

SOUTHERN INSHORE FISHERIES & CONSERVATION AUTHORITY

TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE – 6th February 2025

Minutes of the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), held in the meeting room at the Southern IFCA office in Poole at **14:00 on 6th February 2025**.

Present

Dr Antony Jensen	Chairman, MMO Appointee
Mr Richard Stride	Vice Chairman, MMO Appointee
Ms Elisabeth Bussey-Jones	MMO Appointee
Mrs Heidi Guille	MMO Appointee
Mr Colin Francis	MMO Appointee
Mr Neil Hornby	MMO Appointee
Dr Simon Cripps	MMO Appointee
Mr Stuart Kingston-Turner	Environment Agency
Ms Pia Bateman	Chief Executive Officer (CEO)

Principal Deputy Chief Officer (PDCO) Sam Dell, Deputy Chief Officer (DCO) Dr Sarah Birchenough, Senior Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Officer (SIFCO) Ms Emily Condie, IFCO's Ms Celie Mullen and Ms Hester Churchouse, Project Officers Ms Imogen Wright, Mr William Meredith-Davies, Ms Chelsea Perrins and Office Manager Ms Maria Chaplin were also present. Cllr Paul Fuller, Chairman of the Authority also attended.

Mr C Brock (MMO), Ms J Taylor (Natural England), Ms M Chavner (Natural England), Mr M Wells (Fisher) and Mr G Chittenden (MMO) joined the meeting from the virtual public gallery.

Apologies

18. Apologies for absence were received from Mr G Wordsworth (MMO) and Dr R Morgan (Natural England)

Declarations of interest

19. The following non-pecuniary interests were declared: Dr S Cripps (Agenda Item 7) and Mr R Stride (Agenda Item 6) and pecuniary interests were declared by Mr R Stride (Agenda Item 5b).

Minutes

20. Members considered the Minutes of the meeting held on the 7th November 2024 (Marked A) these were confirmed and signed.

PROGRESS REPORTS

21a. Emergent Updates

The CEO spoke to Members on a second draft of a Private Members Bill, timetabled for a second reading in Parliament in June 2025. The Bill is seeking to regulate Bottom Towed Fishing Gear in MPAs, the first Bill of this nature taken to Parliament was withdrawn prior to a second reading. The CEO informed Members that a Private Members Bill is not a product of Government Policy; however, it is important to be aware of the narrative which is created around it. The CEO outlined that the nature of the Bill is that BTFG should not occur in MPAs and that if the Bill were to go through there would be a conflict with the balance between conservation and socioeconomics underpinning the work of the IFCA.

The CEO reflected on the role of the IFCA's under the IFCA Vision and the relevance to this meeting's agenda referencing the first annual review of the Net Fishing Byelaw and the development of Tranche 3 of issuing leases under The Poole Harbour Fishery Order 2015.

The CEO informed Members of announcements which has been made at The Coastal Futures Conference in January, where Defra Minister Emma Hardy confirmed the Government's

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position on accelerating offshore wind growth whilst announcing new proposals to protect and enhance the marine environment alongside these energy solutions. The CEO outlined that this meant the Government would be advancing new MPAs and extending existing MPAs to compensate impacts of windfarm developments within MPAs, there is no indication as to whether this would be inshore or offshore, or any timelines provided at this stage. The CEO outlined that the MP stated it was recognised that there were increasing spatial tensions in the marine environment and that it was unlikely that the fishing sector wouldn't be impacted but recognised the importance of the industry for food security. The CEO emphasised that it is a critical time for all sectors to understand the direction of Government policy.

The CEO informed Members that there had also been an announcement about a Defra led review of the MPA network, both inshore and offshore, IFCAs have been approached to take part in the review. The CEO outlined that the EFRA select committee has been set up to conduct an inquiry into fisheries and environmental management, and is currently looking at the challenges that the fishing industry are facing and inviting those sectors to provide evidence on impacts of spatial squeeze and implementation of fisheries management, particularly post-Brexit, providing an opportunity for industry to engage with MPs. The process will involve public enquiries and calls for evidence with MPs having a presence on the coast. The outcomes of the report will involve formal recommendations to Government, with Defra, as the relevant department, required to respond to those recommendations.

Dr S Cripps informed Members that a takeaway from the Coastal Futures Conference was that conservation management was about spatial management but it was indicated that environmental health is still declining therefore spatial management may not be achieving the right benefits, discussing the difference between designation and protection and the achievements in Poole Harbour in, by meeting strict standards, having a dredge fishery which can operate within an MPA. Dr S Cripps informed Members that sessions on fisheries were limited and IFCAs were not mentioned in discussion. Members discussed an interest in discussing these matters further at a later date.

The CEO informed Members that the IFCA Conduct and Operations Report had been released, covering the period from 2018-2022, outlining how IFCAs nationally are delivering their statutory functions. The CEO informed Members that Mr Rob Clark, as the CEO of AIFCA, is overseeing the IFCA consideration of this report. The CEO provided detail of some points covered in the report and outlined that the Authority would be fully appraised of the content and implications of the report at the March Authority meeting.

