permits were issued. As such, it is unlikely that 50% cost recovery will be achieved, even where the above increases are implemented.

Inflation rates

The costs set out in Appendix 1 reflect prices for the 2025/26 financial year. Given that the revised fees are intended to take effect in the following financial year, and that costs will have increased in line with inflation (or in the case of staff costs, in line with the settlement agreement in relation to Local Government pay awards), it is considered prudent to apply an inflationary uplift on the fees.

The consumer price index including owner occupiers' housing costs (CPIH) rose by 4.1% during the 12 months to September 2025 according to the Office of National Statistics release of 22 October 2025⁶. Inflation of 4% is assumed in the budget setting process for 2026-27 at agenda item 8 of this meeting.

Table 1 sets out the associated fees including with the application of the inflationary uplift.

| Fee | 2019 fees | 50% cost recovery at 2025 prices | Percentage increase compared to 2019 fees | 50% cost recovery at 2025 prices plus inflationary uplift | Percentage increase compared to 2019 fees |
|----------------------|------------------|---|--|--|--|
| Eligibility Fee | £757.75 | £1,058 | 39.7% | £1,102 | 45.4% |
| HW Cockle Permit | £339.57 | £424 | 20% | £442 | 30% |
| HW Mussel Permit | £101.39 | £97 | -4.1% | £101 | -0.19% |
| Dredge Mussel Permit | £162.48 | £107 | -33.8% | £152 | -6.7% |

Process for amending fees

The byelaw sets out the process for amending fees. In summary, where fee variations are in excess of 3.5% of the current value, the process requires consultation with permit holders and undertaking an impact assessment.

⁶ [Consumer price inflation, UK - Office for National Statistics](#)

With the exception of the revision to the mussel permit fee (including an inflationary uplift) all other potential variations to the fees exceed the 3.5% threshold and will therefore require consultation and consideration of impacts.

Potential impacts

The fee for access to the cockle fishery (the main Wash shellfish fishery) will increase from £1,097.32 to £1,544 under the proposed fee increases. Whilst the percentage increases may appear stark, the actual increase in a cockle permit is less than £450. By way of comparison, the first sale value of one tonne of cockles during the 2025 fishery (July to September inclusive) was circa £700, which is half the permitted catch for a trip.

In total, the cost of access to the fishery will represent circa 2.7% of the gross income (first sale value of catch) based on undertaking 41 trips annually (the average number of trips between 2014 and 2025 inclusive with the exception of 2015 which was excluded because the TAC was exceptionally large) and the 2025 price per kilo for cockles (£0.70 per kg). The impact on profits will be proportionally higher however, overheads relating to the cockle fishery are understood to be low relative to other fisheries (because the vessel is used only in prop-washing and to gain access to the sands over low water).

Ultimately, the impact on permit holders would be considered further through the development of an impact assessment informed by consultation with permit holders.

Financial Implications

Based on 59 Eligibility fees, 59 cockle permits and 4 mussel permits being issued (i.e. the situation as of 2025), the revised fees (including an inflationary uplift) would generate £91,704 income. The projected income from cockle and mussel fisheries within the provisional budget for 2026/27 is £69,000. The proposed increase represents an increase of 33% from that within the provisional budget, but only a 1.2% increase in income compared to 2025/26.

In the context of the budgetary deficit projected for 2026/27 and the proposed increase in levies to mitigate some of the projected shortfall (as per the agreement at the Finance and HR Sub-Committee held on 4 November 2025 and proposed to the full Authority at agenda item 8 of this meeting), the proposed increase in fees is considered proportionate in principle, pending consideration of impacts in more detail following a consultation on the matter.

It is noteworthy however that the fee increases are not likely to achieve 50% cost recovery each year because of the relatively low uptake in the mussel fishery.

Legal Implications

The agreement in principle poses little risk of legal challenge on the basis that it is intended that consultation and detailed consideration of impacts is to be considered to inform a final decision on the matter in accordance with the provisions of the byelaw.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Breakdown of costs associated with managing Wash cockle and mussel fisheries.

Background Documents

Papers and minutes for Action Item 14a of the 27th Eastern IFCA Meeting held on 15 February 2017

Papers and minutes for Action Item 13 of the 35th Eastern IFCA meeting held on 30 January 2019

Papers and minutes for the Finance and HR Sub-Committee meeting held on 4 November 2025

Appendix 1 - Breakdown of costs associated with managing Wash cockle and mussel fisheries

Survey costs (Associated with the Eligibility Fee)

Cockle surveys

| <u>Officer costs</u> | Days | Officers | Officer grades | Duration (hrs) | Totals |
|----------------------|------|----------|-----------------------------------|----------------|-----------|
| IFCO crew | 16 | 3 | 1 senior skipper, 2 grade 5 IFCOs | 12 | 19,725.82 |
| MSO crew | 16 | 2 | 2 MSOs | 12 | 12,010.56 |
| Analysis and reports | 10 | 1 | 1 senior MSO (Research) | 7.4 | 2,973.59 |

Vessel costs

| <u>Vessel costs</u> | Trips | cost/trip | | |
|---------------------|-------|-----------|--|-----------|
| RV PIV | 16 | 1,600 | | 25,600.00 |

Subsistence costs

| | Allowance | trips | Officers | |
|--------------|-----------|-------|----------|----------|
| Breakfast | 6.41 | 16 | 5 | 512.80 |
| Lunch | 8.81 | 9 | 5 | 396.45 |
| Evening meal | 10.92 | 9 | 5 | 491.40 |
| Nights away | 33.27 | 9 | 5 | 1,497.15 |

Mussel surveys

| <u>Officer costs</u> | Days | Number Officers | IFCOs types | Duration | Totals |
|----------------------|------|-----------------|-----------------------------------|----------|------------|
| IFCO crew | 19 | 3 | 1 senior skipper, 2 grade 5 IFCOs | 12 | £23,424.41 |
| MSO crew | 19 | 2 | 2 MSOs | 12 | £14,262.54 |
| Analysis and reports | 4 | 1 | 1 senior MSO (Research) | 7.4 | £1,189.44 |

Vessel costs

| <u>Vessel costs</u> | Trips | cost/trip | | |
|---------------------|-------|-----------|--|------------|
| PIV | 19 | 1,600 | | £30,400.00 |

Subsistence costs

| | Allowance | trips | No Officers | |
|--------------|-----------|-------|-------------|---------|
| Breakfast | 6.41 | 10 | 5 | £320.50 |
| Evening meal | 10.92 | 10 | 5 | £546.00 |

Cockle fishery management costs (associated with the permit fee)

Cockle fishery assessment

| <u>Officer costs</u> | Days | Officers | Officer grades | Duration | Totals |
|----------------------|------|----------|----------------|----------|-----------------|
| | 5 | 2 | MSO | 7.4 | 2,314.53 |
| | 2 | 1 | Senior MSO | 7.4 | 594.72 |

Management measures development (incl. consultation, industry meeting, papers)

| <u>Officer costs</u> | Days | Officers | Officer grades | Duration | |
|----------------------|------|----------|----------------|----------|-----------------|
| | 5 | 1 | PO grade 6 | 7.4 | 1,217.21 |
| | 2 | 3 | ACO, CEO, SMSO | 7.4 | 2,344.18 |

Cockle fisheries enforcement

| <u>Officer costs</u> | Days | Officers | Officer grades | Duration | |
|---------------------------|------|----------|--|----------|------------------|
| Patrols (Sea - primary) | 16 | 3 | 2 grade 5, 1 grade 6 | 4 | 6,266.90 |
| Patrols (Sea - secondary) | 26 | 1 | 1 grade 5 | 10 | 8,132.15 |
| Patrols (Land) | 39 | 2 | 1 grade 5, 1 grade 6 | 4 | 10,396.28 |
| Monitoring sands | 2 | 6 | 1 senior skipper, 1 grade 6, 4 grade 5 | 10 | 3,484.00 |

| <u>Vessel costs</u> | Trips | Cost/trip | |
|---------------------|-------|-----------|-------------------|
| <i>FPV ST/TS</i> | 16 | 862.50 | £13,800.00 |
| <i>RV PIV</i> | 2 | 1,600 | £3,200.00 |

Other costs

| <u>Vehicles</u> | Miles | Trips | Cost /trip £ | |
|-----------------|-------|-------|--------------|---------------|
| KL to Moorings | 26 | 18 | 6.5 | 117.00 |
| KL to Boston | 72 | 17 | 17.5 | 297.50 |

Costs associated with the administration of catch returns

Data entry – catch returns

| <u>Officer costs</u> | Days | No Officers | Officers | Duration |
|----------------------|------|-------------|----------|----------|
|----------------------|------|-------------|----------|----------|

| | | | | |
|-----|---|-----------------|-----|-----------|
| 8.4 | 1 | Support Officer | 7.4 | £1,286.25 |
|-----|---|-----------------|-----|-----------|

Mussel fishery management costs (associated with HW mussel and dredge mussel permit fees)

Mussel fishery assessment

| <u>Officer costs</u> | Days | No Officers | Officer grades | Duration | Totals |
|----------------------|------|-------------|----------------|----------|------------------|
| | 5 | 2 | MSO | 7.4 | £2,314.53 |
| | 2 | 1 | Senior MSO | 7.4 | £594.72 |

Management measures development (incl. consultation, industry meeting, papers)

| <u>Officer costs</u> | Days | Officers | Officer grades | Duration | |
|----------------------|------|----------|----------------|----------|------------------|
| | 5 | 1 | PO grade 6 | 7.4 | £1,217.21 |
| | 2 | 3 | ACO, CEO, SMSO | 7.4 | £2,344.18 |

HW Mussel fisheries enforcement

| <u>Officer costs</u> | Days | Officers | Officer grades | Duration | |
|---------------------------|------|----------|--|----------|------------------|
| Patrols (Sea - primary) | 3 | 3 | 2 grade 5, 1 grade 6 | 4 | £1,175.04 |
| Patrols (Sea - secondary) | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | £0.00 |
| Patrols (Land) | 2 | 2 | 1 grade 5, 1 grade 6 | 2.5 | £333.21 |
| Monitoring sands | 1 | 6 | 1 senior skipper, 1 grade 6, 4 grade 5 | 10 | £2,006.59 |

| <u>Vessel costs</u> | Trips | Cost/trip | |
|---------------------|-------|-----------|------------------|
| FPV PIV | 1 | 1,600 | £1,600.00 |
| FPV ST/TS | 3 | 862 | £2,586.00 |

Other costs

| <u>Vehicles</u> | Miles | Trips | Cost /trip £ | |
|-----------------|-------|-------|--------------|---------------|
| KL to Moorings | 26 | 4 | 6.5 | £26.00 |

Dredge Mussel fisheries enforcement

| <u>Officer costs</u> | Days | Number Officers | IFCOs types | Duration | |
|-------------------------|------|-----------------|----------------------|----------|------------------|
| Patrols (Sea - primary) | 4 | 3 | 2 grade 5, 1 grade 6 | 4 | £1,566.72 |

| | | | | | |
|---------------------------|-----|-----|--|-----|------------------|
| Patrols (Sea - secondary) | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | |
| Patrols (Land) | 2 | 2 | 1 grade 5, 1 grade 6 | 2.5 | £333.21 |
| Monitoring sands | 1 | 6 | 1 senior skipper, 1 grade 6, 4 grade 5 | 10 | £2,006.59 |

| | | | | |
|----------------------------|--------------|--------------------|--|------------------|
| <u>Vessel costs</u> | Trips | Cost/trip £ | | |
| RV Three Counties | 1 | 1,600 | | £1,600.00 |
| FPV ST/JA | 4 | 862 | | £3,448.00 |

Other costs

| | | | | |
|------------------------|-----------------------|--------------|---------------------|---------------|
| <u>Vehicles</u> | Miles (return) | Trips | Cost /trip £ | |
| KL to Moorings | 26 | 10 | 6.5 | £65.00 |

Data entry – catch returns

| | | | | | |
|-----------------------------|-------------|--------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-------------------|
| <u>Officer costs</u> | Days | No Officers | Officers | Duration | Total cost |
| | 8.4 | 1 | Support Officer | 7.4 | £1,286.25 |

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



Action Item 11

62nd Eastern Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority Meeting

10 December 2025

Wash Several Order Interim Measures

Report by: James Teasdale (Policy and Project Officer)

Purpose of Report

To update members regarding the management of the private lays within the Wash following the expiry of the Wash Fishery Order 1992, and in particular to advise on the risks associated with continuation of management under interim measures and the existence of a request relating to Wash lay ownership.

Recommendations

It is recommended that members:

- **Note** the contents of the report
- **Agree** to delegate to the CEO the authority to issue exemptions from fishery closures issued under the Wash Cockle and Mussel Byelaw 2021 to enable lay holders or their representatives to work their lays.
- **Agree** to the proposed revisions to the Scheme of Delegations for the Wash Fisheries sub-committee at Appendix 3.
- **Direct** officers to develop and present proposals for lay management under the interim measures to address identified issues.

Background

Prior to 2023, management of the Wash cockle and mussel fisheries was underpinned by the Wash Fishery Order 1992 (WFO). The WFO was a 'hybrid order' that contained 'regulating' provisions, which were used to manage the wild public fisheries, and 'several' elements, under which the Authority had the power to issue leases for private fisheries, known as lays, for the purposes of shellfish cultivation.

Concerns relating to impacts on wild shellfish stocks in The Wash led to a moratorium on granting new lays in 2009, since when the management of the lays has taken place under a series of interim measures with the most recent WFO interim policies (Appendix 1) being agreed by the Authority at the 30th Eastern IFCA meeting in October 2017.

Under the interim lay policies, lays and their relevant leases would not be transferred, and no new leases would be issued. The exceptions to this prohibition would be in cases where a business was at risk, or in accordance with the 'death of a lay holder'

procedure (Appendix 2). The latter procedure stated that, noting that leases only had a 10-year lifespan, if a lay holder were to pass away and their family wished to inherit the lay, Eastern IFCA would explore the possibility of transferring the lease for the remainder of its lifespan. The death of the lay holder policy is clear that there may be reasons not to re-issue the lay and it does not provide a comprehensive list of what those reasons may be.

At the 50th Eastern IFCA meeting, members agreed to manage shellfish lays under 'interim measures' to manage the fishery after the expiry of the WFO in January of 2023. The 'interim measures' with respect to lay management involved closure of lays using Byelaw 8 (Temporary Closure of Shellfish Fisheries) followed by issuing exemptions to fish within lays on the condition that they did so in accordance with what were the previous lease conditions. The intention of the interim measures was to safeguard lay holders whilst the Authority's application for a Several Order was considered by Defra in the context that lays (and any stock therein) legally reverted back to the public fishery on the expiry of the WFO. The intended effect was to maintain the *status quo* under the WFO and was described as such when presented to the Authority. The associated policies for issuing lays were not referred to specifically in the consideration of the interim measures, but have broadly been applied since, including for example where industry have made requests to obtain lays, which have been declined on the basis of the interim policy.

The closures which underpin the interim measures have been annually renewed since January 2023. The current closure will expire in January 2026.

It is also important to note that, due to low mussel stocks in the Wash and limited commercial markets, aquaculture in the Wash has seen very little activity. Most lays are therefore being held by industry members in anticipation of a return to favourable conditions and only used when stocks of wild cockle settle onto them. On this point it is important to note that under the WFO, wild cockle that settled on a lay became the property of the lay holder, but this is no longer the case and the practice is often objected to by other industry members, who consider it as the unfair loss of wild cockle.

Report

Defra have not progressed the Authority's application for a Several Order (addressed at agenda item 12 of this meeting) and as such interim measures are required to continue to protect lays which had previously been held under leases issued by the Authority under the WFO. The interim measures enable management of the exploitation of such lays in accordance with the previous 'lease conditions' which include measures for the protection of the wild fisheries (for example in relation to biosecurity risks) and the Wash Marine Protected Areas (MPAs).

With the Wash Cockle and Mussel Byelaw 2021 (WCMB) now being in effect, fishing for cockles and mussels is prohibited by default under this byelaw except unless under the Authority of a permit. The areas which constituted lays under the WFO are currently closed to permit holders under permit conditions. As such, reissuing a closure under Byelaw 8 closure would be a duplication of interim management and is not considered necessary.

Continued access to the lays would be provided under the Applications and Exemptions Byelaw 2016, which enables the Authority to provide exemptions to other byelaws for the purposes of, amongst other things, cultivation of sea fisheries resources. As such, as was the case when utilising Byelaw 8, lay holders will be granted exemptions from the WCMB over lays which they held a lease for under the WFO to enable aquaculture activity.

The only limitation to this approach is that, due to the WCMB only regulating the fishing of cockles and mussels, the protection would not have effect in relation to the cultivation of other species (for example oyster). It is important to note that a separate byelaw, Byelaw 3 (Molluscan Shellfish Methods of Fishing), prohibits the removal of any molluscs by dredging without prior authorisation from the Authority, but this does not apply to removal via hardworking. However, in the event that a fisherman wishes to cultivate a species other than cockle or mussel, a temporary closure could be implemented in the future.

Noting that the level of activity within the 'lays' is very low and that there is currently no cultivation of species other than mussel, utilising the protective effect of the WCMB rather than implementing a further temporary closure is considered to be an appropriate means of continuing interim management of the lays.

Whilst the CEO has authority to grant exemptions from byelaws under the Constitution and Standing Orders generally, it is recommended that, as has been the case in previous years, issuing exemptions to enable fishers to work lays is delegated formally to the CEO at an Authority meeting as a reflection of the scale and nature of the exemption in question.

Lay Ownership request

The Authority has received a request to transfer 'ownership' of lays under the 'death of a lay holder' policy (Appendix 2). The request relates to lays which are reportedly containing mussel stock which had been re-laid by the lay holder.

In the first instance, the 'death of a lay holder' policy refers to a decision on the matter being made by the now disbanded Regulation and Compliance Sub-Committee. Because such matters involve the disclosure and discussion of both personal and business related information it is suggested that they are not best considered by the full Authority and should instead be referred to the Wash Fisheries Sub-Committee for consideration and decision. This is considered appropriate because the sub-committee was established for the purpose of making decisions about Wash fisheries involving consideration of sensitive information and membership of the sub-committee was established to mitigate risks associated with bias through Disclosable Pecuniary Interests (DPI).

To achieve this, proposed revisions to the Scheme of Delegations for the Wash Fisheries sub-committee in the Constitution and Standing Orders can be found at Appendix 3.

It is intended that the specifics of the request will be provided along with a recommendation at the next Wash Fisheries Sub-committee meeting, the date of which is subject to agreement with Action Item 16 of this meeting.

Initial consideration of the request has however identified a number of issues regarding continued management under the interim measures.

Whilst the interim measures have been successful at protecting stock within lays and ensuring that use of lays does not impact the Wash MPAs, the appropriateness of the measures with regards to wider administration including the transfer of 'ownership' is less clear. In particular, because the 'lays' and 'leases' under which a lay holder has a 'right' to the lays and the shellfish on them no longer exists and expired with the WFO. In essence, there is nothing to transfer, particularly in the case where lays are empty and the Authority is maintaining exclusive access to areas which are legally part of the public fishery.

The matter becomes particularly challenging in the context that many lay holders are harvesting wild cockles which have settled onto lays rather than cultivating shellfish, which was not intended under the WFO. Under the WFO, and in accordance with legal advice received on the matter, the Authority had no mechanism to address that issue because the cockles were legally the property of the lay holder. This is no longer the case now that the WFO has expired.

Up to this point lay management under the interim measures has effectively constituted protection of existing stock within lays. However, granting requests to transfer lays, particularly where this perpetuates a less than desirable situation in relation to inappropriate use of lays, represents an increase in the associated risk to the Authority, as any issuance of lays would take place outside of the normal legal framework. This is compounded by the recent update from Defra regarding the likely timescales in relation to the Authority's Several order application (which is the subject of agenda item 12 of this meeting).

In summary, the Authority's ability to effectively maintain the *status quo* is increasingly tenuous over time, as lay holders retire or pass away, and requests are received for the transfer or reissuance of lays. It is therefore recommended that proposals for addressing issues associated with wider lay administration and the transfer of lays are developed and presented at the next appropriate meeting of the full Authority.

Financial Implications

No financial implications identified

Legal Implications

As the lays of the Wash are being managed under a series of interim measures, the legal risk of actions taken by the Authority is elevated. There is no active, explicit legislation enabling or providing a framework for the Authority's management of aquaculture, and instead the Authority is reliant on maintenance of the *status quo*, which itself is becoming increasingly difficult as time passes due to changing stock levels and aging lay holders.

Challenge could arise from lay holders or their proposed successors, as well as from other members of the industry. In particular, the settlement of cockles on lays, which under the WFO (and so continued under the interim policies) become the property of

the lay holder upon settlement, has been a contentious issue and is considered unfair by segments of industry. Should challenge be raised the legal defence may be complicated by the lack of direct legislation.

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Wash Fishery Order 1992 Shellfish Lays – Interim Policies

Appendix 2 – Death of a lay holder policy

Appendix 3 - Proposed Revisions to the Constitution and Standing Orders

Background Documents

- Papers and minutes for Action Item 10 of the 50th Meeting of Eastern IFCA held on December 2022.
- Papers and minutes for Action Item 17 of the 30th Meeting of Eastern IFCA held on 25 October 2017.

