

Southern Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority

Full Authority Meeting – 13th March 2025

A meeting of the Full Authority was held at 2pm on 13th March 2025 at Sleeping Bear Hotel, 32 High Street West, Dorchester, Dorset DT1UP

Present

Cllr. Paul Fuller	Isle of Wight Council (Chairman)
Cllr. Rob Hughes	Dorset Council (Vice Chairman)
Cllr. Crispin Goodall	BCP Council
Cllr. John Savage	Southampton Council
Cllr. Matthew Winnington	Portsmouth County Council
Cllr. Rod Cooper	Hampshire Council
Dr Antony Jensen	MMO Appointee
Dr Simon Cripps	MMO Appointee
Mr Richard Stride	MMO appointee
Ms Elisabeth Bussey-Jones	MMO Appointee
Mr Gary Wordsworth	MMO Appointee
Mr Colin Francis	MMO Appointee
Mr James Morgan	MMO Appointee (deputy)
Dr Richard Morgan	Natural England
Mr Stuart Kingston-Turner	Environmental Agency
Ms Pia Bateman	Chief Executive Officer (CEO)
Mr Sam Dell	Principal Deputy Chief Officer (PDCO)
Dr Sarah Birchenough	Deputy Chief Officer (DCO)
Ms Emily Condie	Senior IFCO
Mrs Jennifer Carr	Chartered Accountant
Ms Maria Chaplin	Office Manager (OM)

Mr Terry Langford was present in the public gallery.

Apologies

45. Apologies for absence were received from Mr Charlie Brock (MMO Appointee), Mrs Heidi Guille (MMO Appointee), Cllr Kate Wheller (Dorset Council) and Cllr Barry Dunning (Hampshire Council).

Declarations of Interest

46. There were no pecuniary or non-pecuniary interests declared.

Minutes

47. Members considered and agreed the Minutes of the meeting held on the 5th December 2024.

Chairman's Announcements

48. The Chairman discussed his recent attendance at the second Southern IFCA Community Drop-In Surgery held in Weymouth.

Sub-Committees

49. Members received minutes of the Executive Sub-Committee held on 3rd December 2024 and the Technical Advisory Sub-Committee held on 7th November 2024.

PROGRESS REPORTS

Chief Executive Officer Updates

50. The CEO confirmed that Defra project monies have now been received for current financial year, to include an additional and unexpected 10k from Defra to account for retrospective work undertaken in the realm of Aquaculture and national recreational angling. She discussed that no communication had been received to date regarding the 2025-2026 funding period, and that the position may be clearer following the spring statement.

She discussed that the vessel replacement programme for 25/26, as submitted by the AIFCA on behalf of all 10 IFCA's had recently been rejected by Defra. She reminded the Committee that Southern benefited from a similar pot in 22/23 following submission of Southern's FPV business case direct to Defra, which saw Defra subsequently fund 250k of FPV Vigilant. Defra confirmed that there were 16 proposals submitted for capital support, one being that submitted by the AIFCA, and that only those which were essential to the progress of the Government missions were approved for the FY25/26.

The CEO discussed the National IFCA: Conduct and Operations report, providing some context for Members less familiar with the process. The CEO discussed her thoughts on the report following attendance at numerous national meetings on the matter, concluding that when viewing the report via a Southern IFCA lens, the report was positive, when reflecting on Southern IFCA and the role we are delivering. She discussed that the report had been presented in a negative light, but that the nuts and bolts of it are constructive, anticipated and welcomed, recognising that IFCA's are public bodies, and should be held to account, constantly challenged and ensuring that our work remains progressive and appropriate. The CEO discussed that work was being undertaken at a National level to address some of the immediate ministerial actions and then in slower time, less urgent actions were being address under the headers of Accountability, Communication, Partnership Working and Authority Member Balance.