DCO Birchenough informed Members that Southern IFCA had been notified by Natural England that, in accordance with the conservation regulations, the Secretary of State for Defra has secured the provision of new compensatory measures considered necessary to offset potential adverse effects on the River Itchen SAC and to maintain the overall coherence of the National Site Network. DCO Birchenough outlined that this relates to the lower Itchen drought order project by Southern Water which forms part of their strategy for 2025 to 2035, extending the practice of abstraction to 2035, despite an initial commitment to phase out the practice by 2027. DCO Birchenough outlined the risks posed by abstraction and the associated impacts on migratory species.

DCO Birchenough outlined that the River Meon had been designated as compensatory habitat for Atlantic salmon for the River Itchen SAC, providing compensatory measures under The National Planning Policy Framework on the basis of imperative reasons of overriding public interest. DCO Birchenough informed Members that there is a requirement under the policy framework that compensatory habitat must be given the same protection as the relevant designated site.

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DCO Birchenough stated to Members that through the Southern IFCA's work on the Net Fishing Byelaw, it was identified that the River Meon supported Atlantic salmon but that it is not a Principal Salmon River. DCO Birchenough outlined that the River Meon is currently a Net Prohibition Area under the Net Fishing Byelaw and therefore there is existing protection in place for the compensatory habitat. DCO Birchenough outlined that consideration should now be given to the appropriate management of the River Itchen based on the intention to continue abstraction, effectively making the river unsuitable for Atlantic salmon through an identified adverse impact. DCO Birchenough outlined that Officers intend to explore this issue further, specifically with regard to management under the Net Fishing Byelaw to ensure that fishers are not being disproportionately managed in light of this new development and in consideration of the balance under the IFCA's duties, which may take into account socio-economic factors in addition to conservation considerations. DCO Birchenough informed Members that Officers would report back to the Authority on this matter at the appropriate point.

Dr A Jensen queried that if the area of the River Meon and the River Itchen are Net Prohibition Areas under the Net Fishing Byelaw then is there any action for the IFCA to take. DCO Birchenough provided clarity on the implication for the status of the River Itchen SAC by virtue of the need for compensatory habitat. The CEO outlined that this is proposed to be explored further because, at present, net fishing is prohibited in the River Itchen SAC, which is then being used for other purposes which mean that Atlantic Salmon are not being protected, therefore, to ensure that the fishing community is being fairly treated the implications of this need to be explored.

Mr S Kingston-Turner stated that the introduction of compensatory habitat does not mean that Atlantic salmon will not be present in the River Itchen SAC and that they will still be present but at a higher level of risk than when the Net Fishing Byelaw was made. Ms E Bussey-Jones stated that this may increase the rationale for not allowing net fishing in this area.

Dr A Jensen stated that from an ecological perspective, Atlantic Salmon would still use the River Itchen. Dr S Cripps stated that the main aim of a compensatory habitat is to protect the area being impacted and that work should be being done on the River Itchen to protect that area as the Atlantic salmon stocks are at risk of disappearing. DCO Birchenough outlined the process of determining compensatory habitat as being required, when the risk cannot be avoided or mitigated.

The CEO informed Members that there were four objectives to the development of the Net Fishing Byelaw, two of which related to migratory species and designations. The CEO outlined that there is a need to relook at the model used to determine each type of management area under the Byelaw and ensure that there is consistency in consideration of this change which now represents best available evidence. The CEO outlined that the outcome of this work is unknown, and it is a complex landscape but there is a need to be adaptive in response to a change in best available evidence.

Mr S Kingston-Turner informed Members that the issue needs careful consideration, as if Atlantic salmon are prevented from entering the River Itchen at a time of low flow, then the fish will be more vulnerable in the area where they hold up before being able to enter the river. Mr S Kingston-Turner outlined that the abstraction will not take place in the areas of the river where the fish are spawning and that the risk is not the fish not being there but that the lower flows may hold fish in another area of the Solent before they be in a position to migrate into the River Itchen.

Members discussed the process for designating compensatory habitat and environmental mitigation. Dr A Jensen suggested to Members that a Working Group may be required at the appropriate time to progress any required work.

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Dr R Stride queried whether the IFCA could respond to the designation of the compensatory habitat. Ms E Bussey-Jones asked whether the IFCA had been given the opportunity to comment during the process. DCO Birchenough outlined that the IFCA had not been invited to comment during the process and was unable to comment at this stage, the designation of compensatory habitat, having been agreed by the Secretary of State, now being in place.

21b. Black Seabream: Progress Update

DCO Birchenough provided Members with an update on the development of management for black seabream in Dorset MCZs, detailing outputs from a Member Working Group in August 2024 and a Stakeholder Workshop in October 2024. DCO Birchenough outlined that the Working Group had considered the Drivers and Headline Objectives for the exploration of a Shared Principles Model to supplement spatial protections already in existence across the three MCZs and that Members had discussed management options to be taken forward to the stakeholder community for further discussion.

DCO Birchenough outlined that the Stakeholder Workshop was attended by representatives from both the commercial and recreational/charter sectors, covering all relevant gear types, with 35 industry representatives in total having fed into the management development process to date. DCO Birchenough informed Members that through the Workshop, attendees were provided a contextual underpinning framed around the Drivers and Headline Objectives and were invited to comment on management options and put forward any additional industry informed management options.