Appendix 1 - Wash Fishery Order 1992 Shellfish Lays – Interim Policies

The following policies came into effect on the 25th October 2017

1. Eastern IFCA will not consider applications for additional lays or applications which are currently on the waiting list.
 2. Pending the completion of a review of policy, Eastern IFCA will not re-issue lays to persons who are not the current holder of the lay.
 3. Notwithstanding the generality of 2 above, Eastern IFCA may consider the reissuing of a lay to a person who is not the holder of such at that time only when the continuation of a business is at risk or in accordance with the 'death of a lay holder procedure¹' or in such other circumstances and on such terms as Eastern IFCA may in its absolute discretion deem reasonable.
 4. In determining whether it is reasonable to consent applications under Article 6(3) or Article 6(6) of the Wash Fishery Order 1992, Eastern IFCA will not consider it reasonable where such application is in effect circumvention of policies 1 or 2 above.
- 1 WFO Shellfish lay – death of a lay holder procedure

Appendix 2 – Death of a lay holder policy

Death of a Wash Fishery Order shellfish lease holder

Process

The process for determining the outcome of a break-clause being activated is summarised as four main questions resulting in three potential actions. A flow diagram is presented in Annex 1 of the following process.

1. Is the lay holder a corporate entity?

If the lease is in the name of a corporate entity (or a partner) the break-clause is not activated and the lease continues.

2. Is there currently shellfish on the lay holding?

If the lay holding is currently set with shellfish, these belong to the family of the deceased.

ACTION a - If shellfish is present at the lay holding, Eastern IFCA will, in the first instance, place a temporary closure to fishing on the affected lay holding under byelaw 8 of our byelaws. Eastern IFCA will need to be informed at the earliest opportunity of the death of a lease holder and takes no responsibility for the loss of shellfish in the absence of notification⁷.

3. Has the family expressed a wish to retain the lease?

The family of the deceased may or may not wish to retain the lease agreement.

ACTION b – should the family of the deceased not wish to keep the lease agreement, the lease will be retired. Depending on the outcome of question 2 (above), Eastern IFCA will arrange with the family of the deceased a time to remove any shellfish remaining on the lay holding – including if the family do not wish to retain the shellfish in which case the shellfish will enter the regulated fishery.

Leases expire naturally after a maximum of ten years⁸, if a situation arises where a break-clause is activated but time remains on the lease agreement and the family of the deceased does express a wish to retain the lay holding, Eastern IFCA will explore the possibility of transferring the lease to a specified family member for the remaining duration of the lease.

4. Is there any reason why Eastern IFCA should not grant the transfer of a lease?

Eastern IFCA will first have to consider the eligibility of the proposed family member to attain the lease of the deceased as per Article 6 of the Wash Fishery Order 1992. Following this, Eastern IFCA will also consider the following factors:

- a. Are there currently any measures in place for the purposes of reducing grazing pressure in The Wash as per the mitigation measures agreed with Natural England and published on Eastern IFCA's website? – If measures are currently in place, Eastern IFCA may determine that the reduction in the number of lays is beneficial to the Wash European Marine Site at this time.

⁷ Shellfish on the lay will become part of the wild fishery when the break-clause is activated. This could result in other fishers legally removing that shellfish.

⁸ Wash Fishery Order 1992 Article 6(2)(b) – The Authority cannot grant a lease for more than 10 years without the written consent of the Minister.

- b. Are there any on-going investigations into any potential breaches of the covenants as set out in the lease agreement? – Eastern IFCA may have had reason to expire the lease on the grounds breaches of the lease agreement, if this was the case, officers would consider the potential to not grant a transfer of the lease.
- c. Any other environmental issues – The marine environment is naturally dynamic; as of yet unforeseen environmental issues may have occurred to the extent that it would be beneficial to the integrity and viability of The Wash that the lease is expired.
- d. Other issues the Authority feels is pertinent to deciding the outcome of the break-clause.

All of the above will be considered by the Authority at a Regulation and Compliance Sub-Committee to determine whether or not to transfer a lease. Should the sub-committee conclude to NOT allow a transfer of the lease;

ACTION b – The lease will be retired and Eastern IFCA will arrange with the family of the deceased a time to remove any shellfish remaining on the lay holding – including if the family do not wish to retain the shellfish in which case the shellfish will enter the regulated fishery.

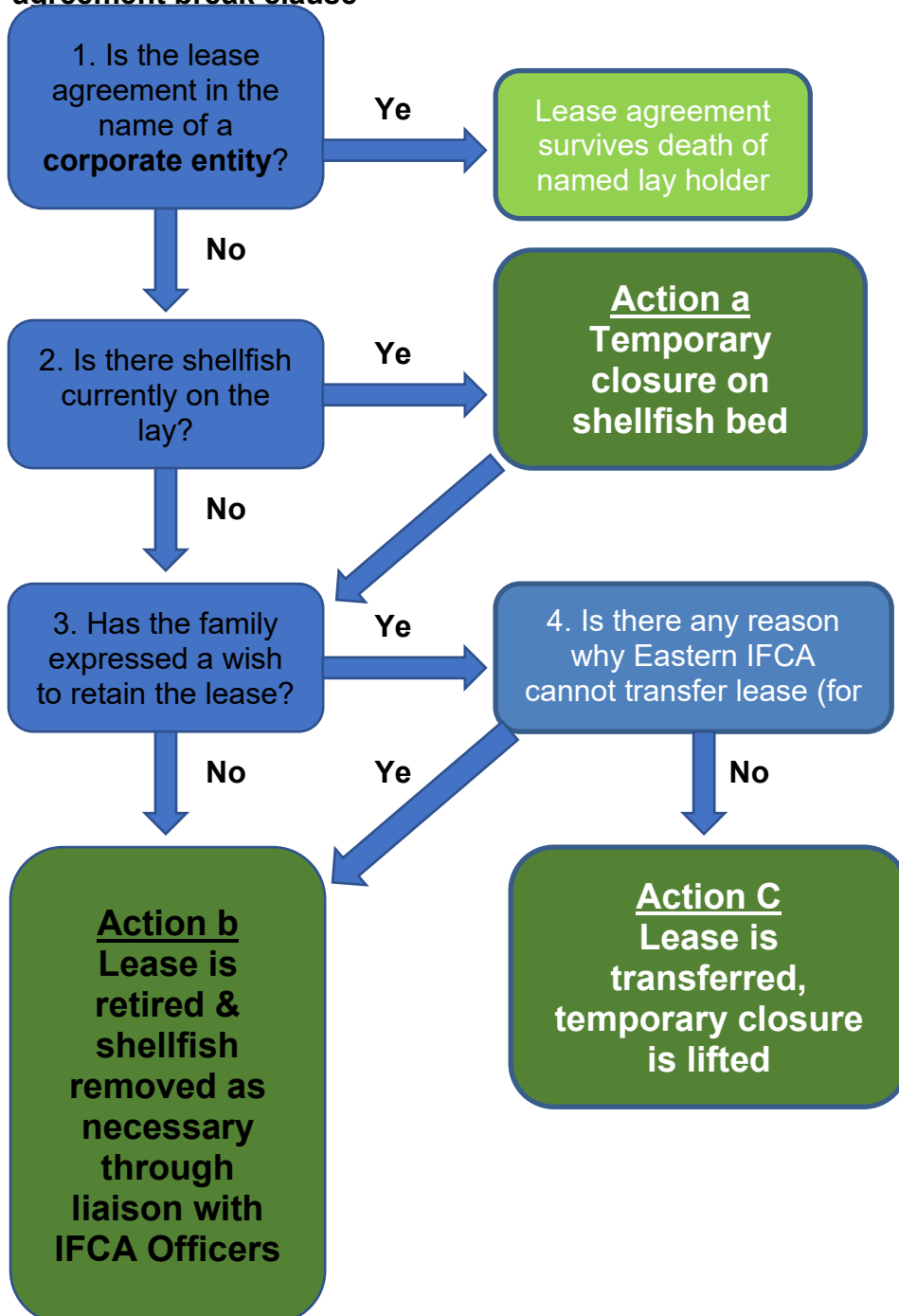
In the case where the sub-committee concludes to allow a transfer of the lease;

ACTION c – Subject to Article 6(2) of The Wash Fishery Order (1992) the sub-committee will effectively grant a new lease to the proposed family member (for duration equal to the time remaining on the original lease). This may include a requirement to request written consent of The Minister.

Summary

In undertaking the process presented, Eastern IFCA will maintain the security of shellfish deposited within the several fishery and apportion WFO shellfish leases in a manner befitting the circumstances in the situation where a lease holder has died.

Annex 1 – agreed process for determining outcome of WFO shellfish lease agreement break clause



| Proposed Revisions to the Constitution and Standing Orders | | | |
|--|----------------|---|--|
| Ref | Original Text | Additional Text | Rationale |
| CHAPTER 4: Scheme of Delegations MATTERS THAT ARE THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE WASH FISHERIES SUB-COMMITTEE TO DISCHARGE | Not applicable | <i>Decision making on all matters associated with the allocation, retention and transfer of aquaculture 'lays' in the Wash that previously existed under the several order elements of the Wash Fishery Order 1992. To include such matters as managed under 'interim' management of the lays following the expiry of the WFO and any subsequent permanent replacement for the several order elements of the WFO.</i> | To provide clarity on the nature of fixed assets and to support improvements to the process of recording and managing such assets. |

Vision

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Action Item 12

62nd Eastern Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority Meeting

10 December 2025

Wash Several Order Application Update

Report by: Luke Godwin (ACO)

Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to update members on the progress made in relation to the Wash Several Order application and to present consideration of alternative options to enable aquaculture in The Wash.

Recommendations

It is recommended that members:

- **Note** the contents of the report, including Defra's position on progressing the Several Order application and the potential for alternative approaches
- **Direct** officers to explore alternative options for aquaculture management in The Wash including through dialogue with fishery stakeholders

Background

Until its expiry on 3 January 2023, the Wash Fishery Order 1992 (WFO) contained a Several Order component that enabled the Authority to manage private shellfisheries, or lays, in the Wash. The *status quo* is currently being maintained under 'Interim Measures' (i.e. closure of the fisheries and subsequent exemptions to operate within lays) and these are addressed at agenda item 11 of this meeting.

At the 39th Eastern IFCA Meeting, members agreed to the use of a new Several Order to continue this management. At this time, the main benefit identified in support of this was that it maintained the *status quo* for both the Authority and industry and provided the Authority with the ability to ensure that the risks of aquaculture activity in The Wash could be mitigated through the implementation of management measures.

Members agreed in principle to a draft Fisheries Management Plan (FMP) to support a Several Order application and agreed to submit a formal application to replace the WFO at the 45th Eastern IFCA meeting. The application was formally submitted to Defra on 1 April 2022 following informal dialogue on the matter including in relation to the development of the associated FMP.

Following delays from Defra in processing the application, and as a consequence of concerns raised by lay holders in relation to the Authority holding a Several Order,

including calls from some that the fishing industry should be the holders of the Order, members considered in detail whether to continue to engage in the process for applying for a Several Order. This consideration at the 52nd Eastern IFCA meeting resulted in members agreeing to continue to endorse the Several Order application.

Progress on the application has been provided at subsequent Authority meetings which in summary highlight that Defra have not had capacity to consider the application or further the work required to lay the draft Order before Parliament.

Report

Defra have recently advised that, due to the 'low demand' for Wash shellfish lays and the high volume of other high priority work, including that generated by the 'EU reset', work to progress the Wash Several Order cannot be prioritised and is unlikely to progress before 2027/28. It is noteworthy that Defra also provided an apology for this being the case and acknowledged that the situation 'is far from ideal'.

Defra also 'strongly encourage' the Authority to explore alternative regulatory frameworks for managing the Wash aquaculture lays.

Alternative approaches

Several Orders granted under the Sea Fisheries (Shellfish) Act 1967 provide grantees with rights to shellfish within a specified area. Any shellfish within these areas are the absolute property of the grantee of the Order and this provides a degree of 'theft protection' as other fishers are effectively prohibited from taking those shellfish.

It is understood however that the vast majority of aquaculture in the UK is not supported by a Several Order and no such 'theft protection' is in place. It is noteworthy also that, whilst an Order provides the holders with a form of protection, without a body such as an IFCA to monitor and enforce the provisions of the Order, the protection provided is potentially only hypothetical.

Where IFCAs are the grantees of Several Orders, they also play a role in enabling the fishery (through the completion of associated Habitat Regulation Assessments, development of biosecurity plans etc.) and its general management (including fair allocation of grounds, enforcement of mitigative measures and protection of stock within lays).

IFCAs have byelaw making powers which are intended to be used to fulfil its duties which includes in relation to 'the cultivation' of sea fisheries resources. Management and enforcement (including 'theft protection') could be implemented via IFCA byelaws, which could be explored as an alternative approach to managing aquaculture in The Wash.

The main drawback identified in using an IFCA byelaw instead of a Several Order relates to the loss of the potential protection provided by an Order establishing that the shellfish within a lay is the 'absolute property' of the lay holder. However, as described above, the protection this provides is only of benefit in reality where an IFCA enforces such in any case.

Further consideration, including potentially seeking formal legal advice on the matter, is required to determine whether a byelaw combined with other forms of authorisation (such as a Crown Estate Lease and / or Authorisation from the Fish Health Inspectorate) will provide an appropriate alternative in this regard.

It is noteworthy however that management of lease provisions under a Several order has proved to be challenging historically. Under a Several Order, the Authority has no means of taking enforcement action against lay holders who are not compliant with the lease conditions (for example, in relation to depositing mussel seed from outside of the district without Authorisation and non-compliance with reporting requirements) except to withdraw the lease. Use of a byelaw instead of an Order potentially provides an opportunity for more effective management of the lays going forward in this respect which is partially important in the context of biosecurity risks posed by aquaculture in The Wash.

The need to address lay management

Action Item 11 of this meeting identifies that there is a degree of urgency to establishing an effective mechanism to address 'lay management' within The Wash in relation to the administration of 'lay ownership' and inappropriate use of lays to harvest wild cockles at the expense of the public fishery.

In addition, the Authority remains responsible for monthly monitoring (of food availability) in accordance with the associated Habitat Regulation Assessment and is incapable of recovering any costs associated with such.

It is noteworthy that the application has been formally under consideration for more than three years, and that Defra have consistently advised during this time that the application will be furthered 'in the near future' but this has not come to fruition. It is considered possible (perhaps likely) therefore that Defra may not be able to deliver progress the application even within the revised timeframe of 2027/28.

The timeframe for byelaw confirmation, if such is considered to be an appropriate alternative approach, is circa 2 years. As such, it appears to be the case that any permanent resolution to lay management will require continued use of interim measures beyond what was intended. Further, that failure to commit to a means of addressing the situation (be it to wait for the Several order to progress or explore a byelaw option) will perpetuate a less than desirable situation with increased risks for the fishing industry and the Authority.

Next steps

Noting the above, it is considered appropriate to undertake a review of the situation and to develop alternative regulatory mechanisms for managing the lays for the Authority to consider. Such will examine the benefits and drawbacks of each approach and any legal or wider consequences. It is intended that such will be presented to the Authority at the earliest opportunity to avoid further delays to implementing a permanent solution.

Financial Implications

In the absence of a regulatory framework to do so, the Authority is unable to cost recover in relation to its management of lays. In reality, cost recovery under the WFO

was negligible with respect to lay management, and so direct budgetary implications are limited, however it was intended that additional cost recovery would be sought under the new Several Order and the delay in implementing such is preventing this cost recovery. This is a relevant factor given the Authority's current financial position with regard to a budgetary deficit requiring above inflation increases in levies, which is addressed at agenda item 8 of this meeting.

Cost implications pertaining to whether a Several Order or Byelaw is used to manage the fishery will be explored as part of the consideration to be presented to the Authority in due course.

Legal Implications

Maintaining the interim measures currently in place represents a potential legal risk because of reliance on mechanisms beyond their intended purpose. Although legal advice has confirmed the appropriateness of the interim measures, the longer the situation persists, particularly in the context of managing lay ownership, the greater the risk of legal challenge becomes. This will be mitigated to an extent through the development of revised interim management (which is referred to in agenda item 11 of this meeting) but ultimately only through implementing a permanent replacement to the WFO with respect to Several fisheries.

Appendices

Not applicable

Background Documents

Papers and minutes for Action Item 10, 39th Eastern IFCA Meeting, 11 March 2020

Papers and minutes for Action Item 13, 45th Eastern IFCA Meeting, 8 September 2021

Papers and Minutes for Action Item 11, 52nd Eastern IFCA meeting, 8 March 2023

Vision

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Action Item 13

62nd Eastern Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority Meeting

10 December 2025

Cromer Shoal Chalk Beds Byelaw 2023 permit conditions

Report by: Luke Godwin (ACO)

Purpose of Report

Following direction provided at the 61st Eastern IFCA meeting, the purpose of this report is to update members on progress on the development of the 'rates of damage' assessment in relation to rugged chalk within the Cromer Shoal Chalk Beds Marine Conservation Zone and an alternative approach for developing management in the context of what have previously been referred to as 'Phase 2 permit conditions'

Recommendations

It is recommended that members:

- **Note** the update on development of the 'rates of damage' assessment and progress in the development of a new approach to delivering management within the MCZ.
- **Agree** in principle the approach set out in the draft ARM Management Plan at Appendix 1.

Background

The Authority has duties to manage fishing activity within the Cromer Shoal Chalk Beds Marine Conservation Zone (hereafter, 'the MCZ') and is doing so via an Adaptive Risk Management (ARM) approach. ARM includes adopting management measures which are proportionate to the risk and adequately precautionary in the context of uncertainty regarding the extent to which pot-based fishing within the MCZ is, or will, hinder the site's conservation objectives.

In accordance with the ARM plan⁹, permit conditions were being developed over two phases. The development of Phase 1 permit conditions was completed at the 60th Eastern IFCA meeting where members agreed to a final revision to the measures. The genesis of these measures were ideas from fishing industry who had offered management measures which would reduce risk to the MCZ. Phase 2 permit conditions were intended to then reduce risk to an 'appropriate level' whilst research under the ARM project continued to address uncertainty about potting impacts.

⁹ [2024_CSCB_MCZ_ARM_Plan_FINAL.pdf](#)

In developing Phase 2 permit conditions, it became apparent that determining the level of risk posed by potting was challenging as a consequence of the level of uncertainty. Higher risk would necessitate management measures which were more impactful to fishing industry which would necessitate more certainty as to the potential risk to the site. In simple terms, development of management measures in lieu of a firm understanding of risk risked either being overly burdensome on fishing industry or potentially failing to protect the MCZ.

At the 61st Eastern IFCA meeting, members discussed a means of characterising risk via a piece of work which effectively scaled up damage caused by individual pots to the entire fishing fleet within the sensitive rugged chalk area within the MCZ with the intention that this could be used to determine the risk and therefore the most proportionate management measures. However, members were of the view that the assessment could not be relied on to determine risk or management measures because the data used to determine the amount of damage per pot was insufficient to draw firm conclusions. Members instead agreed that the rates of damage assessment should be developed further and that officers should develop an alternative means of identifying what 'phase 2 permit conditions' were proportionate.

Report

Rates of Damage Assessment

Since the 61st Eastern IFCA meeting, the assessment has been discussed with Natural England, the ARM Management and research Task and Finish Groups (T&FG), the ARM Evidence Sub-Group, the ARM project Board and with Authority members who attended the Fisheries and Conservation Management Working Group at a meeting held on 14 October 2025.

In summary, the approach adopted under the 'rates of damage assessment' is considered to potentially play an important role in delivering ARM within the MCZ. In order to facilitate its development, a number of workstreams have been created including:

- Natural England seeking internal expert advice on the use of the approach.
- The Research T&FG undertaking a gap analysis of evidence to inform the assessment and identification of other data sources and analysis to incorporate into the assessment.
- The evidence sub-group exploring using data collected by recreational divers.

A second iteration of the assessment is in development, which will also incorporate Natural England commentary on the original assessment as well as the feedback received from the various discussions referred to above including, for example, moving away from using the approach to calculate a precise 'number of years' until the conservation objectives would be hindered and instead using it to characterise risk more broadly.

Importantly, Natural England advised (during the aforementioned Management T&FG) that they will not advise specifically on the current level of risk and that the Authority should 'make a judgement based on the information available' in relation to what the most proportionate management measures are at this time.

Phase 2 permit conditions

In lieu of a means of characterising the level of risk to the MCZ, development of further permit conditions, or establishing whether or not further conditions are needed at this time, is challenging.

This was also discussed at the aforementioned meetings with the exception of the Research T&FG and the Evidence Sub-Group. During these meetings, a new approach to delivering management within the MCZ was identified and is set out in Appendix 1.

In summary, the Management T&FG proposed that the concept of developing 'Phase 2 permit conditions' at a particular point in time was flawed on the basis that management under ARM should be dynamic and responsive to developments in the understanding of risk. Importantly, the Natural Disturbance Study (which is seeking to ultimately identify if pot-based fishing damage is detectable in the context of natural disturbance) will provide initial outputs in the near future which will potentially influence the level of risk assigned to the MCZ and that risk is considered on a quarterly basis in any case¹⁰.

As such, defining a timescales for the introduction of additional management, or giving it the title of 'Phase 2' permit conditions, detracts from the dynamic and fleet of foot management approach embedded into ARM and achievable by the Cromer Shoal Chalk Beds Byelaw 2023 which is a flexible permit byelaw. The approach includes quarterly consideration of risk and at least annual review of the effectiveness of permit conditions as well as an acknowledgement that changes in risk could cause such a review at any time.

The draft Management Plan at Appendix 1 provides a framework and checks and balances to achieve the intended flexible approach. This draft management plan sets out the general principle that defined 'deadlines' for implementing management are not appropriate in the context of ARM and provides a clear framework for how management considerations will follow advancements in our understanding of risk as informed by research projects. It also acknowledges that, in the absence of research outputs, risk will increase over time and sets out clear timeframes for reviewing the appropriateness of management measures in this context.