The CEO discussed a positive report which had been published by Newcastle University, which had been funded by the AIFCA which recognises the achievements and challenges in the IFCA delivery of regional co-management of England's inshore seas. The project interviewed over seventy IFCA staff and Authority Members during 2023/24 to capture their reflections on the IFCA's performance. The conclusions of this report included the need for more secure long-term funding, greater recognition of the IFCA's value and contribution by central government and the wider public.

The CEO discussed that the AIFCA were hosting a Parliamentary event next week with the Minister and coastal MPs. She provided an overview of the two hour event, which included a 30minute session where the AIFCA would be discussing some of their work with Newcastle University on inshore fisheries workshops, a presentation by Rob Clark discussing the role of the IFCA's, as well as a key note speech from the Minister for Environment Daniel Zeichner. The CEO informed Members that both she and the Chairman will be present, recognising the welcome opportunity for the IFCA's.

The CEO provided an update on the other National matters, to include the ongoing Sandeel dispute, the release of the UK National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan and updates regarding offshore windfarms, before turning to District matters.

The CEO discussed a positive meeting in Poole in January with representatives from the MMO & Defra Compliance & Enforcement teams, namely Pete Clark, the Director of Operations at the MMO, Sean Douglas, Head of Compliance & Assurance, MMO, Callumn Gough: Head of Offshore Operations, MMO and James Windebank, Defra C&E Lead. The meeting focussed on how the MMO are looking to build upon the positive work that they are achieving in partnership with Southern IFCA, to identify lessons learnt to deliver a similar model elsewhere. The meeting explored joint patrols, chartering arrangements and culminated in an opportunity for PDCO Dell to introduce the visitors to FPV Vigilant.

The CEO discussed that she and DCO Birchenough had met with two of our coastal MPs in recent weeks, building on Southern's collective focus to identify ways that we can be more engaging with our local MPs. She discussed a meeting with West Dorset MP Edward Morello on salmonid management in the District and its relevance to Dorset rivers, in addition to a meeting with Poole MP Neil Duncan-Jordan to discuss the value of aquaculture in Poole Harbour and its unique USP as a natural barrier which can mitigate the effects of poor water quality.

The CEO discussed that she and PDCO Dell were joined by The Chairman, Vice Chairman of The Authority and the TAC Chairman in Weymouth at a recent Community Drop-In Surgery. She was pleased to report the positives from this recent session which discussed matters including the Pot Fishing Byelaw, black seabream, FMPs, Lobster MCRS and tuna. The CEO recognised how positively the community responded to Dr A Jensen who commanded a captivated audience when discussing the science of whelk populations across the District. Fishers were inquisitive about the breadth of discussions at the TAC, with regard to the level of information considered across multiple scopes (science, social, economic etc) and how these discussions were informing management decisions, with fishers trying to identify how they could help with data collection and knowledge of the fisheries from the ground.

Those Members in attendance in Weymouth concurred how positive the Drop-In session was.

Elected Members from Hampshire and Portsmouth provided an update on the proposed Strategic Authority, which will encompass Hampshire Council, IOW Council, Portsmouth City Council and Southampton City Council. Cllr M Winnington asked how this will impact IFCA funding models moving forward.

Recommendation

51. That relevant Elected Members, led by the Chairman in the first instance, provide an update at the forthcoming June meeting on the progress of the Strategic Authority.

52. That the CEO discuss the implications of the Strategic Authority with Defra and report to Members at the forthcoming meeting in June 2025.

53. Budget Control Statement to September 2024

The CEO confirmed that the BCS captured the period 1st April to 31st Jan 2025, and that the accompanying paperwork provides a summary of major budget headers as well as more detailed notes to provide an understanding of all positive and negative variance equal to or greater than 1k.

The CEO highlighted that the Authority were in a positive position going into the fourth quarter with a surplus of 13.5k against budget.