DCO Birchenough informed Members that a series of suggested management options from both the Working Group and Stakeholder Workshop were now being reviewed by Officers for plausibility and feasibility checking with all material considerations, encompassing cross checking of proposals with the MCZ Conservation Objectives, Headlines Objectives, compliance and enforcement considerations, overarching Policy directives and the progression of the Seabreams FMP.

DCO Birchenough outlined that the next stage was to hold a Member Working Group with the intention of drafting a final version of Shared Principles, informed by the Officers feasibility exercise, the final draft Shared Principles would then be taken back to the Stakeholder Community for consideration, and Formal Advice would be sought from Natural England on any required assessments, prior to final agreement of a Shared Principles Model by the TAC.

Dr A Jensen thanked Officers for facilitating the Stakeholder Workshop and putting in a large amount of preparatory work which led to a positive meeting with a large amount of similarity between suggested management options between different stakeholder groups.

Ms E Bussey-Jones acknowledged the positive benefits of the stakeholder engagement. Ms E Bussey-Jones stated that she maintains that the IFCA cannot take into account socio-economic factors within the MCZs but suggested that this wouldn't impact what the IFCA is aiming to achieve due to the need to consider proportionality. Ms E Bussey-Jones stated that she had been reviewing Government debate on the wording of S154 of the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 and that the IFCA needs to think about how any measures are furthering Conservation Objectives. Ms E Bussey-Jones queried the process for seeking Formal Advice from Natural England and the order in which this advice is sought in relation to developing measures.

The CEO stated that in 2021 recommendations were made to Natural England by Southern IFCA and Sussex IFCA, primarily driven by Sussex IFCA's work in the Kingmere MCZ, on the IFCA understanding of requirements for management under legal duties. A response was received relevant to the Kingmere MCZ which provided an understanding of NE's position

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noting that the preference would be for a whole site closure. The CEO outlined that common practice across all IFCAs is to seek specific Formal Advice from NE on management proposals as an efficient way of working, and NE have the ability to approach the IFCA to discuss this way of working. The CEO further outlined that NE would be providing some generic advice ahead of the next Member Working Group. Any advice received would form one material consideration for the development of measures. The CEO outlined that it is correct that socioeconomics cannot be taken into account when considering the delivery of duties under S154 of MaCAA, however once these duties have been satisfied, additional management can be considered to achieve the Headline Objectives and Drivers for the review if the Authority so wish under the wider IFCA duties.

Mrs E Bussey-Jones asked if spatial closures are still being considered. The CEO stated that spatial management had been put forward as a management option by Authority Members and that it was not a preferred measure from stakeholder feedback. The CEO outlined that all measures are being considered, through the current process. In all cases all relevant material considerations need to be taken into account.

Dr Jensen informed Members that the abundance of black seabream has changed since the point at which the MCZs were designated and although much of the evidence is anecdotal, there is a consensus that the population has increased, an important context when considering flexibility in management approaches. Dr Jensen also informed Members that the results of the evidence gathering project run by the University of Plymouth were being presented next week and that this would also help assist understandings of black seabream to help the Authority discussion.

Mrs H Guille queried whether there had been any specific stakeholder feedback on a maximum landing size as this is where there seemed to be a difference in opinion between Authority and stakeholder proposed measures. DCO Birchenough outlined that MaxCRS was a measure which is generally less favoured by industry, which has been noted through engagement through the FMP process as well. DCO Birchenough informed Members that as part of the feasibility work being undertaken by Officers on proposed measures consideration was being given to the use of MaxCRS against the characteristics of black seabream as protandrous hermaphrodites and the associated risk of targeting one sex if sizes are not appropriately set. Mrs H Guille asked whether there was an evidence base for the size at which black seabream change sex, DCO Birchenough informed Members that there was peer-reviewed literature on this topic which was being used in the Officers review.

The CEO stated that through the Officers review there may be additional recommendations on measures brought forward at the next stage based on the full review of all available literature and evidence on black seabream.

21c. The Poole Harbour Fishery Order 2015: Tranche 3 Leases 2025-2030

PO William Meredith-Davies provided Members with a background to Southern IFCA's management of aquaculture activity in Poole Harbour and outlined progress in working towards implementing Tranche 3 of the issuing of leases under The Poole Harbour Fishery Order 2015 which will run from 1st July 2025 to 30th June 2030.

PO Meredith-Davies informed Members that a lease bed expansion programme for Tranche 3 is not being explored, following analysis of areas under The Order where lease ground is not currently located taking into account the designation of Poole Harbour as an MPA and all relevant other factors including location of wild fisheries, other Harbour activities, navigation, other management measures and suitability of grounds for aquaculture. PO Meredith-Davies outlined that the position on the suitability of a lease bed expansion programme would be

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reviewed in line with Tranche 4 lease bed allocation in 2030 and that the footprint of lease beds for Tranche 3 will remain as under Tranche 2.