The management plan is a live document, which is intended to be revised to align with revisions to the overall ARM plan and any advancements in our understanding of risk. In addition, whilst the management T&FG has agreed to the principles of ongoing and dynamic management as outlined above, work is ongoing to agree the wording and structure of the documents.

The Management Plan also identifies that better understanding fishing activity is a critical first step in developing management measures in the future, which could potentially include effort management. Unfortunately, national data collection measures, including the implementation of the 'Catch App' (for effort and catch

¹⁰ Risk to the MCZ is considered at each ARM Project Board Meeting and reported in the associated notes which can be found on the Authority's website here - [Cromer Shoal Chalk Beds MCZ Meeting Notes - Eastern IFCA](#)

recording for vessels under 10m) and Inshore Vessel Monitoring Systems have not yet delivered sufficient data to effectively inform ARM. As such, it is intended that further data collection driven by Eastern IFCA management measures will be explored including via dialogue with fishing industry over the winter.

Financial Implications

None identified

Legal Implications

There is an inherent risk of legal challenge in making decisions regarding management of fishing activity in the MCZ, which is a particularly contentious issue amongst stakeholders who are highly polarised in their views on the best course of action. However, this is mitigated in part by the level of dialogue on the matter with stakeholders, and agreement from the management T&FG in particular (which includes Natural England) that the approach set out in Appendix 1 is appropriate.

Conclusion

The Management Plan at Appendix 1 is recommended as the most appropriate approach to management given all the available information and the level of risk at this time and represents the most proportionate means of delivering ARM.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Draft ARM Management Plan

Background Documents

Papers and minutes for Action Item 13 of the 60th Eastern IFCA meeting held on 11 June 2025.

Papers and minutes for Action Item 8 of the 61st Eastern IFCA meeting held on 10 September 2025.

Cromer Shoal Chalk Beds MCZ Adaptive Risk Management Plan 2024

Appendix 1 – Draft ARM management Plan

Cromer Shoal Chalk Beds MCZ: Adaptive Risk Management Plan

This document is intended to set out the management plan for delivering Adaptive Risk Management (ARM) within the Cromer Shoal Chalk Beds Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ) in relation to pot-based fishing activity.

Context

The Authority has adopted an ARM approach to managing fishing activity within the MCZ as a means of meeting its duties under the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009.

ARM is described as ‘learning by doing’ and requires that management measures are implemented which are ‘adequately precautionary and proportionate to the risks identified’ to the site¹¹. The adoption of ARM reflects significant uncertainty around the extent to which potting activity is hindering the conservation objectives of the site. Whilst it is well established that potting damages the crucially important ‘rugged chalk’ within the MCZ, the uncertainty relates primarily to the scale and rate of damage caused by potting and at what point this would hinder the features ability to function as a structurally complex habitat that supports unique and diverse biological communities.

Management will be implemented through a flexible permit byelaw, the Cromer Shoal Chalk Beds Byelaw 2023. Flexible permit conditions can be introduced, varied or revoked by the Authority within a three or six-month timescale. This provides a fleet-of-foot process to deliver ARM which can respond quickly to new evidence and any changes to the level of risk.

Approach: Aim and Objectives

Management of potting activity within the site has the following aim:

To deliver fisheries management which is proportionate to the risk posed to the site’s conservation objectives by pot-based fishing and adequately precautionary in the context of significant uncertainty and continuous advancements in our understanding of the risk level.

To meet the management aim, the following objectives are set:

- Assessment of permit conditions on a regular basis to determine if they remain proportionate to the risk identified and adequately precautionary.
- Ongoing review of the risk of hindering the conservation objectives, including in relation to outputs from ARM research projects.
- Review of permit conditions in light of changes in risk.

¹¹ [Current-context-of-Adaptive-Risk-Management-review-V1.0.pdf](#)

Approach: Adequately precautionary and proportionate to the risk

Central to guiding the development of management measures in the context of ARM are the qualifiers 'adequately precautionary' and 'proportionate to the risk'.

Precaution is applied in situations where hindrance of the conservation objectives cannot be ruled out because of a lack of evidence. Typically, the 'precautionary principle' would require the cessation of the activity (or at least mitigation which would certainly prevent the impact) until such time as impacts can be ruled out.

Adopting an ARM approach acknowledges that hindrance to the conservation objectives cannot be ruled out due to a lack of evidence, but that there is also significant uncertainty regarding the evidence which indicates such is possible. In relation to potting in the MCZ, there are two key uncertainties, firstly the timeframes over which potting damage to rugged chalk would result in reduction of structural complexity to the extent that the rugged chalk's functionality is detrimentally impacted and secondly, the extent to which 'natural disturbance' causes impacts to the chalk.

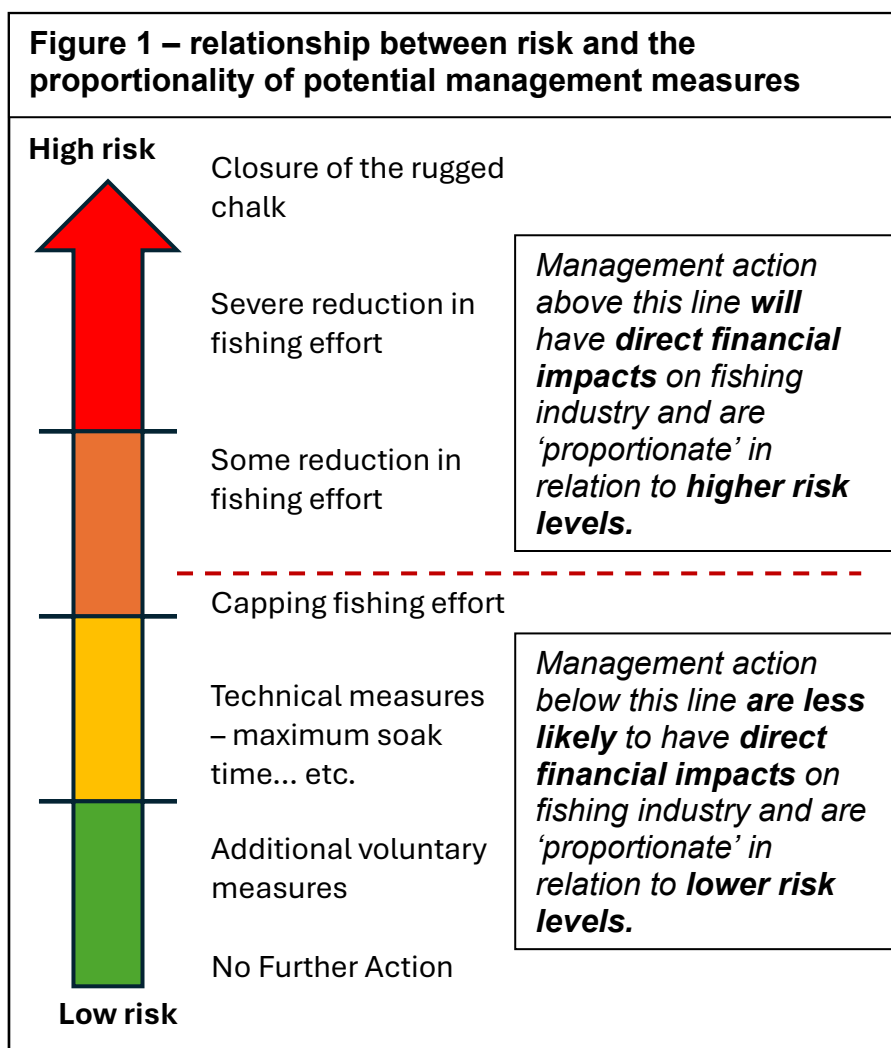
The current MCZ assessment assumes that, over time, cumulative damage of the chalk from potting would eventually lead to hindrance of the conservation objectives. This position is considered to be 'precautionary' on the basis that it excludes the potential that potting damage is undetectable in the context of natural disturbance. The extent to which this is the case will ultimately be determined by the Natural Disturbance Study (NDS), which is ongoing and will deliver initial data in the near future and is likely to further inform the risk posed by potting over time.

Prior to outputs from the NDS, on the assumption that potting will eventually lead to hindrance of the conservation objectives, the level of risk posed is essentially proportionate to the rate of damage and the length of time it occurs over. The MCZ assessment ruled out hindrance of the conservation objectives in the immediate term because potting impacts are small in scale and will accumulate over time which would potentially lead to hindrance of the conservation objectives in the future. Natural England's advice¹² states that they cannot agree with this conclusion, but there is a general consensus that, due to the high level of uncertainty about the rates of potting damage, risk cannot be accurately estimated and that risk to the conservation objectives is likely to be low currently but will increase over time. In reality, further information is required about the rates of damage to more specifically define risk beyond the current judgement.

¹² Natural England advice provided in January 2023 in relation to the Authority's assessment was "*Having considered the assessment prepared by Eastern IFCA, Natural England cannot currently agree with the conclusions made regarding the risk to peat and clay exposures and rugged chalk features resulting from potting activities within the MCZ. It is our opinion that further detail is required in Eastern IFCA's plan for Adaptive Risk Management (ARM) in order to suitably manage this risk.*" Further clarifying advice was received in this regard as follows: "*Whilst NE agrees that the threats to overall site Conservation Objectives are more likely to be of concern if pressures are exerted over the medium/longer term, we do advise that in the short term there should be a concerted effort to prevent or reduce pressures that we know are occurring now. This will act to reduce the cumulative effect of these pressures on the Conservation Objectives of the site. As such, we advise against the assumption that only long-term impacts should be considered and recommend that additional research and mitigation measures are planned expeditiously with this in mind....*"

As such, it is not possible to effectively determine the ‘proportionality’ of management measures to the risk in relation to longer term risk.

Figure 1 illustrates the range of management measures available under ARM, and it is arranged by level of impact to the fishing industry. Figure 1 also highlights the general level of risk which would ‘justify’ such management measures based on them being ‘proportionate’. The scale is intended only as a visual representation of the relationship.



Annual reviews of permit conditions, in addition to quarterly risk reviews and any *ad hoc* reviews of risk, triggered by advances in the ARM research programme, will ensure that management measures remain proportionate to risk including the general increase in risk as over time.

Two key research projects will provide insight into the level of risk posed by potting viz the Natural Disturbance Study and the development of the rates of damage assessment. Both research projects will provide outputs prior to their completion that can be used to inform the level of risk and reconsideration of the proportionality and justification for management measures to be introduced, varied or revoked.

The plan

The Cromer Shoal Chalk Bed Byelaw 2023 is a flexible permit byelaw, so used because it enables dynamic management of the fishery which is best suited to deliver ARM. Effective management in this context is difficult to plan, because it is dynamic and dependent on ongoing pieces of work. Ultimately, the plan is to establish a framework which is flexible enough to 'follow the evidence' as and when related projects deliver such.

The ARM plan¹³ sets out key milestones in relation to management (including annual review of permit conditions during Q3 of each year) and the planned outputs of relevant research projects. In addition, risk is reviewed on a quarterly basis and revisions to risk would also trigger a review of the permit conditions if required.

A summary of the relevant workstreams is set out below. It is important to note that this management plan is intended to be a live documents which will be updated to align with the ARM plan and as such, references to timescales and relevant research projects may change.

| Research Project | Anticipated outputs relevant to management | Anticipated timeframe |
|----------------------------|--|--|
| Natural Disturbance study | The study will provide evidence relating to the extent of damage caused by potting in the context of natural disturbance. The key output will be determining whether potting damage is detectable in the context of natural damage. This output will fundamentally inform risk posed by potting in the site. | The project is programmed to collect data until mid-2027 and provide final outputs thereafter. However, data analysis will be undertaken in the interim to compare annual changes in rugged chalk, providing information on the extent to which potting damage is detectable prior to the completion of the study. The first such output is anticipated in early 2026. |
| Mapping sensitive features | Whilst the research project has delivered a final output to inform spatial management, further <i>ad hoc</i> and potentially planned survey work may provide updates to rugged chalk extent which would potentially translate into revisions of the permit conditions. | n/a – the planned project has been completed and further work is not planned at this time |
| Mapping fishing activity | Having more accurate information on fishing activity, particularly pot numbers, deployment frequency and higher resolution spatial data, will inform the 'rates of damage' assessment to provide a more | n/a – the timeframes referred to in the ARM plan have not been achieved. National data collection (in particular the 'catch app' and Inshore VMS) have not |

¹³ [2024_CSCB_MCZ_ARM_Plan_FINAL.pdf](#)

| | | |
|--|---|--|
| | accurate picture of risk which may ultimately lead to revisions to permit conditions and effort management. In addition, monitoring will detect increases in fishing effort (e.g. sudden increase in vessels or pots) which may also give cause to review the permit conditions). | provided the anticipated data sets within the timeframes anticipated. Gathering this data is however a priority management area under this plan (<i>post</i>). |
| Trailing alternative fishing practices | Research to investigate the comparative impacts of standard versus experimental gear will provide insight into rates of damage and potentially identify solutions which reduce risk. Both of these outputs have implications on risk and may therefore trigger review of the permit conditions. | n/a – the research project has recently been paused pending identification of funding and review of the methodology. |
| Rates of Damage assessment | This project is not currently referred to in the 2024 publication of the ARM plan. The project intends to develop a means of determining the level of risk posed by potting using a 'footprint approach' (i.e. gauge how much damage is caused by potting and scale this up according to the size of the fishery and consider it in the context of the spatial extent of rugged chalk). | TBC – the Rates of Damage workstream is not currently listed within the ARM plan but is a priority research workstream. |

A summary of the actions which will ensure that management remains proportionate to the risk and adequately precautionary is set out below:

| Action | Description |
|--|---|
| 1. Permit conditions are reviewed at least annually (Q3 of each year) | As per the ARM plan, permit conditions will be reviewed at least annually. The working precautionary assumption is that damage from potting activity will hinder the conservation objectives of the MCZ given enough time. Annual assessments of the effectiveness of permit conditions will ensure that the increase in risk over time |
| 2. Risk is reviewed quarterly and changes in risk will trigger a review of permit conditions | Quarterly risk reviews are presented at Project Board meetings. Any change in risk would prompt a review of permit conditions to consider whether they are adequately precautionary and proportionate to the revised risk. |
| 3. Any changes to permit conditions | To determine if permit conditions are proportionate, any proposed revisions following a review would be |

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| will be the subject of a consultation and Impact Assessment | the subject of a consultation to gather information to inform an impact assessment. This will consider the economic and wider costs of the mitigation against the benefits to the MCZ. |
|---|--|

Governance

Whilst the ARM project board will consider risk on an a quarterly basis, and the projects Task and Finish Groups may provide information which informs updates on risk and the need for management, the decision to implement management ultimately lies with the Eastern Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority.

Decisions on management measures are subject to processes set out in the Cromer Shoal Chalk Beds Byelaw 2023 including a requirement for consultation and an impact assessment which reflect the duties placed upon the Authority as a public body and are in line with Defra guidance¹⁴.

Current Priorities

This section is subject to change dependent on risk reviews and permit condition assessments.

1. **Understanding fishing effort** – management measures which will provide more information on the level of fishing activity within the MCZ are a priority as this information will provide a more accurate risk assessment
2. **Effort management** – It is reported to us that the fishing industry within the MCZ hold the view that effort management is needed within the fishery more generally. Effectively managing effort within the fishery requires a greater understanding of fishing effort in the first instance.
3. **Natural Disturbance Study (NDS) and ‘rates of damage’ assessment** – these research projects are considered to be the highest priority with regards to informing risk management and both have / potentially have management implications including implementation of closed areas (to provide control sites for the NDS) and additional evidence gathering requirements (in relation to the ‘rates of damage’ assessment).

¹⁴ [IFCA byelaw guidance - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ifca-byelaw-guidance)

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



Action Item 14

62nd Eastern Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority Meeting

10 December 2025

Whelk Permit Byelaw 2019 Permit Conditions Review

Report by: Emily Parsons (MSO)

Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to update members on the review of permit conditions for the Whelk Permit Byelaw 2019 and to seek agreement on the addition of two permit conditions following the outcomes of a consultation with stakeholders.

Recommendations

It is recommended that members:

- **Note** the outcomes of the informal consultation on the two additional permit conditions
- **Agree** to adopt the permit condition which adds the requirement to separate whelk caught from inside and outside of the Eastern IFCA district and report catch separately on whelk return forms
- **Agree** to introduce the requirement for vessels to report positional data at three-minute intervals as a whelk permit conditions once the Cromer Shoal Chalk Beds Byelaw 2023 comes into effect.

Background

The Whelk Permit Byelaw 2016 requires that permit conditions are reviewed at least every four years. The most recent review was completed and presented at the 58th Eastern IFCA meeting and in summary, the review found that current permit conditions are contributing positively to the protection and sustainability of the whelk fishery. However, several areas of concern were identified, particularly regarding compliance and data accuracy, which may affect the reliability of stock assessments. The key findings included:

- **Stock monitoring using LPUE**
Whelk stock health in the Eastern IFCA district is assessed using Landings Per Unit Effort (LPUE), which measures the quantity of whelk caught per pot. A stable LPUE suggests sustainable harvesting, while a decline may indicate overfishing. The Wash whelk fishery remains an area of concern due to only marginal recovery in LPUE following a significant decline in 2021/22.
- **Compliance with pot limitations**
Non-compliance with pot limitations undermines LPUE accuracy. If fishers exceeded pot limits and fail to report the actual number of pots used, LPUE

may be overestimated, potentially masking declines in the fishery's productivity. Industry members have also raised this as a key concern.

- **Enforcement challenges**

The whelk fishery extends beyond the Eastern IFCA district, allowing fishing activity both within and outside the 6 nautical mile limit. This creates enforcement challenges, as fishers may attribute large catches to pots set outside the district, making it difficult to verify compliance with permit conditions.

Report

To address the risk associated with the sustainability of the whelk fishery, proposals for additional permit conditions have been developed to strengthen accountability, improve data accuracy and support the continued viability of the whelk stock for all stakeholders. The proposed permit conditions are as follows:

- 1) An increase to 3-minute 'pings' for VMS and VMS+**

A 'ping' rate of three minutes would allow individual shanks of pots to be identified through analysis of tracking data. This is intended to enhance compliance monitoring, including in relation to the pot limitation and fishing within / outside of the district and provide consistent high resolution fishing activity data to inform fishery management assessments and decisions.

- 2) Separation and reporting of whelk caught from inside and outside the Eastern IFCA district**

Requiring whelk caught from inside the district to be kept separate from catch from outside of the district, and the separate reporting of these catches on whelk return forms, would facilitate compliance activity relating to the pot limitation and enhance the accuracy of catch returns data used to inform fisheries management assessments.

Consultation

To gather the views of stakeholders on the proposed permit conditions, a consultation on the proposed permit conditions was held between the 9 October 2025 and 6 November 2025. There were 16 individual responses to the consultation which were gathered through a presentation on the proposed permit conditions that was given to the Fisheries and Conservation Management Working Group and a consultation questionnaire. Due to the low number of responses to the questionnaire, Eastern IFCA officers also engaged with stakeholders via phone calls in which answers to the questionnaire were documented. The full outcomes of this consultation can be found in Appendix 1.

Most stakeholders agreed with the proposed permit conditions or had no strong opinions about them. No significant impacts from the permit conditions were highlighted by stakeholders as a concern.

One stakeholder raised that Eastern IFCA should consider health and safety issues arising from the requirement to separate catch on board. Although not impacted by this issue themselves, they highlighted that for whelk fishers that use tonne bags, the additional bag(s) that would be required in order to keep whelk caught from inside and outside of the district separate may make it difficult to balance the weight on board a vessel. Officers considered this in their response to the informal consultation, and

concluded that, due to the many ways in which fishers store catch on board and the variety of containers used in storing catch it is unlikely that this permit condition will make a significant difference to where catch is stored on board a vessel.

One stakeholder was concerned that the requirement to separate whelk would cause issues with processors and had questions around how processors would deal with separated catch and whether this would impact price. Eastern IFCA engaged with one of the main processors for whelk in the district, who stated that, as the price of whelk is determined from the yield, they could see no impact on price from the separation of catch. They went on to say that they had no concerns regarding the proposed permit conditions and that they could not foresee any negative impacts on the industry.

De minimis assessment

A De Minimis Assessment (DMA) was also conducted to determine the proposed permit conditions impact on businesses. It concluded that the impact is likely to be negligible for the majority of businesses and a minimal impact on a single business. The assessment can be found in Appendix 2.

Implementation of the permit conditions

The full wording of the proposed permit conditions to be added can be found in Appendix 3.

The current Whelk Permit Byelaw 2016 specifies the categories under which flexible permit conditions may be attached. These categories are:

- a) minimum length.
- b) catch restrictions.
- c) fishing gear restrictions.
- d) fishing effort restrictions.
- e) spatial restrictions.
- f) time restrictions.

The first proposed permit condition “*3-minute ‘ping’ rate - All Category One permit holders must transmit their location at a rate of once every 3-minutes*” does not fall within any of the existing categories listed above and as such, cannot be introduced at this time. However, the forthcoming Cromer Shoal Chalk Beds Byelaw 2023 will amend the Whelk Permit Byelaw 2016 to allow this requirement to be included as a flexible permit condition.

The second proposed permit condition which adds the requirement for Category One permit holders to separate catch from inside and outside of the district and to report this separately on whelk returns forms, will be added as a flexible permit condition under category b, “catch restrictions”.

Financial Implications

None identified.