She provided a summary of the Major Budget Headers, in that the positive variance captured under the Compliance & Enforcement Header (c.34k) represents c.8k of savings on FPV fuel and maintenance costs, directly related to the delay of FPV Vigilant entering service, in addition to the disposal of FPV Stella Barbara in May 2024. She explained that a c.10k payment for access to a National Intelligence System (CLUE) via the MMO has now been split to cover an upfront payment of 7.5k with the remaining spend anticipated 2025/26. Additionally, she explained that the combined costs for 2 x REM projects were anticipated to be realised later in the financial year (10k).

The CEO explained that the positive variance captured under the Research and Policy Header (c.22.5k) related to the outstanding surveys (c.2.5k) and research (c.6.5k) which was timetabled to be undertaken later in the financial year. She discussed that opportunities to undertake the NFB Drift Net Project (1.2k) will continue to be explored with industry in 2025/2026 and that there

has been no industry update on this project during the current financial year. The CEO discussed that some costs have been incurred for Byelaw advertisement (2.5k) to date, but none to date for associated legal support at this stage of the year (c.4k). The CEO discussed that c.3.5k was being held prior to transfer to the relevant reserve at end of year upon advice of external auditors; specifically, those costs associated with Southern IFCA's upfront payment to support the PHDP MSC Accreditation, on behalf of the permit holders who are repaying the amount over a 5 year term.

The CEO discussed the positive variance captured under the Business Services Header (c.47k); due to a reduction in staff salary and pension contributions (c.39k) as a result of one IFCO currently embarking on a sabbatical (ending Jan 2025), the resignation of an IFCO in April, as well as carrying over from the previous financial year a vacancy in the Compliance and Enforcement team. Costs associated with national staff training (c.2k) will be realised later in the financial year.

Finally, the CEO discussed the positive variance under the Capital Equipment Header (c.30k) reflecting an underspend relating to the delay in FPV Vigilant entering service.

54. 167 Agreement with Sussex IFCA.

PDCO Dell reminded Members that the Authority were seeking a continuation of our Section 167 agreement with Sussex IFCA, describing how the agreement under the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 delegates IFCA byelaw making powers to Sussex IFCA for an area of Chichester Harbour that is within the county of Hampshire. The PDCO reminded Members that the Authority had previously agreed the recommendation to renew the agreement.

By way of update, the PDCO confirmed that the agreement had now been ratified by the Minister, confirming that the 167 Agreement was now in place for another 10 years.

55. MPA Management Update

DCO Birchenough informed Members that the Bottom Towed Fishing Gear Byelaw 2023 had completed the 6th round of QA, this round being with Defra. DCO Birchenough outlined that the Byelaw was submitted to Defra by the MMO towards the end of 2024 and that this was the first time QA on a byelaw had been had directly with Defra. DCO Birchenough outlined that it is not known at this stage whether any further rounds of QA will be required.

DCO Birchenough outlined that the Pot Fishing Byelaw remains in the MMO QA process with a recent round of QA received from the MMO which is currently being worked through. DCO Birchenough outlined that changes to the MMO Byelaws Team means that the Byelaw has been reviewed by a new team which has increased the volume of comments to consider. At present there is no indication that the nature or intent of the byelaw will change through this process.

DCO Birchenough informed Members that the Shore Gathering Byelaw and Fishing for Cockles (Amendment) Byelaw had been sent to the MMO following the Authority decision at the December meeting. DCO Birchenough stated that the first round of QA has been received from the MMO.

DCO Birchenough provided an update on the black seabream workstream, outlining that a progress report had been delivered to the TAC at the February Meeting, providing the outcomes from a Member Working Group and stakeholder engagement. DCO Birchenough outlined that Drivers and Headline Objectives had been developed through the Working Group, underpinning the drafting of a Shared Principles Model and to provide a rationale for the exploration of additional management solutions. DCO Birchenough outlined that a stakeholder workshop had been attended by 22 representatives from across the commercial and recreational/charter sectors and between this and the Working Group, management options had been put forward which are now being reviewed by Officers. DCO Birchenough stated that a Member Working Group is scheduled to consider the progression of this workstream to the next stage.