PO Meredith-Davies outlined that current lease holders under Tranche 2 (2020-2025) had been invited to submit an Expression of Interest for a lease under Tranche 3 for the same lease beds for which a lease was currently held. All current leaseholders responded and expressed an interest in applying for a lease under Tranche 3. PO Meredith-Davies outlined that current lease holders were invited to apply for a Tranche 3 lease in January and the application period is currently ongoing. As part of the application, lease holders are required to submit a Business Plan for Tranche 3 and an End of Year Lease Report for Tranche 2, with template documents provided to assist applicants in providing the required level of information.

PO Meredith-Davies outlined that key documents for management of aquaculture under The Order were also currently being reviewed and updated as needed, including the Poole Harbour Several Order 2015 Management Plan, the Biosecurity Plan and the HRA for the issuing of leases. PO Meredith-Davies outlined that information provided through the application process would feed into the development of these documents. Following the application period, Members would be invited to a Working Group if required to review submitted documentation and Formal Advice would be sought from Natural England on the HRA. Final documents will be provided to Members at the May TAC meeting.

Mrs H Guille queried what criteria the Business Plans and End of Year Lease Reports are reviewed against and how this would relate to Members reviewing these documents through a Working Group.

DCO Birchenough stated that Business Plans would be reviewed to ensure that adequate information had been provided to fully understand intended operations over the 5-year period and that those operations can be appropriately considered in the HRA to ensure compatibility with site integrity for the Poole Harbour SPA, SSSI and Ramsar Site and with biosecurity measures. DCO Birchenough outlined that operations under The Order are well established and there are currently no proposals for activities to differ to those which are currently undertaken which allows an existing understanding of those operations in relation to the framework of the Harbour. DCO Birchenough outlined that there may be aspects of Tranche 2 Business Plans which have not been able to be achieved, however through annual monitoring and continued engagement over Tranche 2 there is confidence that all operations have been within the parameters required.

Mrs H Guille asked about the transparency of the evaluation process and decision points. The CEO outlined that during the period of The Order, since 2015, there have been a number of improvements to the provision of information through both Business Plans and the development of management documents by Southern IFCA which provide that clarity. The CEO stated that the work carried out by PO Meredith-Davies has been to further improve this process and the required information to inform any decisions will be clearly presented to the Authority.

Dr S Cripps outlined his support for aquaculture as a low impact, sustainable activity and queried what the limiting factor was in not expanding lease beds under Tranche 3. DCO Birchenough outlined that there were multiple factors considered, with a primary focus on the need to meet legal duties and ensure site integrity within the designated site of Poole Harbour as an SPA, SSSI and Ramsar site, with associated constraints on lease bed placement over or in proximity to designated features. DCO Birchenough outlined that other Harbour activities also constrain the potential location of lease beds with extensive conversations taking place with Poole Harbour Commissioners since the development of The Order to mitigate any inappropriate overlap. DCO Birchenough also informed Members that additional management

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had been introduced since Tranche 2, for example the Net Fishing Byelaw and associated prohibited areas where it was necessary to identify the appropriateness of any aquaculture activity occurring in those areas and potential risks to the rationale for prohibitions on other fishing activities. DCO Birchenough stated that there were also considerations related to aquaculture operations and the carrying capacity of the Harbour.

Mr N Hornby queried whether there were any efficiencies that could be made in the process as there is no current proposed changes from existing activity to both reduce resource burden and provide certainty to lease holders on business continuity over a shorter timeframe. DCO Birchenough outlined that under the framework of The Order there is a requirement for a five-year lease renewal cycle which the lease holders have been aware of since The Order was introduced. DCO Birchenough outlined efficiencies in the application process which had been implemented for Tranche 3 by PO Meredith-Davies, and how further efficiencies in annual processes associated with management of The Order were also being explored.

Mr N Hornby queried whether a Working Group was required if there were no significant changes being proposed. DCO Birchenough stated that the Working Group had been suggested for Members to be informed that this is a stage in the process that can be used if required, and in the event that Business Plans need to be reviewed in full a Working Group is a non-public meeting where information not able to be made publicly available can be discussed. DCO Birchenough outlined that a determination would be made, following the closure of the application period, whether there were any significant changes proposed within Business Plans and a decision on the need for a Working Group would be made accordingly and communicated to Members.

21d. Solent Dredge Permit Fishery 2024/2025

IFCO Churchouse updated Members on the 2024/25 season under The Solent Dredge Permit Byelaw to date, providing detail on the number of vessels currently targeting each of the main target species, main areas fished and progress on fishers providing catch data for King scallop at a greater spatial resolution within Bivalve Management Area 3, as the area where the largest quantity of King scallop is harvested, to enable better alignment between catch and survey data.

IFCO Churchouse outlined that 23 vessels targeted King scallop in the month of November, with 19 vessels working on a more continuous basis, and for December, 19 boats targeted King scallop with 14 on a continuous basis. IFCO Churchouse stated that almost all of the King scallop harvested in November and December had been fished from BMA 3 with Osbourne Bay and Ryde preferred fishing areas. In November and December 2024, landings of King scallop were lower than the same months in the previous season. For Manila clam, IFCO Churchouse reported an increase in landings compared to the previous season in both November and December, with a focus of activity in Southampton Water. IFCO Churchouse outlined that 5 of the Solent Dredge Permits which had been awarded were yet to be taken out by the applicants.