Legal Implications

There is an inherent risk associated with implementing restrictions. However, the risk of successful legal challenge is considered low and mitigated through the application

of best practice in undertaking consultation and an impact assessment in accordance with the provisions of the Whelk Permit Byelaw 2016.

Conclusion

The two additional permit conditions (appendix 3) are recommended as the most appropriate approach to management given all available information.

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Consultation outcomes

Appendix 2 -De-minimis assessment

Appendix 3 - Proposed permit conditions

Background Documents

Papers and minutes for Action Item 11 of the 58th Eastern IFCA Meeting held on 11 December 2024.

Appendix 1 – Consultation outcomes

Informal consultation on Whelk Permit Conditions review Outcome report



Overview:

Eastern IFCA undertook an informal consultation on the addition of two conditions to whelk permits. This document summaries the key outcomes of the informal consultation which ran from 9th October 2025 to 6th November 2025.

We asked:

The consultation sought the views of stakeholders on the following two permit conditions:

- 1) An increase to a 3-minute 'ping' rate for VMS
- 2) A requirement to separate and report the catch caught from inside and outside of the Eastern IFCA district.

You Said & Our Response:

Stakeholder responses to the consultation included written and verbal submissions. There were 16 individual responses to the consultation questionnaire. A presentation on the proposed permit conditions was given to the Fisheries and Conservation Management Working Group to gather stakeholder views. Officers also received responses through one-to-one engagement with stakeholders over the phone.

The table below provides an overview of the breadth of responses received on key questions asked. Location based or numbers-based information, including information that could be related back to individual responses, is not included in this table.

| You said | Our response |
|---|--|
| Fishery engagement | |
| General questions to gather on stakeholder engagement with the whelk fishery | |
| Stakeholder engagement with the whelk fishery ranges between 10% to 50% of fishing activity, but it was noted that this varies year to year depending on multiple factors such as the weather, productivity of the whelk in any | Since 2014, whelk fisheries have consistently constituted one of the top three most valuable fisheries in the Eastern IFCA district. |

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| particular season and the availability of other fisheries. | <p>The whelk fishery is managed through the Whelk Permit Byelaw 2016 which provides the main mitigation for risks associated with the fishery including the implementation of management measures to ensure a sustainable fishery.</p> <p>Eastern IFCA notes the whelk fisheries importance, especially for during times of the year when other fisheries are less active.</p> |
| Activity is higher in the winter, with the main activity noted as between anytime between January and June. | |
| Some stakeholders fish both inside and outside the district, whereas others will fish for whelk either inside or outside the district only. | |
| The whelk fishery has been noted as an important fishery when the other fisheries are less active. Other fisheries include cockles, crab, lobster, and cod. | |
| On proposed permit condition 1: An increase to a 3-minute ping rate for VMS | |
| Effectiveness of the proposed permit condition | |
| Agreement a 3-minute ping rate would be effective. | Noted. |
| Not sure that it would be effective. | Noted. |
| A 3-minute ping rate is not enough. Ping rate should be turned up to a higher resolution for better spatial resolution. | <p>The intention of a 3-minute ping rate for VMS is to improve the monitoring of the whelk fishery while discouraging non-compliance. A ping rate of 3-minutes for VMS was proposed based on these reasons:</p> <p>Fishing vessels under-12 metres are now required to have iVMS units, these have a ping rate of 3-minutes. This permit would bring vessels over 12 metres in-line with the national measures for vessels under 12 and would ensure consistency in monitoring and data analysis.</p> <p>3 minutes sufficient is deemed sufficient to provide spatial resolution for inshore fisheries management. Inshore Fisheries Conservation Officers are able to identify whelk potting activity from vessels with VMS or iVMS units with a ping rate of 3-minutes.</p> <p>A ping rate with less spatial resolution (above 3 minutes) would not provide sufficient resolution for inshore fisheries management. A ping rate with more spatial resolution (less than 3 minutes) it deemed unnecessary at this time and would not align with national measures.</p> |
| Agreement that a 2-hour ping rate is not enough but that a 3-minute ping rate is unnecessary. Ping rate should be more than 3 minutes but less than two hours. | |

| Would there be any impact from this permit condition? | |
|--|---|
| If compliant with existing permit conditions this condition will have no anticipated impacts. | Noted. |
| No anticipated impacts on business or fishing. | Noted. |
| This measure will have a financial impact and add to the already existing fees of VMS units. | The cost associated with an increased reporting rate is understood to be \$15 per month. This is not considered likely to pose a significant risk to business continuity. |
| Any costs generated from this permit condition should be funded by Eastern IFCA or at least subsidised. | Eastern IFCA does not compensate for any management necessary to retain the health of fisheries or the environment. |
| On proposed permit condition 2: A requirement to separate and report on the catch caught from outside the district | |
| Effectiveness of the proposed permit condition | |
| Agree that this permit condition would be effective. | Noted. |
| Not sure whether it would be effective. | Noted. |
| Possibly effective, however effectiveness relies on compliance with additional permit conditions. Believes that non-compliance is still a risk and that better monitoring is needed. | Eastern IFCA notes that non-compliance with permit conditions is a concern for stakeholders. The intention of the two proposed permit conditions is both to further discourage non-compliance and to make it easier and quicker for enforcement officers to identify non-compliance. |
| Does not think it will be effective. | Noted. |
| Financial impacts from this permit condition | |
| No financial impacts anticipated | Noted. |
| Possibly by impacting whether people chose to target whelk both inside and outside of the 6 nm district limit, or whether they choose to just stay inside or outside. | Consultation with industry indicated that the majority of whelk fishers do not fish outside of the district, and if they do, that they tend to fish either within or outside of the 6 nm district limit during one trip. However, Eastern IFCA acknowledges that this is a concern and intends to monitor the impacts of the permit conditions carefully. Furthermore, as required by the Whelk Permit Byelaw 2016, permit conditions are required to be reviewed every 4 years and so any impacts from this condition would be detected at that point. |

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| Possibly due to the increase in time and effort to sort catch, which could decrease the amount of time spent fishing. | Eastern IFCA is committed to ensuring that the method chosen for separating and reporting catch is easy to implement and does not represent a significant burden for permit holders. |
| Other impacts from this permit condition | |
| Reporting catch from inside and out the district limit would generate more paperwork and be an administrative burden, particularly combined with the other existing administration involved in fishing. | Eastern IFCA plans to incorporate the requirement to report catch separately into the pre-existing whelk return forms. As whelk returns are already required by Eastern IFCA for any whelk fishing, and information on landings is required by the MMO also requires information from whelk landings, the additional administrative work is expected to be minimal. |
| Do not foresee any issues from the requirement to have additional bags/boxes so that catch can be separated. | Noted. |
| Reporting catch from inside and out the 6 would be an administrative burden, particularly combined with the other existing administration involved in fishing. | Eastern IFCA notes that the amount of paperwork that industry members are required to fill out in order to fish is a concern. Eastern IFCA plans to incorporate the requirement to report catch separately into the pre-existing whelk return forms. As whelk returns are already required by Eastern IFCA for any whelk fishing, and the MMO also requires information from whelk landings, the additional administrative work is expected to be minimal. |
| Could pose a challenge to smaller vessels due to limited space. Separation of catch into bags/boxes could cause safety issues due to weight differences on the vessel and as well as manual handling concerns due to the increased number of bags/boxes. | Eastern IFCA would ensure that the implementation of this permit condition would not jeopardise safety aboard a vessel through careful consideration of the method chosen to separate catch. The general practice observed in the whelk fishery is to store catch on one side of a vessel, which shows that whelk catch does not appear to unbalance a vessel at sea. The techniques used to store whelk onboard during fishing varies, with some fishers using boxes or trays, while some use Raschel bags and some using tonne bags. The permit conditions will not have an impact on individual fishers preferred container for storing whelk, |

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| | <p>only that they would need to be marked to show catch from inside and outside of the 6 nm district limit and so should not influence how whelk is stored upon a vessel. The only scenario where this may happen is if a whelk fisher would normally only use a single container, such as a tonne bag, to store all whelk catch, they would now need to use two if planning to catch whelk from inside and outside of the district. This is not anticipated to cause weight issues on a vessel, as two bags can be shifted to balance weight onboard as much as a single bag can be.</p> <p>The permit condition is also not anticipated to markedly increase the number of bags/boxes required aboard a vessel, and so along with the correct manual handling technique, no impacts are anticipated.</p> |
| Estimating the weight of whelk catch is already difficult to do at sea, this would require an additional estimate. | Eastern IFCA acknowledges the difficulties of estimating the weight of catch at sea. However, as whelk is weighed by processors once landed it is not necessary for an estimation to be made for the whelk returns required by Eastern IFCA. Rather, the weight of the catch can be taken from the weight recorded by the processors. |
| Concerns about whether catch would then be mixed at the processors and whether this would impact fishers at all. | Eastern IFCA has contacted one of the main processors to query how they would process separated catch. They did not foresee any issues for themselves or whelk fishers. They explained that their prices are based on the whelk yield, and so it is not a concern if catch from inside and outside of the district limits is mixed or separated. |
| Other comments | |
| The permit conditions do not address larger whelks being placed on the top of the bag/ box. Thorough checks will be needed to be implemented with this management to mitigate non-compliance. | During inspection enforcement officers are required to take a random sample from bags and boxes rather than just sampling from the top. |
| Small whelk in the Wash should be left to contribute to the next years stock. | Following the previous whelk permit byelaw review, the Minimum Landing Size (MLS) of 55 mm was not noted as |

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| | an area of concern. The MLS appears to be appropriate for the majority of the fishery at this current time, however the report indicated that for areas towards the south of the Eastern IFCA District, 55 mm could be too high to enable a viable fishery. A study is ongoing to gather evidence to test whelk size at maturity in different areas in the district. |
| <p>Suggestions of ways to mark separated catch:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Different coloured bags/ boxes – Would be obvious and easy to check • Cable ties on bags/ boxes | Noted. Eastern IFCA appreciates suggestions on the best ways to implement this permit condition. |
| Is the whelk MLS increasing? If so, it would have a negative impact on the stock. | There are currently no plans to increase the MLS for whelk. The most recent whelk permit byelaw review indicated that the MLS appears to be appropriate for the majority of the fishery. The review indicated that this might be different for areas in the south of the district, however more evidence is needed to determine whether an increase in MLS for this area is appropriate. A study is ongoing to gather evidence to test whelk size at maturity in different areas in the district. |
| The whelk fishery should not open until after Christmas/ after the shrimp fishery has ended to reduce the impact on whelk. | Eastern IFCA's whelk stock assessment indicates that the majority of fishing activity for whelk occurs between January and June. Industry members indicated that whelk fishing is important during this time as other fisheries are not available to them. As stock assessments indicate that whelk stocks in the district are being fished at a sustainable level, and due to the importance of the whelk fishery to the industry, Eastern IFCA has no plans at this time to restrict whelk fishing to certain months of the year. |
| Why not use quotas as part of the management measures? | The most recent review indicates that the whelk fishery is currently being managed at sustainable levels, with pot limitations providing adequate effort limitation. |
| Concerns about whelk FMP impacts. | The Whelk Fisheries Management Plan (FMP) outlines a strategy for achieving sustainable management of whelk |

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| | <p>fisheries. The FMP's primary focus is on enhancing data collection, alongside the introduction of initial management measures that largely align with existing Eastern IFCA Whelk Management. Over the longer term, the FMP aims to explore more targeted interventions such as pot limits, catch restrictions, and gear design improvements, as the evidence base improves.</p> <p>Eastern IFCA recognises the importance of aligning management with these plans is essential to ensuring sustainable inshore fisheries and avoid separate and conflicting management, leading to confusion and conflicts and minimise impacts overall.</p> |
| Eastern IFCA officers should have training to analyze the data from VMS and iVMS. | Eastern IFCA officers are deemed sufficiently competent to use VMS data. |
| Are there plans to reconsider allowing the use processed crab as whelk bait? | Eastern IFCA is planning to propose the use of cooked offal as whelk bait in a separate byelaw. |

Responses Summary:

Importance of the whelk fishery

- Most respondents that engage with the whelk fishery stated that the fishery is important as an interim during the winter season while the other fisheries are less active
- All respondents that engage with the whelk fishery indicated that whelk fishing makes up a portion of their fishing, but that this varied between respondents from 10% – 60%.
- Most noted that they only fish either inside or outside of the 6 nm district limits for whelk, whereas some will target whelk from both areas.

Proposed permit condition – Increase to a 3-minute ping rate for VMS

- Most respondents supported an increase in ping rate to 3-minutes for VMS.
- Most agreed that the measure would be effective in tackling non-compliance issues.

Proposed permit condition – Requirement to separate and report catch

- Most broadly supported the measures for separating and reporting whelk caught from inside and outside of the Eastern IFCA district and noted that they did not foresee any issues arising from the measure.
- Some respondents were not sure whether the measure would be effective, citing non-compliance as an ongoing issue.

- Suggestions were made for the method used to separate and mark whelk catches from inside and outside of the district, including the use of coloured zip ties or different coloured bags.

Outcome:

As documented through our comments above, we reviewed all responses to the consultation. As the majority of respondents agreed with the proposed permit conditions, we will undertake the following:

Propose the implementation of the additional permit conditions as originally outlined to Category One permits, to increase the deterrence against non-compliant activity and aid in the collection of accurate data.

Appendix 2. De-Minimis assessment for the proposed whelk permit conditions

| De-Minimis Assessment | | |
|---|--|---|
| For Self-Certified Measures in Defra | | |
| Title of Measure | Whelk Permit Conditions Review | |
| Lead Department/Agency | Eastern Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority | |
| Expected Date of Implementation | 10/12/2025 | |
| Date of Assessment | 14/11/2025 | |
| Lead Departmental Contact | Luke Godwin | |
| Type of Measure (primary/secondary etc) | Permit Conditions | |
| | | |
| Cost of Preferred Option | | |
| Total Net Present Social Value Unknown | Business Net Present Value Unknown | Equivalent Annual Net Direct Cost to Business (EANDCB) £168 |
| Policy overview, rationale for intervention and intended effects | | |
| <p>Summary:</p> <p>The addition of permit conditions relating to separation of catch and provision of spatial information to permits associated with the whelk permit byelaw, with the intent for these conditions to remain in place unless new evidence shows that changes are needed.</p> <p>Problem:</p> <p>Non-compliance with current whelk permit conditions were identified as an issue by the most recent permit review. Specifically, non-compliance with pot limitations for commercial fishers, which is set at 500 pots, may be undermining the accuracy of data used to monitor the health and sustainability of the whelk fishery. The health of the whelk stock is currently assessed using Landings Per Unit Effort (LPUE), which measures the quantity of whelk caught per pot. A stable LPUE suggests sustainable harvesting, while a decline may indicate overfishing. If fishers that exceed pot limitations do not report the actual number of pots used, LPUE may be overestimated and potentially mask declines in the fishery's productivity. Furthermore, as the whelk fishery extends beyond the Eastern IFCA district limit of 6 nautical miles, which can create enforcement challenges, as fishers may attribute large catches to pots set outside the district, making it difficult to verify effort and catch levels within the managed fishery, as well as compliance with permit conditions. As a result, there is a risk that declining stock health may not be detected due to Landings per Unit Effort figures being obscured by pot limitation non-compliance or the misreporting of catch.</p> <p>Need for intervention:</p> | | |

Market Failure Correction – Externalities.

Non-compliance and limitation in the confidence of stock monitoring increases the risk of overfishing. Non-compliance is rewarded by the market as smaller whelk may be landed under the guise of being caught outside the district, and detection of non-compliance is complicated by lack of data and the ability to mix catch. Additionally, the whelk fishery is a shared and valuable resource and is vulnerable to the risks associated with a “tragedy of the commons” scenario, as such there is no market imperative preventing this behaviour. To safeguard the sustainability of the whelk fishery it has been deemed necessary to consider the introduction of additional permit conditions with the aim of strengthening accountability, improving data accuracy and supporting the continued viability of the whelk stock for all stakeholders.

Regulatory Landscape:

The fishery is managed through a set of permit conditions under the Whelk Permit Byelaw 2019. It is a responsibility of the Whelk Permit Byelaw 2019 that the permit conditions are reviewed every four years¹⁵. Subject to review and consultation the permit conditions can be altered following new information, evidence from fishermen, scientific stock assessments and conservation advice. Eastern IFCA reflect upon best practice approaches to fisheries management in accordance with a formal operational procedure which was agreed by the Authority.

Proposed Policy:

Permit conditions to be added such that;

- vessels carrying a VMS unit must report at least at a 3-minute ping rate so that enforcement officers can identify when additional gear is being used and identify when fishing has taken place inside and outside of the Eastern IFCA district, and;
- vessels must separate whelk caught from outside the Eastern IFCA district from whelk caught from inside the Eastern IFCA district. Catch from inside and outside of the district must be reported separately on whelk returns forms.

Policy Options (including alternatives to regulation)

Option 0: Do Nothing

Maintaining the permit conditions as they currently are could potentially save the vessels currently operating in the whelk fishery a small amount of money. The separation of whelk caught from inside and outside of the district is not anticipated to have any associated extra costs, and the cost of VMS ping rate increases is estimated at £14 a month. However, this would limit the ability of Eastern IFCA to ensure the sustainability of the whelk fishery, by limiting the capacity for detection of non-compliance as well as limiting the confidence in the data used in monitoring. Further, other EIFCA fisheries are now requiring VMS ping rate increases, so it is unlikely and unrealistic that many vessels would save money.

¹⁵ [2016_11_03_Whelk_Permit_Byelaw_2016_Final.pdf](#)

Option 1: Voluntary measures.

Given that the risk of overfishing arises from non-compliance of existing permit conditions, and enforcement challenges persist despite the threat of fines and legal action, voluntary measures alone are considered to be insufficient in deterring non-compliant behaviour. Furthermore, these measures are intended to be built upon existing conditions which are already regulatory and given the existing non-compliance voluntary measures would seem contradictory to the problem. As above market failures mean that self-regulation is not an acceptable alternative and unlikely to be effective if participation remains optional. So, in this case, it was determined that without intervention from Eastern IFCA, the risk of overfishing could not be adequately mitigated.

Option 2: Attach conditions as above to fishery permits

Given the existing regulation around the fishery and the mandatory four-yearly review of permit conditions, it is both efficient and effective to introduce additional conditions to existing permits with minimal administrative burden. The proposed condition to increase VMS ping rate aligns with established regulatory standards for i-VMS systems, ensuring consistency and regulatory coherence.

Given the likely unsatisfactory outcomes provided by options 0 and 1, the implementation of option 2 is considered the best course of action. This approach offers the most robust mechanism for deterring and detecting non-compliance, while simultaneously enhancing the quality of the data used for monitoring the whelk fishery. Option 2 provides a high likelihood of identifying and evidencing any violations of the Whelk Permit Byelaw 2016, without increasing the day-to-day enforcement workload.

Therefore, option 2 is considered the most effective solution to address the identified problems.

Assessment of Impacts on Business

The whelk fishery in the Eastern IFCA district is a small-scale fishery that serves a primarily international market. Stock levels (based on Landings Per Unit Effort) have fluctuated since monitoring began but remained at levels considered sustainable and continue to remain at levels considered enough to sustain the fishery at its current level. The number of individuals in the whelk fishing industry remained stable, with a slight decrease in recent years. Of these, most individuals use boats that are under 12 m in length and so are required to have i-VMS, which pings at a rate of 3-minutes, leaving only a single vessel requiring changes to their VMS units.

Consultation with the industry found that the separation of catch from inside and outside the district is unlikely to have any significant financial costs attached. One industry member indicated that there is the potential for a loss of revenue if fishers are dissuaded from fishing inside and outside of the district due to the need to sort catch separately. This impact, however, is not possible to quantify and likely to be negligible as indicated by the consultation.

As such, the real impact on business is limited to a small number of individuals, and while the increase in ping rate may constitute an additional financial cost for the industry members that require it, the amount in monetary terms is very low.

The best estimate of EANDCB is £168, based on the requirement for one business to increase VMS pings to 3-minutes. The EANDCB has been calculated based on the cost of increasing the VMS ping rate, which is estimated to be approximately £14 a month (based on the price in 2023).

The value of the whelk fishery within the Eastern IFCA district was assessed to be £1,82,742.76 in 2024.

The impact of the permit conditions are estimated to be minimal within the context of one business and negligible in the context of the sector (East Anglia whelk fishers) in the Eastern IFCA district. It is not considered of national significance in comparison to the environmental risks tackled by the permit conditions.

Altogether, the impact of the permit conditions are not significant within the context of one business and not considered of national significance in comparison to the environmental risks tackled by the policy.

Wider Impacts (Including Assessment of Impact on SMBs and Households)

The proposed permit conditions will have minimal wider impact as it only impacts one businesses within a small section (whelk fishers) of a small sector (East Anglian fishers).

There is a risk, as with all regulations and restrictions within fisheries, that these permit conditions will; displace effort, potentially taking other fisheries or the whelk fishery within the 6 nm limit beyond sustainable levels causing business failures within the fishing industry. These risks however cannot be accurately quantified.

Assessment of Impact on Trade and Investment (Including Internal Market Assessment)

International sales make up a large portion of whelk sales, but due to the negligible impacts on the industry the proposed permit conditions are not expected to impact trade or investment.

Assessment of Environmental Impacts

This policy will protect biodiversity by tackling non-compliance and enhancing the monitoring of the whelk fishery in the Eastern IFCA district.

There is a risk, as with all regulations and restrictions within fisheries, that these permit conditions will displace effort due to industry increasing effort either side of the 6nm district boundary to attempt to avoid situations where bags or boxes are left only half-filled, potentially taking other fisheries or the whelk fishery within the 6 nm limit beyond sustainable levels.