DCO Birchenough informed Members that there were two new considerations which needed to be made in the byelaw making process. The first relates to calculations of costs to industry under an Impact Assessment which must consider profit costs rather than revenue costs with a methodology provided by Defra using the Seafish Fleet calculator. The second is the consideration of two additional policies and how these are being supported by the byelaw process and proposed byelaw legislation, the first is the Public Sector Equality Duty and the second is the Environmental Principles Policy Statement.

The Chairman thanked DCO Birchenough for her update and invited Mr Terry Lankford to address the Authority with a matter which related in part to MPA management.

Mr T Lankford presented to Southern IFCA matters included in his letter, addressed to the Members. This included a background of Mr Lankford's fishing career to date and his concerns with the reduction in the inshore fishing community in recent years. He discussed the impact that regulations were having on the fishing fleet and lack of opportunity for new entrants. He discussed the ban on pollack for commercial fishers, with recreational fishers not facing any restrictions. He discussed the Net Fishing Byelaw and the restrictions relating to salmon, and the Shore Gathering Byelaw which is restricting young fishers handgathering.

Mr R Stride agreed with Mr Lankford that fisheries management can reduce fishing opportunity, however, with specific regard to the Net Fishing Byelaw, discussed the legislative requirement upon Southern IFCA to ensure that salmonids, as a designated feature, receive protections. He further discussed the net fishing monitoring and control programme, which looks to work with fishers to ensure that the best available evidence remains central to all decision making.

Mr S Kingston-Turner reiterated that the byelaw process was indeed challenging, however feels that as an Authority, the Net Fishing Byelaw demonstrates a balanced approach, especially when reflecting on other net management arrangements in other IFCA districts.

Ms E Bussey-Jones reassured Mr Lankford that from her perspective, since joining the IFCA she has been amazed at how the fishing industry and the conservation representatives come together and work. She discussed the point raised about food security and reassured Mr Lankford that this is one of many subjects that the Authority consider when making decisions, both fishers and merchants are key considerations for the Authority.

The Chairman thanked Mr Lankford for attending the meeting.

ITEMS FOR DECISION

56. Annual Strategy 2024-2025

The CEO reminded Members that in accordance with the MaCAA we are required to submit to Defra and the SoS an AP which sets out Southern IFCA's main objectives and priorities for the year ahead.

The CEO then discussed the new and improved Annual Strategy that aims to be more user friendly, concise and accessible for all audiences. She discussed the introduction of ten strategic anchors, which aim to ensure that Southern's District work maintains direct alignment to wider contexts. This recognises previous discussions with Members who had asked for renewed consideration at a National level for the IFCA Success Criteria to be updated. The CEO had developed the Strategic Anchors in the absence of national updates, which aim to keep Southern focussed to the IFCA High Level Objectives, as set by Defra.

She discussed the introduction of an Organisational Anchor, describing the importance of supporting, developing and investing in our team. Recognising the central role of the team in delivering the IFCA's legislative functions.

The CEO described how, in combination, all of the components of the Strategy are drawn together to form delivery metrics, which also include consideration of the 8 Fisheries Objectives, as well as those relating to Defra's funding.

The CEO described the need to do is demonstrate our accountability to Defra, our 6 Local Authority's and our stakeholder community (across a variety of fisheries), discussing how unique and distinct these groups were. The key message being that Southern need to change their reporting lens to suit these differing audiences. This improvement to our reporting follows greater clarity in our strategic approach, as provide in the Annual Strategy and will feature in the pending Annual Report for the current financial year.

The CEO concluded by summarising the 25/26 horizon priorities identified for the two operational teams and invited both Deputies to discuss their respective Team Plans in subsequent agenda items.

The recommendation was agreed via mutual consent, with all Members in favour.