PDCO Dell provided Members with compliance statistics for the current season, outlining that 23 patrols had been conducted from 1st November to 31st January, 13 of which were sea patrols on FPV Vigilant and 10 shore patrols. A joint patrol had also been carried out with the MMO. PDCO Dell informed Members that Officers had carried out 64 inspections, 47 as vessel boardings and 17 as landing inspections, premises involved in the purchase of catch from the fishery had also been inspected. PDCO Dell provided detail by species with 26 inspections of Manila clam and 38 inspections of King scallop. PDCO Dell outlined that bottom towed fishing gear incursions around the closed area at Calshot had been an identified risk and 10 drone flights had been carried out over that area. PDCO Dell informed Members that 8 infringements had been detected which had resulted in 6 verbal warnings and 2 Official Written Warnings,

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work was also completed to follow up on late catch return submissions and enforcement action taken as needed.

DCO Birchenough informed Members that compared to the applications for a Solent Dredge Permit received for the 2024/25 season which was 54, 51 applicants had been ineligible, and 47 were taken out by applicants for the start of the season. DCO Birchenough outlined that there remain five permits which have not yet been taken out by applicants and some permits which have been taken out but not used. DCO Birchenough stated that industry had voiced concerns over the number of permit applications for this season and that the current information indicated that the level of fishing effort was not seeing the number of permits used at capacity.

Dr S Cripps queried whether the five permits which had not yet been taken out could be drawn back to reduce effort. DCO Birchenough outlined that those permits have been awarded to eligible applicants and cannot be retracted, those applicants have the option to take out their permit at any point during the season.

Mr S Kingston-Turner queried how long successful applicants have to take out their permit. DCO Birchenough outlined that permits are valid until 31st October 2025 and, outside of any spatial prohibitions, there are areas where fishing could take place until the permit season ends.

Dr S Cripps asked for a higher-level overview of catch trends to date. IFCO Churchouse summarised for Members that Manila clam catches were increased on the previous two seasons but that there are more vessels fishing for this target species this season to date, King scallop catches are reduced from the previous season (2023/24) with the catch per unit effort being slightly above the 2021/22 and 2022/23 seasons.

ITEMS FOR DECISION

22. Net Fishing Byelaw: Year 1 Review

Senior IFCO Condie presented Members with an overview of management under the Net Fishing Byelaw and the process by which the Authority carried out the first annual review of flexible permit conditions, permit fees and limitations on the number of permits.

Senior IFCO Condie outlined available evidence informing the annual review, including outputs from the On-Site Monitoring Programme and a review of Indicators of Salmonid Health Over Time under the NFB Monitoring and Control Plan. Senior IFCO Condie confirmed that no Threshold Trigger Levels had been reached under the On-Site Monitoring Programme under any of the 5 monitoring components during Year 1.

Senior IFCO Condie provided Members with an update on additional evidence gathering including that a proposed research project to improve understandings of potential interactions between drift nets and salmonids in a non-targeted fishery had not been able to go ahead due to unresolvable factors relating to the collection of evidence. Senior IFCO Condie outlined that the most appropriate method of approaching any further evidence collection would continue to be explored in Year 2.

Senior IFCO Condie outlined how Net Permit Holders had been consulted through the Year 1 annual review, and provided Members with the review outcomes, that it is proposed that no changes are made to flexible Permit Conditions, Permit fees or the number of Permits for Year 2. Senior IFCO Condie also outlined that Atlantic salmon run data had been updated in the Monitoring and Control Plan which resulted in updates to the Threshold Trigger Levels for salmonid interactions and that the Inshore Netting Review: Process, Tools & Intentions 2024 document had been updated to reflect access criteria for Year 2.

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Senior IFCO Condie informed Members that Year 2 Net Permits would be issued from 1st March 2025 to 31st March 2026 and in subsequent years it is the intention that the permit validity period will align with the financial year. Following a TAC decision, Net Permit Holders will be informed of the outcome of the review and Officers will continue to monitor the fishery under the Monitoring and Control Plan in Year 2.

Dr S Cripps queried whether the information provided under emerging updates on compensatory habitat affects this review. DCO Birchenough outlined that the review is specific to permit conditions, permit fees and limitations on the number of permits which is not relevant to the consideration of the compensatory habitat matter at this time.

Dr S Cripps queried the rationale for a reduction in the salmonid interaction threshold trigger levels. Senior IFCO Condie outlined that the trigger levels are calculated using the most recent three years of salmonid run data compiled by the EA. The current trigger levels are calculated using run data from 2021-2023 as the most recent best available data.

Mr R Stride queried the sub-committees mentioned in the control mechanism process for the triggering of a Threshold Trigger Level. DCO Birchenough confirmed that the Permit Byelaw Sub-Committee and the Evidence Review Sub-Committee referred to the same sub-committee.

Mr R Stride also queried why data from the catch app had not yet been able to be integrated into monitoring. DCO Birchenough informed Members that there was an ongoing process of establishing protocols for data sharing between relevant organisations.

Mr R Stride queried the use of adult run data to inform the Threshold Trigger Levels and that by averaging three years' data, in the event that there was a year when the run data was poor this would influence the three-year average, which, if followed by a more positive run year may result in a trigger level being reached because there is an increased number of fish but the trigger level remains low based on the average including a poor year. Mr R Stride queried whether, in the event that a trigger was reached, when reviewing associated evidence would data from that current year's run be available.