Rationale for producing a DMA (as opposed to an OA/IA)

The impact from this policy is well below £10m EANDCB, is limited to permit conditions, and does not contain contentious or novel elements.

| | | |
|--|--|---------------------------------------|
| Will the policy be reviewed (yes/no): Yes | | Review date if applicable: N/A |
| Review Provision Detail and Monitoring and Evaluation Plans. The Authority must review flexible permit conditions and restriction of the issuing of whelk permits no less frequently than every four years after the date that a flexible permit conditions or restriction on the issuing of whelk permits has taken effect. | | |
| Emily Parsons Ellie Collishaw | Marine Science Officer Policy & Project Officer | 14/11/2025 |
| Internal Directorate Clearance | | |
| Policy sign off | | |
| Senior Analyst sign off | | |
| Central Sign Off | | |
| Better Regulation Unit (Policy) Sign off | | |
| Office of the Chief Economist (Central Appraisal Team) Sign off | | |

Appendix 3. Proposed permit conditions

Below is the full wording of the proposed whelk permit conditions to be added:

Vessel Monitoring Devices

7. Vessels with an overall length of less than 12m must at all times whilst at sea:
 - a. Have either a Nemo or SC2 I-VMS MMO type-approved I-VMS device installed onboard and operating;
 - b. Have the I-VMS unit switched on and transmitting data to the device supplier hub for onward transmission to the UK VMS Hub at least once in every 3 minutes; and
 - c. Ensure that the device has not been manually overridden, has not been tampered with or damaged and is not obstructed or interfered with so as to compromise or prevent the effective transmission of data to the UK VMS Hub.
8. Subject to condition 9, vessels with an overall length of 12m or more must at all times whilst at sea:
 - a. Have installed and operating onboard a VMS or VMS+ unit;
 - b. Have the VMS or VMS+ unit switched on and transmitting data to the device supplier hub for onward transmission to the UK VMS Hub at least once in every 3 minutes; and
 - c. Ensure that the device has not been manually overridden, has not been tampered with or damaged and is not obstructed or interfered with so as to compromise or prevent the effective transmission of data to the UK VMS Hub.
9. Where a vessel to which condition 8 applies is not able to meet condition 8(b), condition 8 shall not apply if:
 - a. the vessel has onboard and operating, a tracker provided by the Authority; and
 - b. the permit holder or nominated deputy remunerate the Authority for the associated subscription cost.
- 10.. Separation and Reporting of Catch – All Category One permit holders must separate whelk caught within the Eastern IFCA district from whelk caught outside the district upon removal from the sea. Such catches must be stored in separate, clearly identifiable containers on board the vessel at all times. The quantities of whelk taken from inside and outside the Eastern IFCA district must be recorded and reported separately on the whelk catch return forms submitted to the Authority.

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



Action Item 15

62nd Eastern Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority Meeting

10 December 2025

Shrimp Permit Byelaw 2018 permit conditions review

Report by: James Teasdale (Policy and Project Officer)

Purpose of Report

To advise members of the outcomes of the Shrimp Permit Condition review, and to seek approval for proposed changes regarding VMS reporting rate requirements.

Recommendations

It is recommended that members:

- **Note** the content of the paper.
- **Agree** to maintain existing permit conditions.
- **Agree** to implement a new permit condition for Category 1 permits to require positional information at a minimum rate of one 'ping' every three 3 minutes.
- **Direct** officers to explore options to alter the experience requirements associated with Category 1 permits .

Background

The Shrimp Permit Byelaw 2018 exists to manage the interactions between the beam-trawls used in the district's shrimp fishery and the seabed, particularly that of the Wash and North Norfolk Coast SAC. Permits are split into two categories: Category 1 for shrimping within the Wash and North Norfolk Coast SAC, and Category 2 for the rest of the district. These permits have Permit Conditions attached to them that regulate activity and equipment. Under the Byelaw, the Authority is required to undertake a review of these Permit Conditions every four years, with 2025 being a review year.

Report

In addition to the review of the existing Permit Conditions (see Appendix 1), which concludes that they should remain in place, the need for improved positional information regarding the Wash fleet has been identified. Smaller vessels are equipped with inshore Vessel Monitoring System (iVMS) units that provide positional information every three minutes, while larger vessels are equipped with Vessel Monitoring System plus (VMS+) units that by default only 'ping' every two hours. As many of the closed areas in the district are small enough to easily be crossed or circumnavigated in two hours, this poses a distinct risk that without an increase in VMS+ 'ping' rates, vessels could fish within closed areas with a very low chance of detection.

Engagement with industry has also identified an issue associated with the ‘experience requirement’ attached to Category 1 permits, in that the requirement appears to have restricted the available pool of skippers able to take vessels out, resulting in vessels sitting idle during productive fisheries. This is not an intended effect of the policy.

As such, while the full suite of permit conditions were put forward for consultation with industry, opinions were also sought on requiring an increase in VMS+ ‘ping’ rate, and the removal or reduction of the experience requirement.

Consultation

The consultation was launched on 9 October and ran to 6 November. Three responses were received from fishers’ associations, and 3 from individuals, together representing approximately 75% of the fleet, as well as an additional respondent who does not currently participate in the fishery.

The majority of respondents only engaged with the two proposed changes, with only two respondents giving any feedback regarding the existing permit conditions, both of whom provided favourable responses. All other feedback related to the reporting rate and experience requirement proposals.

Responses were evenly mixed regarding the VMS+ ‘ping’ rate, with objections raised primarily regarding the additional cost associated with the increase. While it is understood that financial pressures are a serious concern for the industry, the annual costs for a vessel are not expected to be significant in the context of business expenses. Further, no vessels were identified during the consultation that would incur this cost solely in the context of the shrimp fishery, as the requirement is already in place for the cockle and mussel fisheries, and is anticipated to also be required for the whelk fishery. Other responses indicated an understanding of the need for positional information, though one positive response did also query the need for 3-minute ‘pings’, and whether less frequent ‘pings’ would be adequate. However, due to the very small nature of the closed areas in the district, a high ‘ping’ rate is required to ensure that any incursions into closed areas can be identified.

Regarding the experience requirement, the majority of respondents, representing over half the fishery, expressed concerns that removing the multiple-year experience requirement would result in an influx of vessels from outside of the district, which could then severely deplete the Total Allowable Effort for that year, and have knock-on effects in terms of diminished trip availability for following years. Two respondents strongly supported a reduction in the requirement. Within the fishery, it was indicated that multiple vessels were sitting idle because the requirement was preventing vessel operators from finding skippers to take the vessels out, with potentially significant financial implications in terms of lost earnings.

Beyond the fishery, the restriction is seen as a barrier to access that prevents vessels from diversifying, particularly smaller scale vessels from just beyond the Wash. A third respondent also expressed a degree of support for the reduction despite their concerns regarding a potential influx of vessels, despite no access restrictions being in place, the likelihood of such was minimal and could be addressed if it did happen under a flexible permit byelaw in the event that it did occur. It is also noteworthy that

the experience requirement was implemented to ensure that those operating within The Wash, which is a highly sensitive Marine Protected Area, were experienced and less likely to inadvertently breach management measures designed to protect the site or damage the seabed through poor fishing practices. However, it was also acknowledged that the wider effect would be to prevent an influx of new vessels into the fishery.

Consultation also identified that some industry members within the district may not have been aware of the nature of the experience requirement, in particular that any commercial fishing within the Wash and North Norfolk Coast SAC qualifies for fulfilling the experience requirement. As such, there may be a number of vessels interested in joining the fishery that already qualify for access, with one such industry member already contacting Eastern IFCA to indicate their intention to join the fishery.

The full consultation outcome document can be found at Appendix 2.

Review of permit conditions

The current permit conditions include gear restrictions and effort limitation provisions which are required to mitigate the impacts of shrimp fishing within the Wash and North Norfolk Coast SAC in accordance with the associated Habitat Regulation Assessment¹⁶. The need for these measures has not diminished during the review period and remain necessary to ensure that the shrimp fishery does not detrimentally impact site integrity of Wash MPAs.

The limited responses relating to the existing permit (except in relation to the 'experience requirement') were supportive of their effectiveness and necessity and given that they are still required to mitigate the environmental impact of the fishery no revisions to these permit conditions are being proposed.

The need for greater resolution of positional data was identified prior to the consultation (*ante*) and the views of stakeholders appears to be generally supportive of the measure. Overall, there appears to be a case to introduce a permit condition to increase the 'ping' rate of VMS units to enable effective monitoring of the discrete closed areas in place throughout the district for the protection of sensitive MPA features (primarily *Sabellaria* reef).

Feedback from stakeholders prior to and during the consultation has identified that the experience requirement is potentially in need of revision but that there are strongly polarised views on the matter within industry. It also appears to be relatively complicated, with the potential for unintended consequences arising from a revision to the requirement and indeed from maintaining the provision as it is. As such, it is considered appropriate that the experience requirement is the subject of further consideration including through further dialogue with fishing industry.

¹⁶ The full Habitat Regulation Assessment is available from the Authority's website - [Habitats Regulations Assessment of impacts of shrimp fishery on Wash & North Norfolk Coast Special Area of Conservation - Eastern IFCA](#)

Impact Assessment

An impact assessment has been undertaken (Appendix 3 refers) in relation to the increase in 'ping' rate for vessels operating VMS+ units. As the impact is anticipated to be well below £10m annually, a De Minimis Assessment was undertaken.

While no specific vessels were identified, there may be vessels that do not currently participate in other fisheries that already require an increased ping rate and would therefore be directly impacted by the requirement to increase VMS+ ping rate specifically for the shrimp fishery. However, this impact is not considered to be sufficiently significant to overcome the need for improved positional information. The costs in 2023 were calculated at £14 a month per vessel. Even allowing for price increases, the total annual costs for the entire fleet is in the low thousands annually. While the impact is greater on businesses with multiple vessels, the cost as a function of each vessel's revenue remains very low.

The impact of reducing or removing the experience requirement for entry into the fishery is potentially significant but difficult to quantify. The impact of making no changes is the risk of the continued inactivity of viable fishing vessels and the total loss of income from those vessels due to the available skippers being ineligible to take these vessels out under the experience requirement.

As regards making changes, the main concern is that lowering the requirements to enter the fishery could rapidly increase the number of vessels, leading to the enlarged fleet using up the trip allowances under the shrimp effort limitation scheme¹⁷, thereby impacting catch opportunity amongst the existing fleet. To assess this, models were developed using historical data and recent trends, projecting the effect of additional vessels over five years. The potential impacts were shown to be significant but showed exceptionally wide levels of variation depending on what the fleet's effort levels were predicted to be. For example, at the effort levels shown over the last two years, adding three additional vessels could cost the fleet over £70,000 annually in terms of gross revenue, with more vessels yielding a proportionately greater impact. Conversely, taking a longer-term view that also includes recent lower effort years, the fishery could potentially absorb a dozen new vessels without immediate impact.

However, the risk is highly variable and depends on future effort levels and vessel behaviour. If activity remains high, each new vessel could reduce fleet income, disproportionately affecting vessels most reliant on the fishery. Conversely, if effort stays low, the short-term risk is minimal. Given these uncertainties and the potential for sudden spikes in effort, lowering entry barriers poses a risk to business continuity, warranting further investigation and consideration.

Conclusion

The review process has reaffirmed, with the exception of the experience requirement, the effectiveness of the existing permit conditions. Stakeholder feedback indicates that these measures remain effective, and therefore no changes are proposed in this regard. Similarly, the need for improved positional data is clear, and while concerns about cost were raised, the financial impact of increasing VMS+

¹⁷ [2023_07_03_Shrimp_permit_scheme_policies_Final.pdf](#)

ping rates is minimal compared to the benefits of ensuring compliance with closed areas. Accordingly, introducing a permit condition (Appendix 4) to increase ping frequency is considered justified.

The experience requirement, however, presents a more complex challenge. While originally intended to safeguard sensitive habitats and prevent poor fishing practices, it has also functioned as a barrier to entry, with unintended consequences such as idle vessels and lost earnings. Consultation revealed strongly divided views within the industry, and analysis shows that the potential impacts of revising the requirement are highly variable and difficult to predict. Although historical data suggests that sudden influxes of vessels are unlikely, modelling indicates that under higher effort levels, even small increases in fleet size could significantly affect revenue distribution and business continuity. Conversely, maintaining the requirement as it stands risks significant ongoing obstacles to elements of industry.

Given these uncertainties and the potential for both positive and negative outcomes, immediate changes to the experience requirement would be premature. The most appropriate course of action is considered to be to undertake a detailed review of this provision, including further dialogue with stakeholders, and consideration of mitigation measures to manage any future risks. This approach will ensure that any revisions strike a balance between enabling operational flexibility and safeguarding the sustainability of the fishery and its associated marine environment.

Financial Implications

The financial implications for the Authority from this approach are minor. It is possible, should there be issues with VMS systems, that Eastern IFCA will need to provide trackers to industry. While industry would cover the subscription costs in such a case, the cost of the trackers themselves may be carried by the Authority in the short term should the number required exceed those the Authority already possesses

Legal Implications

No legal implications identified.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – Shrimp Permit Conditions
- Appendix 2 - Consultation Outcomes
- Appendix 3 - De Minimis Impact Assessment
- Appendix 4 - Proposed additional Permit Condition

Background Documents

Shrimp Permit Byelaw 2018

Appendix 1 – Shrimp Permit Conditions



Eastern Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority

Shrimp Permit Byelaw 2018

Flexible Permit Conditions – Category One Permit

These flexible permit conditions relate to Category One shrimp permits issued under the Shrimp Permit Byelaw 2018 and should be read in conjunction with that byelaw.

Interpretations

1. In these flexible permit conditions:
 - a) “try-net” means a trawl deployed by hand from a vessel used to determine the presence or absence of shrimps.

Permit conditions

Try-net

2. A vessel must not carry or deploy more than one try-net.
3. A try-net must:
 - a) be deployed and hauled only by hand;
 - b) have a beam width of no more than 500 millimetres;
 - c) be no more than 20 kilograms in weight; and
 - d) not have tickler chains or any other attachment designed to, or with the effect of, penetrating the seabed except guides, skids or a shoe.

Prohibited attachments

4. A vessel must not carry or deploy a net, the mesh of which measures between 16 and 31 millimetres which has:
 - a) tickler chains;
 - b) any item designed to, or with the effect of, penetrating the seabed except guides, skids or shoes;
 - c) guides, skids or shoes unless the surface of such which comes into contact with the seabed is flat across its entire length.

Separator trawl or sorting grid requirement

5. A vessel carrying fishing gear with an aggregate beam width or a net headline length of eight metres or less must not carry or deploy a net, the mesh of which measures between 16 and 31 millimetres unless:
 - a) netting, the mesh of which measures at least twice that of the codend and no more than 70 millimetres, is fitted across the entire cross-section of the net in such a way that:
 - i. sea fish cannot reach the codend without first passing through the netting; and
 - ii. there is a hole in the net through which all sea fish that do not pass through the netting are able to escape; or
 - b) a rigid grid, the spacing between the bars of which is no more than 20 millimetres, is fitted across the entire cross-section of the net in such a way that:
 - i. sea fish cannot reach the codend without first passing through the grid; and
 - ii. there is a hole in the net through which all sea fish that do not pass through the grid are able to escape.
6. Paragraph 5 does not apply to a trawl net.

Requirement to complete returns

7. A Permit holder must submit, or cause to be submitted, to the Authority, shrimp return forms relating to the previous weeks fishing no later than the Wednesday of each week.
8. Where shrimp return forms are more than twenty one days in arrears, the Authority must notify all persons named on the associated Shrimp Permit in writing.
9. Seven days after notification under paragraph 8, the persons so notified must not fish for shrimp unless and until such time as:
 - a) the Authority has received all of the notified shrimp return forms referred to in the notification; and
 - b) the Authority has issued confirmation that such has been received.

Fishing effort restrictions

10. The Authority may restrict the maximum number of trips which can be undertaken under the authority of a Shrimp Permit in accordance with the Shrimp Permit Scheme Policy and when doing so must:

- a) notify all persons named on extant Shrimp Permits in writing; and
- b) provide at least two weeks' notice of the restriction coming into effect.

11. Fishing effort restrictions will have effect until the 1st August following notification or less time as may be specified in such notification.

12. Where notification is provided under paragraph 10, a person fishing for shrimps under the authority of this permit must not undertake more than the maximum number of shrimp fishing trips.

Registration of fishing gear

13. A person must not fish for shrimps under the authority of this permit using fishing gear unless:

- a) a 'certificate of gear approval' has been issued by Eastern IFCA for that shrimp fishing gear;
- b) the 'certificate of gear approval' is valid; and
- c) a tag provided by Eastern IFCA is affixed to the gear with a reference number which is associated with the 'certificate of gear approval'.

14. For the purpose of this permit condition, a 'certificate of gear approval';

- a) will only be issued if the shrimp fishing gear has been inspected by an Eastern IFCA Officer and meets the requirements of the conditions of this permit and the Shrimp Permit Byelaw 2018;
- b) will be invalid if the shrimp fishing gear is modified in any way after the 'certificate of gear approval' has been issued;
- c) will be valid for the period the associated permit is valid.



Eastern Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority

Shrimp Permit Byelaw 2018

Flexible Permit Conditions – Category Two Permit

These flexible permit conditions relate to Category Two shrimp permits issued under the Shrimp Permit Byelaw 2018 and should be read in conjunction with that byelaw.

Interpretations

15. In these flexible permit conditions:

- a) “try-net” means a trawl deployed by hand from a vessel used to determine the presence or absence of shrimps.

Permit conditions

Try-net

16. A vessel must not carry or deploy more than one try-net.

17. A try-net must:

- e) be deployed and hauled only by hand;
- f) have a beam width of no more than 500 millimetres;
- g) be no more than 20 kilograms in weight; and
- h) not have tickler chains or any other attachment designed to, or with the effect of, penetrating the seabed except guides, skids or a shoe.

Prohibited attachments

18. A vessel must not carry or deploy a net, the mesh of which measures between 16 and 31 millimetres which has:

- d) tickler chains;
- e) any item designed to, or with the effect of penetrating the seabed except guides, skids or shoes;
- f) guides, skids or shoes unless the surface of such which comes into contact with the seabed is flat across its entire length.

Separator trawl or sorting grid requirement

19. A vessel carrying fishing gear with an aggregate beam width or a net headline length of eight metres or less must not carry or deploy a net, the mesh of which measures between 16 and 31 millimetres unless:

- c) netting, the mesh of which measures at least twice that of the codend and no more than 70 millimetres, is fitted across the entire cross-section of the net in such a way that:
 - i. sea fish cannot reach the codend without first passing through the netting; and
 - ii. there is a hole in the net through which all sea fish that do not pass through the netting are able to escape; or
- d) a rigid grid, the spacing between the bars of which is no more than 20 millimetres, is fitted across the entire cross-section of the net in such a way that:
 - i. sea fish cannot reach the codend without first passing through the grid; and
 - ii. there is a hole in the net through which all sea fish that do not pass through the grid are able to escape.

20. Paragraph 5 does not apply to a trawl net.



Eastern Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority

Shrimp Permit Byelaw 2018

Eligibility Criteria – Category One Permit

These Eligibility criteria relate to Category One shrimp permits issued under the Shrimp Permit Byelaw 2018 and should be read in conjunction with that byelaw.

Interpretations

1. In these Eligibility Criteria:
 - a. The “Wash Fishery Order 1992” means the Wash Fishery Order 1992¹⁸;
 - b. “pre-qualified list” means the register held by the Authority of persons who meet experience requirements to fish under the authority of a Wash Fishery Order 1992 Licence

Eligibility Criteria

1. A person is not eligible to fish under the authority of a Shrimp Permit unless they fulfil the experience requirement.
2. The experience requirement is that a person has demonstrated to the satisfaction of the Authority they have fished for at least 16 days within a year for three separate years within the Wash and North Norfolk Coast SAC.
3. When deciding what evidence is considered satisfactory, the Authority will consider a number of sources of evidence and the apparent credibility of the sources.
4. Potential sources of information include, but are not limited to, the following:
 - a. Testimony of a vessel owner or master;
 - b. Salary or other financial arrangement information;
 - c. Testimony of an Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Officer;
 - d. Landings declarations or catch return forms.
5. A person is considered to have met the experience requirement if that person is named on the Wash Fishery order 1992 ‘pre-qualified list’.

¹⁸ Wash Fishery Order 1992 (SI 1992/3038)

Shrimp Permit Byelaw 2018 Review

Formal Consultation: Outcome



This document presents the outcome to the formal consultation on the existing and proposed additional permit conditions under the Shrimp Permit Byelaw 2018. Shrimp permit conditions require review at least every four years. This consultation which ran from the 9 October to 6 November 2025 and forms part of the review process.

We asked:

We asked our stakeholders for views on both the effectiveness of existing permit conditions and opportunities for improvement. This included two proposed changes to the permit conditions:

1) An increase to a 3-minute ping rate for VMS.

This will bring all positional reporting in line with IVMS and provide fishing activity information for the most effective fisheries management.

2) Removing or altering the experience requirements on Category 1 Shrimp Permits (usable within the Wash and North Norfolk Coast).

Industry members have informed us that this requirement is making it very difficult to find skippers, and as a result vessels are sometimes not able to go to sea. Alterations could, for example, include replacing the experience requirement with a training session to ensure skippers are aware of the permit conditions, closed areas, and how to ensure the fishery doesn't adversely affect the habitats of the Wash and North Norfolk Coast.