Resolved

57. That Members approve the Annual Strategy for dissemination to the Secretary of State and publication on Southern IFCA's website prior to 31st March 2025

58. Compliance & Enforcement Team Plan

PDCO Dell discussed how the Compliance and Enforcement Team (CET) are going to deliver against the Annual Strategy.

PDCO Dell referred Members to Section 3.1, which discussed the ongoing work relating to the introduction of MCA Work Boat Code Edition 3, discussing how the CET will continue to implement the code and align Southern IFCA operations to it, ensuring that the requirements of the new code are met at Southern IFCA, which include the introduction of additional training, as well as matters relating to working practice and health and safety.

PDCO Dell described how his team will continue to deliver their function in accordance with a fair, effective and proportionate enforcement regime via an Intelligence Led Risk Based Approach, ensuring our investigation processes are in line with statutory requirements.

He discussed working alongside the Research and Policy Team, maintaining a focus on community engagement, which he stressed is integral to how the CET maximise voluntary compliance and continue to build trust with our local coastal communities.

He also discussed the importance of joint working with other regulators, to include the MMO, Environment Agency, Cefas and local Harbour Authorities.

PDCO Dell discussed the continuation of the Southern IFCA Remote Electronic Monitoring and Artificial Intelligence pilot project, which will continue to rely on volunteers from the fishing industry to install REM on their vessels. He also discussed the second horizon priority, to continue to drive operational effectiveness in the CET via the identification and introduction of operational efficiencies. This includes the collaborative work with key partners on the development of Control and Enforcement Systems that support operational delivery and enhance the information operational officers can access on the coast.

Mr R Stride asked that the wording in Section 6.1 of the report be amended to reflect the IFCA Vision to achieve balance.

The recommendation was agreed via mutual consent, with all Members in favour.

Recommendation

59. That PDCO amends the CET Team Plan in accordance with the matter raised by M R Stride, by removing the word 'solely'.

Resolved

60. That Members approve the Compliance & Enforcement Team Plan for April 2025 to March 2026.

61. Research & Policy Team Plan

DCO Birchenough presented to Members the Research & Policy Team Plan for 2025-2026, outlining that the RPT Plan works under the Annual Strategic Plan 2025-2026 to describe how identified Horizon Priorities will be delivered as well as other workstreams. DCO Birchenough outlined that the RPT Plan details how RPT work is underpinned by Delivery Metrics and the golden thread which runs through all the strategic plans.

DCO Birchenough informed Members that there are two Horizon Priorities identified for the RPT, MCZ Management for Black Seabream and the Bottom Towed Fishing Gear Review Phase 2. DCO Birchenough provided an overview of each Horizon Priority and the proposed timelines for undertaking each workstream.

DCO Birchenough outlined that work will continue to support the Defra delivery of Fisheries Act objectives, working to support the Fisheries Management Plans process, marine consents and work related to Marine Protected Areas, in each case demonstrating how Southern IFCA is supporting Defra and utilising associated funding.

DCO Birchenough stated that reviews of management interventions would continue as required with timetabled reviews for permit byelaws and the conclusion of the Tranche 3 lease renewal under The Poole Harbour Fishery Order 2015. DCO Birchenough also referenced the Monitoring Programme covering all Southern IFCA survey work, data collection through permit byelaws and new projects such as the Whelk Landings Per Unit Effort Project to support FMP evidence gathering.

DCO Birchenough informed Members that, based on Member feedback regarding Working Groups, a series of dates had been proposed for the coming year which may or may not need to be utilised but provide an oversight of when Working Groups may occur to assist Members' planning.

DCO Birchenough outlined that the outcomes of the RPT Plan would be reported as part of the Annual Report for 2025-2026.

The recommendation was agreed via mutual consent, with all Members in favour.

Resolved

62. That Members approve the Research & Policy Team Plan for April 2025 to March 2026

63. Authority to Prosecute 2025 Update

PDCO Dell provided an update to Members on the updated Southern IFCA Authority to Prosecute, in the context of a clearly defined framework, which ensures that prosecutions are conducted fairly, consistently and in accordance with established legal principles.