DCO Birchenough outlined that run data is published annually and is currently available up to 2023 as the most recent dataset, the run data is not live and would not be available for the current year in which the fishery is operating. Mr S Kingston-Turner informed Members that the data has to be quality assured before being published to identify the difference between different species using counters.

Dr A Jensen commented that the use of a three-year average will help smooth peaks and troughs in the data.

The CEO read out to Members two points raised by Dr Richard Morgan on this agenda item, sent by email as he was unable to attend the meeting.

The first point related to clarification on the indicators of salmonid health over time. DCO Birchenough outlined that the data used is detailed in the Monitoring and Control Plan, and comprises a number of different reports. An annex is included to the Monitoring and Control Plan which provides detail on each component of the indicators, where the data has been taken from and what type of data is used.

The second point related to there being no observer patrols conducted during Year 1 due to low levels of activity in the fishery and that it would be beneficial in Year 2, if low levels of

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activity continued, to try and undertake some observer patrols to provide a source of objective evidence to inform the Year 2 annual review.

DCO Birchenough responded that Officers would continue to explore how an observer program could be delivered over Year 2, and that the very low levels of activity in Net Permit Areas in Year 1 had meant there was little to no activity to observe which was confirmed by continued engagement with Net Permit Holders during Year 1. DCO Birchenough outlined that this engagement would continue through Year 2.

Mrs H Guille queried whether, as the identification of a Threshold Trigger Level being reached is based on Net Permit Holders reporting interactions or mortality and a level of formal monitoring for 5% of trips, there was a sufficient margin of error to mitigate the risk of not detecting that a trigger had been reached.

DCO Birchenough responded that based on the fact that Net Permit Holders did submit reports of interactions during Year 1 that the requirement to report is being adhered to and this, combined with having a variety of measures in combination to identify a trigger level being reached provides confidence that this would be identified.

Mr S Kingston-Turner asked whether there was a breakdown of the number of patrols which had been carried out in relation to the number of known fishing trips which took place and the circumstances under which those patrols had been carried out.

PDCO Dell responded that the number of fishing trips is difficult to quantify as there is no Southern IFCA specific reporting requirement but that the future introduction of IVMS would assist with this. PDCO Dell stated that patrols were aiming to target key times of day and tides in relation to net fishing and reminded Members that under the Monitoring and Control Plan there is a joint obligation with the Environment Agency to undertake this patrol work.

Dr S Cripps stated that it was important that observer trips were carried out to provide independent data to that submitted by fishers given the importance of Atlantic salmon as a species and current risks to populations.

PDCO Dell discussed challenges which existed in relation to carrying out observer trips including significant health and safety considerations but that alternatives were also being explored including Remote Electronic Monitoring and IVMS which would provide more robust monitoring tools. PDCO Dell informed Members that Southern IFCA had historically worked with and continued to work with the EA to share intelligence and target illegal fishing for salmonids.

Mr S Kingston-Turner commented that the EA would not put their staff on the fishing vessels operating under the NFB for observer trips due to health and safety considerations and stated that other methods were being looked at including drone use.

Dr S Cripps queried that, in considering the emerging information on the designation of compensatory habitat to protect Atlantic salmon, should the Authority not also be introducing additional management to support Atlantic salmon in those areas.

The CEO outlined that there is a need to develop a full understanding of the IFCA's legal duties in relation to compensatory habitat and how these relate to our understood duties in relation to designated sites and to other factors such as socio-economic considerations.

DCO Birchenough outlined that the River Itchen is already afforded the highest level of protection under the Net Fishing Byelaw as a Net Prohibition Area and that this included the

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area at the entrance to both rivers where fish are likely to congregate. DCO Birchenough outlined that the neighbouring part of the estuary was then defined as a Net Permit Area, linked to the Monitoring and Control Plan, and thus the change in trigger levels associated with changes in Atlantic salmon run data which is reviewed on an annual basis. DCO Birchenough stated that the combination of measures provided robust management which takes account of the changing Atlantic salmon population.

Mr S Kingston-Turner queried whether Net Permit Holders could be asked to provide information on the number of trips undertaken each year. DCO Birchenough responded that this would require a permit condition stating that the data needs to be provided or could be explored on a voluntary basis. DCO Birchenough outlined that, to date, this had not been explored to avoid duplication of reporting with the Catch App.

Ms J Taylor from Natural England stated that if Members required any further information about compensatory habitat then Graham Horton and Aldous Rees are leading on this work.

Ms J Taylor informed Members that Natural England are currently undertaking a condition assessment of the River Itchen SAC which should be published in 2025.

The recommendations were agreed by general consent, all Members voted in favour.

Resolved

23. That Members agree that no changes are required to be made to the flexible permit conditions, permit fees or limitations on the number of permits for Year 2.

24. That Members note the required updates to the 'Inshore Netting Review: Process, Tools & Intentions 2024' Policy document relevant to 'Access Criteria' and the 'Net Permit Area Monitoring and Control Plan'.