You said and our response:

We received responses to the consultation from 6 stakeholders. Three of these responses were made at the association level, and three were submitted by individuals. Collectively, the responses covered approximately three quarters of the vessels engaged with the fishery over the last three years. The following is a summary of the key issues raised and our response.

Only two stakeholders provided comments to the existing permit conditions (try-net condition, prohibited attachments, separator trawl or sorting grid, requirement to complete returns, effort restrictions, and registration of fishing gear). Both said the conditions are 'effective'.

All 6 responses primarily focused on the two proposed changes to the permit conditions. Regarding the VMS ping rate increase, two responses were positive/neutral, 2 opposed the suggestion, and the final 2 did not provide comment. Half of the responses objected to the proposition of lowering the experience requirement due to concerns that doing so would threaten the fishery as a result of

an influx of vessels exhausting the available trips. The other half were supportive of changing the requirements due to the limitations they pose on finding skippers or diversifying their fishing opportunities.

Some concerns were raised in regard to the two proposed changes to the permit conditions:

| You said | Our response |
|---|---|
| 1. Increasing the VMS ping rate to 3-minutes | |
| A 3 minute ping rate is not necessary, a 10 minute ping rate would be enough. | Due to the small size of the closed areas, a frequent ping rate is necessary to effectively monitor the areas and detect any potential incursions. Ten-minute pings would be insufficient and would undermine monitoring. |
| The increase in ping rate will increase costs for vessels that are potentially already under financial strain. | While effort will always be made to minimise costs for the industry, increasing the VMS ping rate is necessary for effective monitoring of the fishery. |
| There is no pattern of non-compliance to necessitate the increase in ping rate. | Whilst we are not aware of any non-compliance, the current 2-hour ping rate leaves an unacceptable risk of non-compliance occurring and going undetected. Close monitoring of fishing effort is an essential component of management measures that enable it to continue in a sensitive Marine Protected Area. |
| 2. Removing/altering the experience requirements on Category 1 shrimp permits | |
| The experience requirements are necessary to protect the fishery from new vessels, particularly as there is no permit limit. An influx of vessels could mean the TAE is exhausted faster, impacting financial continuity throughout the year. | While impact assessments indicate the fishery has capacity to support further vessels, and the ability for vessels to diversify is an important element of inshore fisheries, there is a genuine risk to existing businesses should there be a significant influx of vessels. As such, a review will be undertaken of the experience requirement to ensure any changes do not unduly threaten existing business models. |
| The experience requirement is important to ensure safe and sustainable fishing practices. | Whilst we understand the importance of ensuring safe and sustainable fishing practices, the current requirement of three years' experience does not guarantee a skipper will fish responsibly. There may be other ways to encourage safe and sustainable practices. |

| | |
|--|--|
| The experience requirement supports the need to encourage local people to get involved with the fishery. | The lack of availability of skippers for existing vessels suggests the current requirements are not achieving this. We are exploring alternative methods that could lower the barrier to entry while still mitigating risk to the fishery. |
| The current requirements make it difficult to find skippers to take boats. | We understand that finding skippers is a significant issue for existing businesses, and are exploring alternative methods |
| The current requirements prevent small-scale vessel owners from diversifying into the fishery, impacting employment, financial viability, and increasing pressure on other stocks. | We understand the need for small-scale vessels to diversify as well as the risk posed by effort displacement on other stocks, and are We are exploring alternative methods. |
| Suggestion of restrictions at the permit or vessel level but easing the requirements for more flexibility at the skipper level. | Approaches to lower barriers to entry while maintaining control over the number of vessels within the fishery are being investigated. |
| Suggestion of a mentorship or supervised entry model so new entries can demonstrate their competence under existing permit holders. | The intention of this option is understood, however this method would risk gatekeeping or the commoditisation of entry to the fishery. As such, any training requirements will likely be handled by Eastern IFCA to ensure fairness. |

Appendix 3. De-Minimis impact assessment

| | | |
|---|--|--|
| De-Minimis Assessment | | |
| For Self-Certified Measures in Defra | | |
| | | |
| Title of Measure | Shrimp Permit Conditions | |
| Lead Department/Agency | EIFCA | |
| Expected Date of Implementation | 11/12/2025 | |
| Date of Assessment | 07/11/2025 | |
| Lead Departmental Contact | James Teasdale | |
| Type of Measure (primary/secondary etc) | Flexible Permit Conditions | |
| | | |
| Cost of Preferred Option | | |
| Total Net Present Social Value n/a | Business Net Present Value £2.1m | Equivalent Annual Net Direct Cost to Business (EANDCB) £0.003m |
| Policy overview, rationale for intervention and intended effects | | |
| <p>Background:</p> <p>The shrimp fisheries of Eastern IFCA's district are managed under the Shrimp Permit Byelaw 2018. In particular, the fishery within the Wash and North Norfolk Coast SAC are managed under 'Category 1' permits, which are associated with a cap of the total number of annual trips made within the fishery, and an experience requirement for an individual to hold or be named on a permit. These measures are in place for the protection of the SAC, to limit the gear interaction with the features of the site to a sustainable level, and to ensure that those prosecuting the fishery are familiar with Wash fishery practices so as to mitigate risk of bad practices leading to seabed damage. The permit conditions attached to these permits are flexible, and legally must be reviewed every four years.</p> <p>Problem:</p> <p>During the 2025 review, two issues had emerged; a gap in positional information provided by the VMS systems aboard vessels larger than 12m, as these systems only ping every 2 hours which is not adequate to ensure oversight given the size of the closed areas in the district, as a vessel could easily fish an area between pings and thereby not be detected; and permit holders being unable to find skippers for their vessels due to a shortage of skippers who fulfil the experience requirement.</p> <p>This is a regulatory failure, as protective conditions are creating unintended problems, and existing legislation is not resulting in adequate data levels to effectively deliver Eastern IFCA's duties to monitor and protect the marine environment.</p> <p>Summary of Proposed Policy:</p> <p>Changes to the permit conditions are therefore being considered to both improve the positional data provided by VMS units, and to alter the experience requirement so as to enable fishing activity.</p> | | |

Policy Options (including alternatives to regulation)

Policy 1: VMS Ping Rate

Option 0: Do Nothing

Maintaining the status quo could potentially save the vessels currently operating in the fishery a small amount of money, with the cost of VMS ping rate increases estimated at £14 a month. However, this would limit the ability of Eastern IFCA to ensure that closed areas are adequately protected, by limiting the capacity for detection of non-compliance. Further, other EIFCA fisheries are now requiring VMS ping rate increases, so it is unlikely that many vessels would realistically save the cost of the VMS ping rate increase if this policy is not adopted.

Option 1: Require a 3min ping rate (preferred)

Raising the required ping rate on VMS devices would bring VMS devices in line with IVMS devices and allow effective monitoring of activity around closed areas to detect and prevent non-compliance. If vessels are unable to increase the ping rate without an expensive refit of the VMS unit, a tracker can be provided.

Policy 2: Experience Requirement

Option 0: No changes

Making no changes to the experience requirement would avoid any risks associated with opening up the fishery. However, during the consultation process it has been raised to Eastern IFCA that the current restrictions have led to an effective depletion of the pool of available skippers, such that multiple vessels are sitting idle solely due to lack of skippers. The policies attached to the Shrimp Permit Byelaw were intended to protect the fishery from increases in effort, rather than to reduce effort, and the experience requirement was intended to ensure fishers had the knowledge to safely fish in the Wash and North Norfolk Coast while providing an access route to new entrants. If it has become a barrier to existing businesses, this would indicate the policy is not fit for purpose.

Option 1: Removal or reduction in the experience requirement

Reducing the experience requirement would allow skippers with less experience, or even no direct experience of the Wash and North Norfolk Coast, to both skipper for existing vessels and apply for permits of their own. This would however carry a risk of increasing effort; if the experience requirement is for example replaced with a training day, vessels from across the country would be able to enter the shrimp fishery, which on productive years there would be significant incentive to do. Further, such vessels would be likely to have far less knowledge of the Wash and North Norfolk Coast, and not be dependent on the area year-to-year, so would have far less incentive to fish responsibly.

When coupled with the reactivation of the currently idle vessels, as well as the consultation process highlighting that some vessel owners from the North Norfolk Coast fulfil the experience requirement and so may now join the fishery, this approach would open the fishery to a three-directional increase in effort, with no indication of what the upper limit for these fisheries would be. The risk of a spike in fishing activity severely damaging the long-term prospects of the fishery is high.

Option 2: Removal or reduction in the experience requirement coupled with a review of the application process to give greater control over spikes in effort from new vessels (preferred)

The risks associated with Option 1 may be mitigated by the review of the permit application process, with an open door policy associated with accepting applications, but a review window built into the process such that, should a large spike in interest in the fishery occur, Eastern IFCA may review and reject applications such that the fleet size stays within acceptable bounds. This would allow diversification into the fishery by new entrants while maintaining control of access such that established businesses are not put at risk.

Description of Novel and Contentious Elements (if any)

No novel or contentious elements present in either policy consideration.

Assessment of Impacts on Business

Broadly this assessment will focus on revenue rather than profit, as many fishing vessels operate on very thin margins and a focus on profit can undermine the economic significance of changes. However, in terms of net profit, the 'Economics of the UK Fishing Fleet' published by Seafish indicates that in 2023 and 2024, the profit margins of North Sea beam trawlers under 300kW was - 2%, so a net loss. However, these vessels are not likely to reflect the specific shrimp fisheries of the WNNC. As such, the higher value listed for Under 10m demersal trawl/seine will be used, at

20% in 2024, despite significant numbers of the fleet being over 10m, the behaviours captured by the Under 10m category are more likely to reflect the district's shrimp fleet.

Policy 1: VMS+ Ping Rate

The impact of the VMS+ ping rate change will be that increasing the ping rate will cost the vessel owner approximately £14 per month, so £168 annually. It is hard to estimate the number of vessels that would specifically be impacted by this, as while a number of vessels utilise VMS+, ping rate increases are already required under the Wash Cockle and Mussel Byelaw 2021, and are being proposed for the Whelk fishery, so most vessels already operate increased ping rates, and specific impacts from this policy are difficult to identify. However, even if half the recently active fleet were required to pay this fee solely for the shrimp fishery, the net cost to business would still be below £3,000. While costs to industry are avoided where possible, this cost is not considered significant against a fishery that generates gross revenues of hundreds of thousands per vessel, given the necessity of ensuring closed areas are protected to the effective management of the fishery.

Policy 2: Experience Requirement

During consultation, stakeholders highlighted that several vessels were sitting idle due to the experience requirement, resulting in significant financial losses. This represents the cost of maintaining the status quo (Option 0).

However, altering the experience requirement (Option 1) introduces its own risks. The shrimp fishery operates under effort limitations based on a five-year rolling average of trips, with a maximum annual cap of 1,746 trips and a baseline average of 1,101 trips. Increasing the number of vessels could quickly consume available effort, reducing trip opportunities in future years and potentially triggering closures or stricter management measures during high-effort periods. To assess these risks, projections were developed using three models: one based on the last two years of activity (averaging 1,020 trips and 29.5 vessels), another based on the last three years (774 trips and 28 vessels), and a historic average (1,101 trips and 32 vessels). These models were used to estimate the impact of adding 1–10 vessels over a five-year period.


The modelling revealed wide variation in potential outcomes. Under the three-year model, which reflects recent lower-effort conditions, the fishery could theoretically absorb 11 additional vessels without requiring management interventions. However, given the variability of the fishery, there is still a risk that some busier years would still exceed the trip cap, resulting in profit losses. In contrast, under the two-year model, representing higher recent effort, headroom is much smaller. Adding two vessels would leave only 59 trips before hitting the cap, and adding three vessels could trigger restrictions by the 2027/29 permit year, reducing available trips that year by 10%. Over five years, three additional vessels could result in a gross revenue loss of £353,548, with the impact likely concentrated on vessels most reliant on the fishery.

The financial impact escalates rapidly with further increases in vessel numbers. Four additional vessels could cost £870,437 over five years, five vessels £1.35 million, and six vessels £1.81 million. These losses would not be evenly distributed across the fleet, as vessels with greater dependence on shrimp fishing would bear the brunt of restrictions. Moreover, impacts would likely occur in spikes during profitable years when effort surges, rather than being spread evenly over time. Vessel behaviour adds another layer of uncertainty: while some vessels take only a handful of trips annually, others exceed 70 trips. If two new vessels entered at this high level of activity, the projected impact by 2028 would exceed £724,000, whereas eight vessels fishing at only 10 trips each would create no measurable impact.

In summary, while the fishery appears capable of supporting more vessels under current low-effort conditions, the risk of significant economic disruption under higher-effort scenarios is substantial. The variability in effort levels and vessel behaviour makes predicting outcomes extremely difficult, reinforcing the need for caution when considering changes to the experience requirement.

Determining how many vessels would enter the fishery as a result of the policy change is not realistically possible in the long term, however it is very unlikely to see any significant changes in the short term, as the current permit year is coming to the end of the peak season and there is not a high 'pull' factor.

As such, given that the most accurate model over the medium-term is believed to be the longer-term 3 year model, if the experience change is coupled with a review of the annual permitting process, as in Option 2, such that applications are required in advance of the permit year to allow a review of intended effort levels and action to be taken to avoid overuse of effort, such as yearly permit limitations, impact on the existing businesses can most likely be avoided.

| | | |
|---|---|------------------------|
| Wider Impacts (Including Assessment of Impact on SMBs and Households) | | |
| No wider impacts expected from preferred policy options. | | |
| Assessment of Impact on Trade and Investment (Including Internal Market Assessment) | | |
| The shrimp fishery is involved in the export market, but the preferred policy option is not expected to have any impact on trade and investment. | | |
| Assessment of Environmental Impacts | | |
| There is a risk that allowing skippers who do not already have the experience of fishing in the Wash and North Norfolk Coast will increase the risk of poor practice that may have an environmental impact. However, the gear restrictions already in place mitigate this risk, which will be coupled with training from Eastern IFCA staff regarding the nature of the MPAs, as well as improved oversight from VMS ping rate increases. As such, no impact is expected. | | |
| Rationale for producing a DMA (as opposed to an OA/IA) | | |
| Even considering gross impact rather than EANDCB, the impact does not reach the £10 million threshold and is limited to permit conditions, so is not suited for a full Impact Assessment. | | |
| Will the policy be reviewed (yes/no): | Review date if applicable: 2029 | |
| Yes | | |
| Review Provision Detail and Monitoring and Evaluation Plans. | | |
| All permit conditions are subject to a legal requirement to be reviewed every four years, including consultation. Further, monthly and annual review is in place over the shrimp fishery under a working group and a Monitoring and Control Plan. | | |
|  | James Teasdale, Policy and Project Officer | Date 18/11/2025 |
| Internal Directorate Clearance | | |
| Policy sign off | | |
| Senior Analyst sign off | | |
| Central Sign Off | | |
| Better Regulation Unit (Policy) Sign off | | |
| Office of the Chief Economist (Central Appraisal Team) Sign off | | |

Appendix 4. Proposed permit conditions

Below are the proposed additional shrimp permit conditions to be added to Category 1 Permits:

Vessel Monitoring Devices

1. Vessels with an overall length of less than 12m must at all times whilst at sea:
 - d. Have either a Nemo or SC2 I-VMS MMO type-approved I-VMS device installed onboard and operating;
 - e. Have the I-VMS unit switched on and transmitting data to the device supplier hub for onward transmission to the UK VMS Hub at least once in every 3 minutes; and
 - f. Ensure that the device has not been manually overridden, has not been tampered with or damaged and is not obstructed or interfered with so as to compromise or prevent the effective transmission of data to the UK VMS Hub.
2. Subject to condition 10, vessels with an overall length of 12m or more must at all times whilst at sea:
 - d. Have installed and operating onboard a VMS or VMS+ unit;
 - e. Have the VMS or VMS+ unit switched on and transmitting data to the device supplier hub for onward transmission to the UK VMS Hub at least once in every 3 minutes; and
 - f. Ensure that the device has not been manually overridden, has not been tampered with or damaged and is not obstructed or interfered with so as to compromise or prevent the effective transmission of data to the UK VMS Hub.
3. Where a vessel to which condition 9 applies is not able to meet condition 9(b), condition 9 shall not apply if:
 - c. the vessel has onboard and operating a tracker provided by the Authority; and
 - d. the permit holder or nominated deputy remunerate the Authority for the associated subscription cost.

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.



Action Item 16

62nd Eastern Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority meeting

10 December 2025

Report by: Julian Gregory, CEO

Authority Meeting Dates 2026-27

Purpose of report

The purpose of this report is to propose dates for meetings of the Authority and sub-committees thereof in 2026-27.

Recommendations

It is recommended that members:

- **Approve** the calendar of meetings at Appendix 1.

Background

Meetings of the full Authority, the Finance and HR sub-committee and the Fisheries and Conservation Management Working Group are scheduled a year in advance and are approved at the December Authority meeting. The agreed pattern for meetings is as follows:

- Full Authority - quarterly, ordinarily on the second Wednesday in March, June, September, and December.
- Finance and HR sub-committee - quarterly, ordinarily on the first Tuesday in February, May, August, and November.
- Fisheries and Conservation Management Working Group - quarterly, ordinarily on the third Tuesday in January, April, July and October (albeit the October meeting is usually the second Tuesday to avoid the half-term week).

Meetings of the Wash Fisheries and Wash Appeals sub-committees are arranged by the CEO as required to fulfil their functions.

The annual scheduling of meetings is intended to facilitate workflows and the scheme of delegations and to give members, stakeholders, and the public advance notice to aid forward planning for Authority decisions.

Report

Quarterly meeting dates are proposed for the full Authority, Finance and HR sub-committee meetings and the Fisheries and Conservation Management Working Group.

A meeting of the Wash Fisheries sub-committee has been scheduled to cater for the potential for a meeting to be required to address eligibility and associated matters in advance of the 2026-27 cockle and mussel permit year. It will be cancelled closer to the time if it is not required.

The calendar of meetings to March 2027 is attached as Appendix 1.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Meetings Schedule 2026-27

Appendix 1

Eastern IFCA Meetings Schedule 2026-27

| Meeting | Date | Time | Proposed venue |
|--|--|--------------|---------------------------------|
| Fisheries and Conservation Management Working Group* | Tuesday 20 th January 2026 | 14:00 | Online or venue to be advised |
| Finance & HR Sub-Committee | Tuesday 3 rd February 2026 | 10:30 | Eastern IFCA office, Kings Lynn |
| 63rd Eastern IFCA | Wednesday 11th March 2026 | 10.30 | Town Hall, Kings Lynn |
| Wash Fisheries Sub-Committee | Tuesday 24 th March 2026 | 10.30 | Eastern IFCA office, Kings Lynn |
| Fisheries and Conservation Management Working Group* | Tuesday 21 st April 2026 | 14:00 | Online or venue to be advised |
| Finance & HR Sub-Committee | Tuesday 5 th May 2026 | 10:30 | Eastern IFCA office, Kings Lynn |
| 64th Eastern IFCA | Wednesday 10th June 2026 | 10.30 | Town Hall, Kings Lynn |
| Fisheries and Conservation Management Working Group* | Tuesday 21 st July 2026 | 14:00 | Online or venue to be advised |
| Finance & HR Sub-Committee | Tuesday 4 th August 2026 | 10:30 | Eastern IFCA office, Kings Lynn |
| 65th Eastern IFCA | Wednesday 9th September 2026 | 10.30 | Town Hall, Kings Lynn |
| Fisheries and Conservation Management Working Group* | Tuesday 20 th October 2026 | 14:00 | Online or venue to be advised |
| Finance & HR Sub-Committee | Tuesday 3 rd November 2026 | 10:30 | Eastern IFCA office, Kings Lynn |
| 66th Eastern IFCA | Wednesday 9th December 2026 | 10.30 | Town Hall, Kings Lynn |
| Fisheries and Conservation Management Working Group* | Tuesday 19 th January 2027 | 10:30 | Online or venue to be advised |
| Finance & HR Sub-Committee | Tuesday 2 nd February 2027 | 10:30 | Eastern IFCA office, Kings Lynn |
| 67th Eastern IFCA | Wednesday 10th March 2027 | 10.30 | Town Hall, Kings Lynn |

*Membership of the F&C Working Group comprises all MMO appointed members with all Local Authority appointed members being welcome to attend at their own discretion.

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



Action Item 17

62nd Eastern Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority Meeting

10 December 2025

Review of Annual Priorities and Risk Register

Report by: L. Godwin, ACO

Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to update members on progress against 2025-26 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 September 2025 to end of November 2025.

The tables at Appendix 1 detail the progress against the key priorities for 2025-26, as set in the Business plan for 2025-30.

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 2025-26

Appendix 2 – Risk Register

Appendix 3 – Update on Risk Register

Background Documents

Eastern Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority Business Plan 2025-30.