PDCO Dell provided a background to this, in that the Authority has the statutory power under the Section 181 of the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 to bring proceedings. Following a recommendation by the Authority in June 2015, in accordance with Standing Orders Paragraph 80,

the Authority to Prosecute is delegated by the Authority to the Chief Executive Officer (or in his/her absence the Deputy Chief Officer) and the Chairman (or in his/her absence the Vice Chairman).

The Authority abides by clear principles set out in the Code for Crown Prosecutors, the two main principles of which are the Evidential Test, this test considers whether there is enough evidence to provide a realistic prospect of conviction and that the evidence can be used and is reliable.

The second test is the Public Interest Test, Southern IFCA considers public interest factors to determine whether to prosecute an offender or consider whether an alternative course of action may be suitable. Sanctions are set out in the report and reflect the Southern IFCA Compliance and Enforcement Framework. Further details on how we apply the Public Interest Test is included in the Framework and publicised on the Southern IFCA website.

The recommendation was agreed via mutual consent, with all Members in favour.

Resolved

64. That Members approve the 2025 updates to the Authority to Prosecute Framework

ITEMS FOR INFORMATION

Compliance and Enforcement Report

65. PDCO Dell provided an overview of work undertaken by Compliance and Enforcement Team during the period November 2024 to January 2025. The figures contained within the report are provided to Defra via the AIFCA as well as being published on the Southern IFCA website.

Southern IFCA Google Mapping Report

66. Senior IFCO Condie presented Members with progress on an ongoing project exploring the use of Google Maps to provide information on Southern IFCA regulations for Officers and stakeholders. Senior IFCO Condie played a video demonstrating the capabilities of the system and how it could be utilised to provide information on byelaw boundaries, MPA boundaries and other useful spatial information. Senior IFCO Condie outlined that the system was proving useful so far and was being trialled and used by Officers out on the ground, the capabilities will continue to be explored and developed with consideration given as to how to roll out this system for use by the stakeholder community. Members expressed an interest in accessing the system once available.

Behind the Scenes

67. A Behind the Scenes report was provided by all staff at Southern IFCA covering the period of January to March 2025. The Chairman thanked the officers for producing informative reports and noted the importance of Members being able to understand the full breadth of work which is undertaken.

Marine Licencing

68. DCO Birchenough delivered an update report on marine licence applications (MLAs) received by Southern IFCA during the last quarter, working under Marine Consents. DCO Birchenough outlined that 10 MLAs which required a response from Southern IFCA had been received between December 2024 and February 2025 with an additional 7 MLAs identified as not requiring a response. DCO Birchenough outlined that the report provided a summary of MLAs where a response was required and that, to date, the number of MLAs received during the financial year which were identified to require a comment by Southern IFCA was 200% higher than the previous financial year.

Sector Group Meetings

69. The Chairman invited Members to receive the minutes from recent meetings of The South Coast Fishermen's Council and the Dorset, Hampshire and Isle of Wight Marine Conservation Group.

AIFCA Annual Delivery Plan

70. The CEO introduced the AIFCA delivery plan received from Rob Clark, Chief Officer AIFCA, and invited Members to provide any feedback via email on the report that could be considered at the next AIFCA Forum.

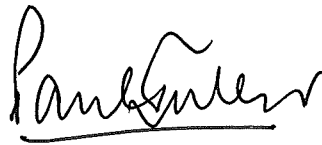
Date of Next Meeting

71. Members considered the date of the next meeting to be held on the Thursday 12th June 2025 at Winchester University, St Alphege Building, Room 202 Sparkford Road, Winchester SO22 4NR.

Resolved

72. The date of the meeting was confirmed.

The meeting concluded at 16:55.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Paul Gutter', with a horizontal line underneath.