25. Poole Harbour Dredge Permit Fishery: Review of Permit Conditions

IFCO Mullen presented to Members the outcomes of the review of flexible permit conditions under the Poole Harbour Dredge Permit Byelaw (PHDPB), outlining that the review was carried out at the point of three years since the last review in line with the requirements set out in the PHDPB and in response to reports received during the 2024/25 season from Permit Holders indicating a decline in Manila clam catches. IFCO Mullen outlined that, following in-season analysis of catch data, the Authority had recommended that, through a review, a program of action be developed to allow the Authority to be proactive in the management of the fishery.

IFCO Mullen outlined that through the review there had been consultation with Permit Holders, with a summary of outputs annexed to the report, and a Working Group, with recommendations from Members having been incorporated into the review outcomes.

IFCO Mullen informed Members that there were two main sources of evidence informing understandings of stocks of Manila clam in the fishery, annual Poole Harbour Bivalve Survey data providing Catch Per Unit Effort (CPUE) for the fishery and monthly catch return data provided by Permit Holders, providing Landings Per Unit Effort (LPUE).

IFCO Mullen detailed the outcomes of the review as the development of a Monitoring and Control Plan which includes an On-Site Monitoring Programme for CPUE and LPUE data with defined Threshold Trigger Levels (TTLs), Recovery Thresholds (RTs) and associated control mechanisms to initiate a review of best available evidence in determining if any additional

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management measures are required to support a sustainable Manila clam fishery. IFCO Mullen outlined how the TLLs and RTs had been set and that in the event that either TTL is reached, the May TAC meeting would form the decision point for any changes to management through the control mechanism. IFCO Mullen outlined that evidence gathered through the review on the suitability of potential permit condition changes would be presented to the Authority in the event that a decision on changes to management is required.

IFCO Mullen outlined that the Monitoring and Control Plan also contains an SPA Monitoring Programme to inform any reviews of the HRA for the fishery, with monitoring variables associated with the condition of the SPA and the operations of the fishery. IFCO Mullen informed Members that the HRA for the fishery had been updated for the 2025/26 season and continued to propose that 45 permits be issued in line with current effort in the fishery since its inception in 2015. The HRA will move from being subject to an annual review to a review based on the activation of a monitoring variable under the Monitoring and Control Plan.

IFCO Mullen outlined that the Monitoring and Control Plan also contained an In-Season Monitoring Programme to monitor LPUE and CPUE during the fishing season and to support potential Authority decisions under the On-Site Monitoring Programme, but that In-Season monitoring variables are not connected to a trigger point or control mechanism. IFCO Mullen stated that administrative changes had also been made to Permit Condition 2.1 and the PHDPB Access Policy to facilitate the future use of the Southern IFCA Online Permitting System.

IFCO Mullen outlined that, if Members agree the recommendations, the application process for 2025/26 permits will commence in April and, subject to the outcomes of the 2025 Poole Harbour Bivalve survey and any TTL reached under the On-Site Monitoring Programme, the relevant Control Mechanism will be activated as needed.

Dr S Cripps commented that this work represents a good example of sustainable fisheries management with harvest control rules sitting within a harvest strategy, which aligns with the aims of the standard of the MSC certification.

Mrs H Guille queried whether, in the event that a control mechanism is activated, potential management actions to reduce effort had been considered and assigned priority, noting for example that temporal measures are likely to be more useful than spatial in effort reduction.

IFCO Mullen responded that potential changes to management were explored through the review including seeking input from Permit Holders through the consultation. The Officers reviewed these options in terms of feasibility, impact and Permit Holder feedback and have identified a prioritised list of potential actions.

Mrs H Guille asked if it was known how much recovery would be required to bring stock levels back above an appropriate level to be deemed sustainable. IFCO Mullen responded that the RTs which had been set in addition to the TLLs provided a level which, if the fishery reached a TTL and additional management was introduced, the stock would have to return to in order for consideration to be given to removing that additional management.

Mrs H Guille queried whether certain management mechanisms, for example removing fishing on a Saturday rather than a weekday, would have more or less impact on reducing effort, asking whether it was possible to quantify the reduction in effort for a specific potential measure.

DCO Birchenough responded that, using catch data provided by permit holders since the start of the fishery in 2015, there is the ability to quantify fishing effort and use this to determine an

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estimate of effort reduction based on any additional measures. DCO Birchenough outlined that the fishery remains data moderate and therefore, in the absence of modelling for the fishery, it is difficult to quantify how much effort would need to be reduced by in order to return the stock to an RT level, however the TTLs can be used as empirical reference point to help inform stock status. DCO Birchenough outlined that, through the Working Group, Members had requested the additional decision point at the May TAC meeting in order to review the data underpinning the TTLs and to consider this in line with any other supplementary information which may help inform a decision, providing an extra level of quality assurance in any additional management which may be agreed to be required.

DCO Birchenough also outlined that there is the ability to monitor the implementation of any additional measures through in-season monitoring and as the dataset continues to develop over time then the data informing the Monitoring and Control Plan will also develop and ensure that best available evidence is feeding into the definition of those TTLs and RTs.