APPENDIX 1 - Progress against Annual Priorities – September 2025 to end of November 2025 (inclusive)

Five key priorities are established for 2025-26.

| Financial Year 2025-26 | | |
|---|-----------------|--|
| Priorities | Progress | Comment |
| 1. To ensure that the conservation objectives of Marine Protected Areas in the district are furthered through: | | |
| a) Implementation of management measures for 'red risk' gear/feature interactions (carried over). | On Track | The Closed Areas Byelaw 2021 has been the subject of a formal consultation which closed on 17 November 2025. The responses from the consultation will be carefully considered to inform a final decision on the byelaw before submission to the Marine Management Organisation for formal quality assurance. |
| b) Continued implementation of Adaptive Risk Management of fishing activity within the Cromer Shoal Chalk Beds Marine Conservation Zone (carried over). | On Track | <p>Overall, delivery of the project plan is on track with the ARM plan, however, some components remain delayed. A quarterly update is provided on the Authority's website¹⁹ setting out progress against the plans workstreams and these are summarised below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Cromer Shoal Chalk Bed Byelaw QA process is ongoing however, re-submission to the MMO (which was scheduled for Q2) is delayed as a consequence of resource being allocated to other elements of this workstream including development of permit conditions. It is anticipated that the byelaw will be re-submitted within the coming weeks. • The Natural Disturbance Study is ongoing, with multibeam surveys having been undertaken within the study areas during October. An application for funding under the Fisheries and Seafood Scheme (FaSS) has been submitted and it is hoped that this funding will enable the continuation of the study during this financial year. The study is critically important to the ARM project generally and failure to continue the work may necessitate a more precautionary approach to managing potting in the MCZ. |

¹⁹ [CSCB MCZ ARM Newsletter - Eastern IFCA](#)

| | | |
|---|----------------|---|
| | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interim measures which include mandatory positional report via trackers and mandatory closures to support the NDS are still in place. The former requirement is still in place and required because of issues with one IVMS supplier has stopped providing positional data to the UK data hub. Work is ongoing to retrieve the IVMS data from the supplier. • Monitoring of compliance with the mandatory NDS closures is ongoing and a suspected incursion was detected during October. It is noteworthy that this monitoring requires a significant resource which includes daily checks of fishing vessel tracker data. • The 'rates of damage' assessment has been the subject of discussion with stakeholders and Natural England with the intention of developing the approach further. Work includes seeking an external organisation to analyse ROV data collected by the Authority and consideration of data gathered by local divers to enhance the data set used to inform the assessment. • A management plan has been developed which is the subject of Action item 13 of this meeting. |
| c) Completion of 'amber/green' gear/fishing interaction assessments and development and implementation of management measures as required (carried over). | Delayed | <p>Significant progress has been made during the reporting period in relation to the development of HRAs and the processes and frameworks which facilitate the delivery of such. This is considered to be a positive consequence of having appointed a new Grade 6 MSO whose role includes coordination of this priority workstream.</p> <p>Two Habitat Regulation Assessments (HRAs) have now been signed off by Natural England, neither of which required mitigation to conclude that the associated fisheries were not having an adverse effect on Marine protected Areas.</p> <p>A further two HRAs are at final review, and both are anticipated to be confirmed in the near future.</p> |

| | | |
|--|--------------------|---|
| | | <p>Four more HRAs are pending submission of a final review and five more are being further developed following initial advice from Natural England.</p> <p>The remaining four HRAs are currently on hold pending the completion of other HRAs in part because they represent very large sites which overlap with other MPAs, the associated HRAs for which are in development and will ultimately inform consideration of these larger sites.</p> <p>It remains the case that every effort is being made to progress the workstream, including re-prioritisation of other workstreams, most notably the delivery of 'red-risk interactions management'.</p> |
| d) Participation in the national 'Coastal Health' project and the pilot in The Wash (carried over). | In Progress | Contribution to this workstream is ongoing and has included dialogue with Cefas regarding chemical test kits and the associated process for collecting samples in the event of a marine incident and attendance at a workshop in London relating to emergency response frameworks. |
| e) Habitat mapping in relation to <i>sabellaria</i> reef within MPAs outside of the Wash and North Norfolk Coast (new priority). | In progress | Following the review of the Closed Areas Byelaw 2021, <i>Sabellaria</i> reef evidence gathering within Haisborough, Hammond and Winterton SAC is considered the priority and surveys will be programmed in during the remainder of the financial year. <i>Sabellaria</i> reef surveys have been undertaken by Natural England within Inner Dowsing, Race Bank and North Ridge during 2024 and it is anticipated that data will become available for use in a review of the Closed Areas Byelaw 2021 during the 2026/27 financial year. |
| 2. Management of Wash cockle and mussel fisheries (wild capture and private) | | |
| a) Confirmation of the Wash Cockle and Mussel Byelaw 2021 to enable management of wild capture fisheries (carried over). | Complete | The byelaw was confirmed by Defra at the end of February, and the byelaw has now been fully implemented (including in relation to fishing within the Wash mussel fishery). |

| | | |
|---|--------------------|---|
| b) Implementation of Wash Cockle and Mussel Byelaw access policies (transition) (carried over). | Complete | This workstream was completed during the reporting period and included production and distribution of relevant admin and educational materials, completion of the 'Wash Training Course' for all fishermen named on a permit and the administration of permits under the Eligibility Policy for the mussel fishery. Both the Byelaw and the policies are now fully implemented. |
| c) Develop appropriate management of private shellfish aquaculture within The Wash (carried over). | Delayed | As previously reported, this workstream remains significantly delayed. Defra continue to lack the capacity to consider the application or progress it further. Wash shellfish lays continue to be managed under interim measures at this time. This is further considered at Action Item 12 of this meeting. |
| d) A review of relevant byelaws inherited from Eastern Sea Fisheries Joint Committee (carried over). | Delayed | Work to review the inherited byelaw is delayed due to focus on other priority workstreams including the Cromer Shoal Chalk Beds Byelaw and Closed Area Byelaw 2021. |
| 3. Obtaining better fisheries data | | |
| a) Facilitating and contributing to the roll-out of I-VMS by the Marine Management organisation (revised priority). | Complete | I-VMS requirements came into effect via MMO licence conditions in May 2025 and resource has been allocated to facilitating the launch of this measure including through promulgation of MMO messages via IFCOs and the Authority's website. |
| b) Development of measures (through byelaws and / or permit conditions) to implement standardised | In Progress | Enhanced reporting rates in relation to the Whelk and Shrimp fisheries has been the subject of consultation and proposals to implement requirements to that effect are the subject of Action Items 14 and 15 of this meeting. |

| | | |
|---|--------------------|---|
| reporting rates across of VMS units (revised priority). | | |
| c) Consider gathering vessel tracking data through alternative means (in lieu of I-VMS) (new priority). | In Progress | <p>Interim measures have been implemented to gather I-VMS analogous data from vessels operating within the Cromer Shoal MCZ (and more specifically the rugged chalk areas) and similar measures are in place within the cockle fishery (with an alternative tracker option being considered in relation to vessels 12m and over in length).</p> <p>These arrangement remain in place whilst the I-VMS roll-out remains in its early stages and prior to the confirmation of a Statutory Instrument (to replace the existing MMO licence conditions). It is noteworthy that there are a number of issues which are impacting the availability of I-VMS data including device faults and one of the two approved suppliers having stopped reporting data to the UK VMS hub.</p> |
| 4. Fisheries Management Plans | | |
| a) Supporting the planning / carried over). | In progress | No relevant FMPs were at this stage during the reporting period. |
| b) Supporting the publication phase including by reviewing and evaluation plans (carried over). | In progress | No relevant FMPs were published during the reporting period. |
| c) Supporting post-publication phase including implementation (carried over). | In progress | Dialogue regarding the implementation of FMPs is ongoing including through attendance and contribution to associated meetings. |
| 5. Contribute to the development of second-generation Marine Plans through | | |
| a) Collaboration with the Marine Management Organisation to | In Progress | Engagement with the publicised consultations has continued including an ongoing consultation regarding policy objectives for the second-generation plan. |

| | | |
|---|--------------------|--|
| seek opportunities to improve data and evidence for inshore fishing activities (carried over). | | |
| b) Stakeholder engagement to raise awareness of marine planning and identify key issues (carried over). | In Progress | Promulgation of relevant stakeholder events has been undertaken in relation to publicised engagement events. |
| c) Contributing to policy development by providing expert advice and relaying information from our stakeholders (carried over). | In Progress | Input has been provided as requested via the publicised consultations. |

Key:

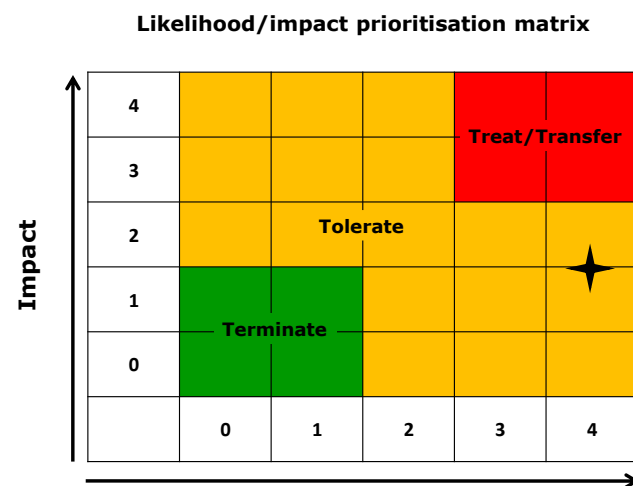
| | | | |
|--|--------------------|--|-----------------------------------|
| | Complete | | Progress stalled / delayed |
| | In progress | | Not started |

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">During 2024-25 three new / replacement vessels entered service and a fourth underwent a life extending refit.Alternative sources of funding sought where appropriate e.g. EMFF & Defra CDEL funding supported the purchase of FPV Seaspray, FPV Thunderstruck and C-Runner.Promote Eastern IFCA output and effectiveness to funding authorities through engagement with Council leaders and Financial Directors.Agreement in place with funding authorities for capital funding contributions each year.Assets managed and maintained to reduce the likelihood of early retirement or unexpected depreciation.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. | Tolerate |
| | | | Reputation | Financial | | | | |
| | | | 4 | 4 | Finance Directors agreed to annual capital contributions from 2019-20 onwards to cater for the cost of asset replacement as an alternative to requests for a lump sum amounts as assets are replaced. No guarantees were given or implied. Eastern IFCA will explore all avenues for funding. | | | |
| | | | Drive for savings may impact County Councils' decisions regarding Eastern IFCA funding. Visible presence reduced, enforcement and survey activities compromised. | Inability to generate sufficient reserves to meet asset replacement schedule would threaten Eastern IFCAs ability to function. Closure costs could result. | | | | |

| 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 | | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide a leadership function.• Be proactive and identify issues early.• Engage with all partners routinely• Operate transparently and utilise effective communications approaches.• Use Business Plan to prioritise and communicate outputs, Measure progress/deliver outputs.• Represent community issues to, and support their engagement with, higher authorities.• Recent revisions undertaken to the ARM project for the MCZ to address wider stakeholders concerns about engagement.• Effective business planning process in place.• Leading role where appropriate e.g. Op Blake.• Proactive approach to raising issues with Defra.• Identify opportunities to facilitate delivery of Government objectives through outputs and contribute to Government fisheries and environmental targets by embedding into work plans.• Careful consideration of findings and recommendations from the 2018-2022 quadrennial report and incorporation into delivery of duties as appropriate. | Tolerate |
| | | | Reputation | Financial | Possible – Whilst positive relationships have been established the existence of disparate partner aspirations introduces complexities which may drive perceptions of bias or inefficiency. | | | |
| | | | 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 | | 2 | Possible – disenfranchised partners seek to introduce doubt as to Eastern IFCA professionalism, utility, and effectiveness | <ul style="list-style-type: none">Actively and regularly engage with all partners including media outlets.Review use of social media and web-based information noting its unavoidable use to misinterpret and spread misinformation.Embed professional standards and practices.Deliver change efficiently and effectively.Promulgate successful outcomes.Assure recognition and understanding through clear and concise publications and effective promulgation of such as appropriate.Routine updating of news items on website.Monitor media presence and engage where appropriate.Targeted and meaningful dialogue with stakeholders which caters for intended audiences to reduce likelihood of misinterpretation or misrepresentation. | Tolerate |
| | | | Reputation | Financial | | | | |
| | | | 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 designated areas. | 3.5 | | 2 | | <ul style="list-style-type: none">Fishing activities authorised by Eastern IFCA are assessed per Habitats Regulations and MaCAA; management routinely includes mitigation to prevent adverse effects on MPA integrity.Eastern IFCA is fully engaged in national fisheries/MPA project, prioritising management of highest risk fisheries in MPAs and implementing new management measures.Effective monitoring of fishing activity and enforcement of measuresAdaptive 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.Ongoing, close liaison with Natural England regarding conservation matters,Review of management in accordance with Defra guidance,Utilising I-VMS as a management tool by the Authority.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.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. | Tolerate |
| | | | Reputation | Financial | Possible – Eastern IFCA's approach to managing sea fisheries resources actively addresses our environmental obligations. | | | |
| | | | 4 | 3 | | | | |
| | | | 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). | | | | |

| 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 viability with associated social and economic problems | 3 | | 3 | | <ul style="list-style-type: none">Annual stock assessments of bivalve stocks in The WashAnnual review of the level of threat via the Strategic AssessmentAbility to allocate sufficient resources to monitoring and effective enforcement.Consultation with industry on possible management measures.Review of management measures in accordance with Defra guidance.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 PlanSWEEP research into primary productivity levels within the Wash.Regular engagement with the industry to discuss specific matters.Continued research into the cockle and mussel mortality events.Whelk research is ongoing to identify level of risk posed and potential mitigation for sustainability concerns.Annual surveys of Wash cockle and mussel stocks alongside innovative approach to management of the cockle fishery.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.General engagement with FMP programme. | Treat |
| | | | Reputation | Financial | 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. | | | |
| | | | 3 | 3 | | | | |
| | | | 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 Regulations (GDPR). Prosecution casefiles compromised. Loss of data in the event of fire or theft Breakdown in dissemination of sensitive information between key delivery partners. | 4 | | 2 | | <ul style="list-style-type: none">All computers are password protected. Individuals only have access to the server through their own computer.Secure wireless internetRemote back up of electronic filesAccess to electronic files is restricted.Up to date virus software installed on all computers.Important documents secured in safes.ICT equipment and policies provided by public sector provider – including encrypted laptops/secure governmental email system.All Eastern IFCA personnel undergo DPA training.Electronic backup of all Eastern IFCA documents held by ICT provider offsite.Policies and processes developed to ensure data security and compliance with data protection legislation. | Tolerate |
| | | | Reputation | Financial | Possible - Limited staff access to both electronic and paper files. Office secure with CCTV, keypad entry system and alarm. | | | |
| | | | 4 | 4 | | | | |
| | | | Partners no longer believe that confidential information they have supplied is secure. Personnel issues arise over inability to secure information. | Eastern IFCA open to both civil and criminal action regarding inability to secure personal information. | | | | |
| 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. | 4 | | 2 | | <ul style="list-style-type: none">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 £140k for each IFCA to address three specific work-streams.County Council Finance Directors representatives have been kept appraised of the situation and the potential for increased levies in the event that funding from Defra is discontinued. | Tolerate |
| | | | Reputation | Financial | Defra have continued to roll over new Burdens funding in recognition of the value that IFCAs provide in meeting national policy objectives. | | | |
| | | | 4 | 4 | | | | |
| | | | Inability to meet all obligations would have a significant impact upon reputation. | Circa 25% of the annual budget is provided by Defra under the New Burdens doctrine so its loss would have a significant impact. | | | | |

| 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 | | 4 | | <ul style="list-style-type: none">Continuation of a new Several Order as a high priority within the 2025-26 5-year Business Plan.The fisheries are being managed under interim management measures with the status quo being maintained in terms of access to the fisheries.Dialogue will be maintained with Defra teams and officers will prioritise responses to information requests from Defra.Industry dialogue will be prioritised as required to make progress.Consider alternative means of managing aquaculture in The Wash. | Treat |
| | | | Reputation | Financial | | | | |
| | | | 4 | 4 | The WFO 1992 expired in January 2023 and due to the process for a new Several Order being prolonged and subject to significant delays by Defra the new order is not in place. Defra have advised that the application is unlikely to be progressed before 2027/28. | | | |
| | | | 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 | Potential for legal challenge against Eastern IFCA. Ongoing loss of revenue from permit fees. | | | | |

Appendix 3 – Risk Register Update September 2025 to end of November 2025

| Risk Description | Change in risk-rating / update |
|--|--|
| Eastern IFCA fails to secure funding to replace assets | No Change in risk rating or mitigation since last publication of 5-year Business Plan. |
| Eastern IFCA fails to maintain relevance amongst partners | No change in risk rating or mitigation since last update. |
| Negative media comment | Risk decreased – Replacement of the Wash Fishery Order 1992, which was a highly contentious work stream, generated a strong sense of feeling from some fishery stakeholders and was responsible for the increase in likelihood associated with this risk factor. Mitigation to treat the risk appears to have been effective and following the completion of the workstream, the likelihood of negative media comment appears to have reduced. Work is also underway to address wider stakeholder engagement matters as described within the 2018-2022 Conduct and Operations Report. |
| Degradation of MPAs due to fishing activity | No change in risk rating or mitigation since last publication of 5-year Business Plan. However, it is noteworthy that progression of the Closed Area Byelaw 2021 workstream leading to confirmation of the byelaw will potentially change (reduce) the associated risk for this factor. |
| Shellfish and fish stocks collapse | No change in risk rating or mitigation since last publication of 5-year Business Plan. It is noteworthy however that the intertidal mussel stock biomass has increases significantly according to the 2025 survey. |
| Failure to secure data | No change in risk rating or mitigation since last publication of 5-year Business Plan. |
| New Burdens funding discontinued | No change in risk rating or mitigation since last publication of 5-year Business Plan. |
| The new Several Order to replace that element of the Wash Fishery Order 1992 is substantially delayed. | Risk Increased – On the basis of Defra’s advice that the application for a new Several Order is not likely to progress until 2027/28, the likelihood associated with this risk has increased with the effect that overall the associated action is now ‘treat’. Additional mitigation is being considered, including seeking an alternative means of managing aquaculture in The Wash which is the subject of agenda item 12 of this meeting. |

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 19a

62nd Eastern Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority Meeting

10 December 2025

Marine Protection Quarterly Report

Report by: Jon Butler, Assistant 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 August 2025 to November 2025 inclusive.

Recommendations

It is recommended that members:

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

Background

Quarterly reports on the activities of the Marine Protection Team are provided to Authority members at quarterly meetings of the full Authority. Monthly updates have been sent to members.

Report

Unfortunately, due to recent staff movement within the team it has not been possible to provide the monthly reports. This will hopefully be resumed in the New Year when the team is back to strength.

August was a busy month for the team with a focus on cockle landings and shrimp gear inspections in The Wash, crab on the North Norfolk Coast and bass in the south of the district. Recreational angling across the district remains an annual priority with an increased number of people fishing during the holiday period, this brings a slight increase in risk as people are genuinely unaware of minimum conservation reference sizes.

The Roger Sand in the Wash was opened during August following surveys conducted by officers; it was concluded there was a high likelihood that the bed would 'ridge out'. Some in industry raised concerns fisherman would focus on this area causing damage and flood the market with small cockles. There was also concern fisherman would start targeting shrimp early in the season when there was a lot of brood about. The situation was carefully monitored alongside surveys to other sands agreed with industry, where concerns had been raised about the potential for 'ridging out'.

Compliance within the cockle fishery as a whole was good, with 3 offences detected and dealt with by officers. Compliance by recreational anglers during the summer was much better than in previous years with only a small number of infringements detected.

Priorities during September remained broadly similar for officers, albeit the team needed to prioritise mussel surveys, which results in a reduced presence on the coast.

Any pressures on the Roger Sand decreased during September when the fleet from Kings Lynn began to fish a mainly sublittoral bed of cockles just off Hunstanton. This bed hasn't been actively fished for over a decade and the cockles landed were all of a good size. It is reported that the price for these cockles was above that being reached for other Wash cockles, this has seen fisherman continuing to target this area during autumn. Following discussions with Natural England it was concluded that as this bed hadn't been surveyed during the spring surveys, as an exceptional circumstance the cockles taken could be taken outside of the annual TAC. At the time of writing the remains circa 500t of cockles to be taken during the 205/26 fishery should industry continue to fish.

Monitoring of the closed areas off Cromer continues and any incursions are investigated. Regular dialogue continues with industry regarding the use importance of trackers, IVMS and EIFCA supplied GPS unit. Ensuring the buoys remain on station during poor weather is challenging and a number were lost during heavy weather. We are currently waiting for a weather window to allow us the opportunity to recover the buoys for the winter.

The focus during October remained on completing the mussel survey, all of which were completed. The surveys are a particular challenge during the autumn with a limited number of days available and weather proving a challenge

Financial Implications

None

Legal Implications

None

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Marine Protection Monthly Reports

Background Documents

Not Applicable



MARINE PROTECTION MONTHLY REPORT

AUGUST 2025



An overview of the work conducted by the Marine Protection Team.
Report by: Assistant Chief Officer (Designated Deputy)

Enforcement and engagement priorities throughout the district as agreed through the Tactical Co-ordinating Group (TCG)

Area 1 (Hail Sand Fort to Gibraltar Point) – Visit key ports, including a high visibility patrol to Grimsby, as well as prioritise a joint patrol with the MMO/NE IFCA. Shore patrols to engage with recreational and commercial fishermen, and carry out compliance inspections of gear and catch. Submission of intel following patrols.

Area 2 (The Wash and North Norfolk Coast to Brancaster) – Carry out MCS shrimp gear compliance inspections. Monitor activity in the cockle fishery, landing inspections of vessels prioritising those which have not already been landed or had their catch weighed. Submission of intel following patrols.

Area 3 (Brancaster to Great Yarmouth) – Landing inspections of vessels active in the crab and lobster fishery, as well as premises inspections. Shore patrols focusing on engagement and education of recreational anglers, particularly in the Sea Palling area. Submission of intel following patrols.

Area 4 (Great Yarmouth to Harwich) – Focus on the bass fishery with patrols of inland waters, engagement with charter vessels and recreational anglers. Shore

patrols focusing on engagement, education and inspections of recreational anglers. Submission of intel following patrols.

Enforcement Outcomes

Enforcement planning and actions are risk-based and intelligence led and informed by organisational priorities as set out in the 5-Year Business Plan. The areas reported are sea patrols, Marine Protected Area monitoring, port visits, new vessel engagement and partnership working.

Area 1 (Hail Sand Fort to Gibraltar Point): Patrols carried out to Lincs ports to follow up on intel received as well as to monitor whelk fishing activity at Grimsby.

Area 2 (The Wash and North Norfolk Coast to Brancaster): High number of catch inspections, with landings observed in Boston and King's Lynn, due to the cockle fishery being open, this has resulted in the detection of 3 offences.

Area 3 (Brancaster to Great Yarmouth): Multiple visits to all North Norfolk ports with inspections of crab and lobster vessels at Cromer a focus, no offences detected.

Area 4 (Great Yarmouth to Harwich): Multiple visits to all ports with a focus on the bass fishery, with one verbal warning given to a recreational angler.

| Enforcement metric | Number completed | | | |
|---|------------------|--------|--------|--------|
| | Area 1 | Area 2 | Area 3 | Area 4 |
| Shore Patrols | 2 | 10 | 9 | 16 |
| Port visits (1 per month) | 5 | 13 | 36 | 27 |
| Catch inspections (landings observed) | 0 | 53 | 0 | 0 |
| Catch Inspections (Landings not observed) | 1 | 9 | 13 | 17 |
| Vehicle Inspections | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Premises inspections | 1 | 0 | 1 | 3 |
| Enforcement actions/Offences | 0 | 3 | 0 | 1 |
| Intelligence reports submitted | 1 | 4 | 0 | 4 |
| Fishers engaged | 2 | 76 | 74 | 76 |
| | | | | |
| Vessel Patrols target of 90 per year (April -March) <i>Achieved to date: 50</i> | 0 | 4 | 2 | 2 |
| Boardings | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Gear Inspections | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

Marine Protected Area monitoring

Monitoring of 'restricted areas' under the Marine Protected Areas Byelaw 2018 were conducted throughout the reporting period via direct observation on a risk-based approach. 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 |
| | 2 monitoring occasions (areas visited: 1, 2, 8, 9, 10) | 1 monitoring occasion (areas visited: 24, 25, 26, 28) | No monitoring occasions | No monitoring occasions |

Enforcement messages received

Area 1 (Hail Sand Fort to Gibraltar Point)

- Query from a member of the public regarding someone being fined for bait digging at Cleethorpes beach, the person had been shown some documentation which looked like Eastern IFCA byelaws. The only legislation Eastern IFCA has in place for bait digging on the Lincolnshire coast is a small area of Horseshoe point. North East Lincolnshire Council (NELC) issues annual bait digging permits which are subject to permit conditions, failure to comply results in an on the spot fine of £100. It is likely that the person was fined by NELC officers. Have also received a query from an angling club who fish within the district regarding regulations related to bait digging, officers have passed on all relevant details and will remain in touch.

Area 2 (Wash and North Norfolk Coast to Brancaster)

- Opening of the Roger sand cockle bed raised concern that fishers would pile in to the area and blow out more than is necessary, also concern that the opening will flood the market with small cockles and thus reduce the price. This in turn could drive vessels to switch to target shrimp too early in the season. The cockle fishery continues to be carefully monitored with ongoing dialogue with fishermen and processors.

Area 3 (Brancaster to Great Yarmouth)

- New vessel at Cromer, details of fisherman obtained and relevant regulations discussed.
- Query from fisherman regarding the use of crab for bait when fishing for whelk, IFCO to check the changes being made through the Crab and Lobster Byelaw. Also queried whether processor waste which was edible crab caught within the district and cooked, could be used as bait.

Area 4 (Great Yarmouth to Harwich)

- Fisherman made a comment about the number of inspections being carried out recently. Inspections are proportionate, and fishermen should understand they are part of EIFCA's day to day activity.
- Fisherman is losing most of his catch to seals, would like to run a piece of net over the cod end to protect from this. Top side chafer permitted attachment details have been passed on to the fisherman.
- Recreational fisher requested officers give consideration to increasing the lobster minimum landing size by 3cm, officer has been in touch to explain the proposals being made through FMPs and as such EIFCA are not looking to introduce any changes locally.

Fishing trends

Area 1 (Hail Sand Fort to Gibraltar Point)

Very little commercial activity

Area 2 (Wash and North Norfolk Coast to Brancaster)

Cockle fishery has opened, most cockles landed are 10-12mm, price anywhere between £600 - £800 per tonne. Small number of vessels still shrimping, price between £8 and £9 per kg.

Area 3 (Brancaster to Great Yarmouth)

Brown crab catches remain very poor, worst season known, demand is high but prices are low. Lobsters being caught in good numbers, particularly at Sea Palling. Mackerel fishing has been very limited with just a few sizeable. RSA have had sporadic catches of small bass.

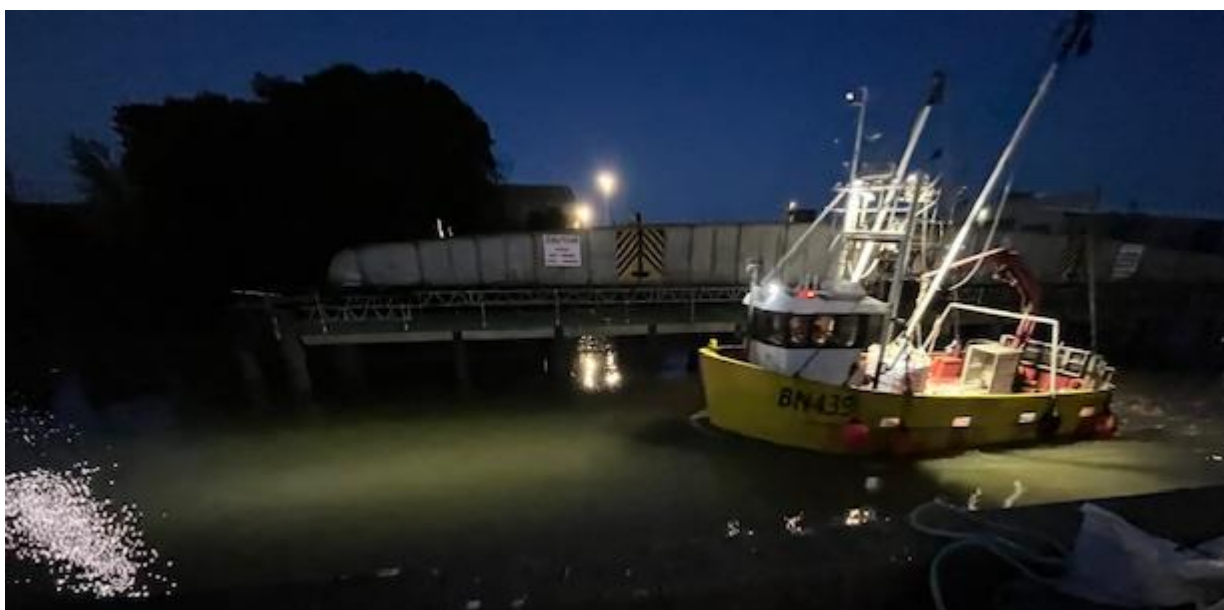
Area 4 (Great Yarmouth to Harwich)

Sole being landed into the south end of the district. The whelk fishery has continued throughout the summer this year and several vessels are dedicating their efforts from 12nm eastwards. RSA have reported that bass are still in the area but more often found in sheltered areas such as rivers, catching in good numbers but most are under MCRS. Mid Suffolk fishers are struggling to catch crab and are also struggling to buy it in to sell in their shops.



MARINE PROTECTION MONTHLY REPORT

SEPTEMBER & OCTOBER 2025



An overview of the work conducted by the Marine Protection Team.
Report by: Assistant Chief Officer (Designated Deputy)

Enforcement and engagement priorities throughout the district as agreed through the Tactical Co-ordinating Group (TCG)

Area 1 (Hail Sand Fort to Gibraltar Point) :

SEPTEMBER: Visit key ports including Grimsby, and Donna Nook over low water to assess fishing activity, both commercial and recreational, taking time to engage with RSA and inspecting commercial gear and catch. Arrange joint working patrol with MMO/NE IFCA.

OCTOBER: Key priorities remained the same as September.

Area 2 (The Wash and North Norfolk Coast to Brancaster) –

SEPTEMBER: Carry out MSC shrimp gear compliance inspections. Monitor activity at sea and landing inspections relating to the Cockle fishery, taking care to prioritise vessels whose landed weight had not already been checked.

OCTOBER: MSC Shrimp gear compliance inspections remained a priority. Inspection of cockle landings with preference being given to those not previously landed/weighed.

Area 3 (Brancaster to Great Yarmouth) –

SEPTEMBER: RSA patrols along coast, paying particular attention to Sea Palling and Cart Gap on Friday evenings and weekends. Crab and Lobster compliance inspections of both vessel landings and premises, again along the coast with particular attention to Sea Palling and Cart Gap on Friday evenings and weekends.

OCTOBER: Priority to continue to monitor landings at weekends, as well as engagement and education of RSA fishers.

Area 4 (Great Yarmouth to Harwich) –

SEPTEMBER: Focus on engagement and education of RSA activity through shore patrols & landing inspections. Attention to be paid to Bass fishing activity both commercial and recreational, particular attention at Lowestoft and inland waters.

OCTOBER: Shore Patrols to focus on RSA Engagement, education and landing inspections in inland waters, as well as the recreational bass fishery from charter vessels and around Lowestoft were to be monitored.

Enforcement Outcomes

Enforcement planning and actions are risk-based and intelligence led and informed by organisational priorities as set out in the 5-Year Business Plan. The areas reported are sea patrols, Marine Protected Area monitoring, port visits, new vessel engagement and partnership working.

Area 1 (Hail Sand Fort to Gibraltar Point):

SEPTEMBER: Despite patrols being planned to monitor commercial landings and RSA Activity, time constraints prevented Officers from completing the task..

OCTOBER: Information received on Marine Debris being found at Sutton on Sea as a result of the collision in the North Sea. Staff available prevented any further activity.

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

SEPTEMBER: During the course of 6 patrols, 4 sets of shrimp gear were inspected. Whilst completing mussel surveys, at sea monitoring of cockle vessels took place. Additionally landings were checked resulting in a possible infringement of fishing twice in a calendar day
Intel also indicated a possible infringement of RSA bass netting.

OCTOBER: One shrimp gear inspection was completed. Monitoring of the cockle fishery continued with 2 intel reports received suggesting potential non-compliance.

Area 3 (Brancaster to Great Yarmouth):

SEPTEMBER: Patrols carried out found RSA fishing to be very poor. 19 shore patrols covering commercial activity resulted in 27 inspections, with no compliance issues.

OCTOBER: five patrols targeting RSA activity were completed, very little activity was observed.

Nine landing inspections along the coast found no infringements but noticeably poor crab landings.

Area 4 (Great Yarmouth to Harwich):

SEPTEMBER: During a number of patrols very little RSA or Bass Fishing activity was observed. Eight days of Officer time were spent in Southwold assisting with the fishing gear recycling project.

OCTOBER: Weather restricted activity but 9 shore patrols were completed, finding whiting were the main species caught by RSA fishers and very little bass was being caught.

| Enforcement metric | Number completed | | | |
|--|------------------|---------|-----------|----------|
| | Area 1 | Area 2 | Area 3 | Area 4 |
| Shore Patrols September: October | 0 1 | 8 3 | 19 5 | 15 9 |
| Port visits - (1 per month) September October | 0 1 | 8 3 | 66 24 | 31 18 |
| Catch inspections (landings observed) September October | 0 0 | 13 0 | 23 9 | 9 6 |
| Catch Inspections (Landings not observed) September October | 0 0 | 5 4 | 33 1 | 1 0 |
| Vehicle Inspections September October | 0 0 | 0 0 | 0 0 | 0 0 |
| Premises inspections September October | 0 0 | 0 0 | 1 0 | 4 2 |
| Enforcement actions/Offences September October | 0 0 | 0 0 | 0 0 | 0 0 |
| Intelligence reports submitted September October | 0 1 | 7 4 | 0 4 | 4 0 |
| Fishers engaged September October | 0 0 | 23 5 | 130 23 | 69 32 |
| | | | | |
| Vessel Patrols target of 90 per year (April -March) September October Achieved to date: 78 | 0 0 | 9 9 | 2 5 | 3 0 |
| Boardings September October | 0 0 | 0 0 | 0 0 | 0 0 |
| Gear Inspections September October | 0 0 | 0 0 | 0 1 | 0 0 |

Marine Protected Area monitoring

Monitoring of 'restricted areas' under the Marine Protected Areas Byelaw 2018 were conducted throughout the reporting period via direct observation on a risk-based approach. 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 |
| September | 7 monitoring occasions (areas visited 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10) | 1 monitoring occasion (areas visited: 24,) | No monitoring occasions | No monitoring occasions |
| October | 5 monitoring occasions (areas visited 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12) | 2 monitoring occasions (areas 24, 25, 27) | No monitoring occasions | No monitoring occasions |

Enforcement messages received September and October

Area 1 (Hail Sand Fort to Gibraltar Point)

- Information received of debris being washed up at Sutton on Sea as a result of the collision in the North Sea.

Area 2 (Wash and North Norfolk Coast to Brancaster)

- Info ascertained at a shrimp meeting included shrimp fishing had continued all year along the Lincolnshire Coast, productivity and prices were both favourable, which meant Officers would need to be mindful of checking landings.
- Report received of additional vessels targeting an un-surveyed area of cockles that was unlikely to uncover at low water. It was estimated up to 20 vessels might target this area. It was possible complaints may be received regarding the state of the bed as a result of the cockle fishing taking place..
- A request was received for a trial dredge fishery to target the previously mentioned cockles as the remaining stock was in deeper water making them difficult to access. It was advised this request would have to be part of a considered process and would not be possible during this year's fishery.

- Report received of cockle boats causing deep ruts in the sand within the Le Strange Cockle beds, as a result of running hard ahead whilst waiting for the tide to return, instead of sitting in neutral waiting for the water.

Area 3 (Brancaster to Great Yarmouth)

- Enquiry from a fisher how they could legally fish for and land bass. Advice on legislation applicable to MMO, EA, Broads Authority, and EIFCA was given. It was further questioned whether a commercial fishing vessel with correct bass authorisation could go inland using long lines, attached to the vessel and attended at all times could be used, or alternatively using rod and lines from that vessel. Advice was sought from the MMO.
- Reports of octopus getting into pots and taking meat out of lobsters, leaving the shell and a mess. Fisher suggested he would try attaching lights to his pots in an attempt to deter the octopus, but also expressed concern for the fishery if octopus came to the fishing grounds in greater numbers.
- One fisher reported he had made the decision to retire and would be selling his boat.

Area 4 (Great Yarmouth to Harwich)

- Following on from previous reports a message was received stating every fish have been taken from a fishers nets by seals.
- Report received of increased amounts of commercial trawling in the River Deben. It was thought the vessels were deploying single otter trawls from Felixstowe Ferry to Hemley – it was felt no significant change to the HRA was required.
- Skipper reported having to cut open his trawl net having retained around 2 tonne of mussels in it, which the vessel could not cope with. The Mussels in the river around Orford were impacting fishing effort due to the excessive weight.
- Suffolk Constabulary contacted EIFCA regarding the legality of digging for Lug and Rag works in the river Orwell. The Orwell estuary is a SSSI, AONB and ASSI

Fishing trends

Area 1 (Hail Sand Fort to Gibraltar Point)

SEPTEMBER: Shrimp activity appears to be concentrated along the Lincs coast, prices remained between £4 and £5 per kg.

Area 2 (Wash and North Norfolk Coast to Brancaster)

SEPTEMBER: Mainstay of activity focused on the Wash cockle fishery. Cockle meat yields were dropping, possibly due to the drop in temperature. Price £750 per tonne.

Area 3 (Brancaster to Great Yarmouth)

SEPTEMBER: Crab fishery remained poor, there were signs of gear being taken ashore for the winter. Among those pots still fishing at Caister and Sea Palling octopus had been seen in the pots. Species caught showed signs of changing with multiple catches of conger eels, spider crabs, bream and wrasse. The expected

arrival of cod and skate has yet to happen, even herring and bass numbers have not been great.

Area 4 (Great Yarmouth to Harwich)

SEPTEMBER: Unfavourable weather conditions have impeded fishing effort greatly. Efforts to make up lost earnings have encountered large numbers of dabs, with a very low value. Bass landings remained low, whilst skate and smoothhound remained plentiful in the area. Sole were constant but in small numbers, targeted by trawlers from Lowestoft.

Crab and lobster fishing was quiet, those crabs caught were of poor quality. RSA activity was resulting in a mixed bag, some large bass caught from the beaches, but in small numbers.

No fishing trend information was available for October.

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 19b

62nd Eastern Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority Meeting

10 December 2025

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 2025-26 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

This report describes progress against the business critical workstreams during September, October and November.

Each of the business critical workstreams set out in the 5-year Business Plan are considered below.

Shrimp management

Shrimp effort is monitored to ensure that it remains within agreed thresholds in accordance with the Shrimp Effort Limitation Scheme Policy. Shrimp fishing effort updates are provided on the Authority's website²⁰.

The Shrimp Permit Year runs from 1 August to 31 July, and an annual Total Allowable Effort (TAE) is set during September each year to achieve the agreed 5-year rolling average of 1,101 trips per year. Work to agree the TAE for the 2026/27 permit year was undertaken during the reporting period which included analysis of the effort data and dialogue with the Shrimp Working Group, whose views were sought on the proposed TAE and as to whether further measures were needed to manage effort in the context of the TAE.

As a consequence of several years of below average fishing effort, the maximum TAE of 1,746 trips was available to the fishery for 2026/27. Discussion with the Shrimp Working Group concluded that making the full TAE available was appropriate and that additional measures were not required at this time. The CEO was in agreement with the proposals and agreed the TAE in September.

In addition, shrimp permit conditions were reviewed during the reporting period, which included consultation with permit holders, and which is the subject of Action Item 15 of this meeting.

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

SWEEP samples were not collected from one station (the Wreck) during the reporting period due to poor weather. All EHO samples were collected during the reporting period. Samples collected at two sites during October were rejected (by Cefas) which required redeployment to obtain satisfactory samples. In both cases, the samples did not contain enough cockle meat to enable the required essays because of low meat yield in the cockles at the sites. SOPs have been revised to cater for the smaller cockles from the area to ensure sufficient samples are obtained in the future, and this proved successful during November with no samples being rejected.

E.coli levels within the Stubborn sand reduced to the extent that the annual 'time limited prohibition' was lifted during September. During November, an investigation state was activated in relation to the Dills cockle bed as a consequence of E.coli levels marginally exceeding the threshold for a Category B shellfish production area. It is noteworthy however that commercial cockle catch is heat treated in accordance with food safety provisions relating to Category C areas and as such, no disruption to fishing activity or food safety risks are likely as a consequence of the slightly elevated result.

Wash Cockle and Mussel management

The Wash cockle fishery continued to be prosecuted during the reporting period. Cockle fishermen identified a 'new' bed (not included within the Authority's annual cockle survey). Because the cockles from this area were not surveyed or included in

²⁰ [Shrimp Effort Updates - Eastern IFCA](#)

the original Total Allowable Catch (TAC) for the fishery, it was decided that the cockles harvested from the 'new' area will not contribute to the uptake of the TAC which has provided additional fishing opportunity for the fishery. The decision was taken in agreement with Natural England.

Annual intertidal mussel surveys were successfully completed during the reporting period which have identified that mussel biomass has increased once again resulting in the greatest biomass since the mid-1940s. The increase appears to be a consequence of cessation of die-off of 2-3 year old mussels which appears to have been affecting stocks since the mid-2000s. The reason that the die-off has reduced is not and it was observed once again on one mussel bed.

The Mussel Fishery was maintained as open during the annual mussel surveys to enhance opportunities for the fishery following feedback last year from fishing industry that this was facilitate establishing a market. Despite having sufficient stocks to enable mussel fisheries, uptake has been very low in relation to both the harvestable fishery (which targets adult mussel to sell directly to markets) and the relaying fishery (which targets juvenile mussel for aquaculture). The low uptake is reportedly due to poor market conditions which have been impacted by a prohibition on exporting live mussels from Category B waters into Europe and prohibitions on re-laying mussel stock outside of the Wash and North Norfolk Coast due to biosecurity risks associated with Chinese Mitten Crabs.

Management of Whelk Fisheries

Monthly monitoring of the whelk fishery has indicated that the Landings per Unit Effort in The Wash continued to increase over the reporting period. Risk remains in The Wash however on the basis that the overall trend within The Wash has been a downward decline in recent years.

A consultation regarding new permit conditions in for the fishery was undertaken during the reporting period, with proposals to introduce two new measures the subject of Action Item 14 of this meeting.

Assessments of unplanned fisheries

There were no 'unplanned fisheries' during the period.

Advice in relation to sustainable development

26 'consultations' were received during the period including Marine Licence Applications, and pre and post-application examinations. Of these 20 have been completed with advice provided.

A number of the consultations relate to windfarm and / or energy infrastructure including in relation to the Sizewell C nuclear power facility.

Monitoring district-wide Biosecurity risk

No new biosecurity risks were identified during the reporting period.

Financial Implications

None identified

Legal Implications

None identified

Appendices

Not applicable

Background Documents

5-Year business Plan 2025-30