Mr N Hornby stated that as Manila clam is not a native species, there is the potential for a greater level of co-management for this species and seeking industry collaboration and buy-in, as the drivers are slightly different to if you were dealing with a species which is a natural part of the ecosystem.

The CEO read out to Members points raised by Dr Richard Morgan on this agenda item, sent by email as he was unable to attend the meeting.

The CEO outlined, on behalf of Natural England, that Natural England were supportive of the introduction of a Monitoring and Control Plan. The first point related to the SPA Monitoring Programme variables, and the use of 'significant', when referring to significant change in stie condition and significant new best available evidence triggering a review of the HRA.

The second point related to Natural England seeking clarity on whether Southern IFCA will actively seek new best available evidence or reply upon Natural England and other relevant organisations/institutions providing it, noting that Natural England welcome Southern IFCA considering evidence from other sources as Natural England's data does not always represent best available evidence for a number of reasons.

Natural England further provided information that the conclusion of the 2025/26 HRA was accepted and agreed, noting that further evidence around benthic impacts is an area where Natural England feel further evidence is required. Natural England outlined that funding has been applied for to undertake a study in this regard and updates will be provided to Southern IFCA as this work progresses. It was outlined that Natural England are undertaking a condition assessment for the Poole Harbour SPA which is due to be published this month, the outcomes of the assessment is that all bird features are in unfavourable condition due to various pressures, and that the dredge fishery is not noted to be a cause of unfavourable condition but is noted as a condition threat with respect to the pressure of removal of non-target species.

DCO Birchenough outlined the efficiencies provided by having an SPA Monitoring Programme as part of the Monitoring and Control Plan. DCO Birchenough outlined the types of evidence under the Monitoring Variables which would be reviewed to inform understanding of any changes and that Officers are able to identify if any changes or new evidence are likely to impact the HRA, in which case a review of that document would take place considering all available evidence. DCO Birchenough stated that Officers maintain an oversight over new evidence including updated condition assessments through the Natural England Designated Sites Portal, but that it is helpful to receive notice of any updates from Natural England. DCO Birchenough informed Members that there are resource implications which need to be taken into account when considering Southern IFCA's ability to gather new evidence relating to

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environmental impacts and that the undertaking of such work also sits within the remit of other relevant authorities/organisations. DCO Birchenough outlined that Officers sit on various groups, such as the Poole Harbour Study Group, which allows for a wider understanding of research being carried out in the Harbour. DCO Birchenough stated that in relation to elements such as designated feature extent/location then there is a need for evidence to be provided by Natural England as it needs to be subject to the correct quality assurance to ensure that the evidence has met the correct data standards.

Members discussed the use of the word 'significant' in relation to the SPA Monitoring Programme Monitoring Variables, recommending that Officers explore alternative word use to 'significant' under Monitoring Variables 4 & 5 as the term 'significant' tends to relate to quantitative statistical change which is not what is being monitored under these variables.

Mrs H Guille queried whether the wording for Monitoring Variables 4 & 5 could also be updated to recognise that Southern IFCA would also be exploring updated or new sources of best available evidence recognising any factors relating to resourcing and remit. DCO Birchenough and The CEO confirmed that this could be explored further, recognising that this needs to sit within the duties of the IFCA and is not designed to replace the duties of relevant organisations in providing evidence.

Recommendation

26. It is recommended that Officers review wording under the Poole Harbour Dredge Permit Fishery Monitoring and Control Plan, SPA Monitoring Programme, Monitoring Variables 4 & 5 to:

- Change the word 'significant' to a different suitable word which does not relate to a quantitative change.
- To add text to outline Southern IFCA's role in monitoring for updated or new best available evidence.

Members considered the four recommendations in the paper together, proposed under general consent. All Members were in favour, with the exception of Dr S Cripps who abstained.

Resolved

27. That Members agree the PHDPB Monitoring & Control Plan.

28. That Members authorise inconsequential amendments to be made to the HRA (2025 Update) as required following any advice from Natural England.

29. That Members agree the required updates to Permit Condition 2.1 and relevant sections of the PHDPB Access Policy.

30. That Members agree the issuing of 45 permits under the HRA (2025 Update).

ITEMS FOR INFORMATION

31. Fisheries Management Plans

PO Wright provided Members with an update on the development of Fisheries Management Plans, outlining that a consultation on the Joint Fisheries Statement had now closed with subsequent changes of relevance to Southern IFCA being changes to deadlines of unpublished FMPs in Tranche 3 and Tranche 4, a change in name of the Black Seabream FMP to the Seabream FMP to include Gilthead Bream as a species and the inclusion of Cuckoo Wrasse in the Wrasses Complex FMP.

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PO Wright informed Members that Defra had laid legislation in Parliament to enact a number of measures from the frontrunner FMPs, including new MCRS for lemon sole, turbot and brill in ICES areas 7d and 7e and crawfish in 7e, noting that the MCRS all align with MCRS which Southern IFCA currently have in place for the District. PO Wright stated that the new legislation also included restrictions on fly seining vessels and changes to allow commercial catch limits for bass to be updated promptly following international negotiations.

PO Wright provided Members with information on the formal consultation taking place for Tranche 3 FMPs, of which five are relevant to the Southern IFCA District and how responses have been developed and submitted by Southern IFCA for each relevant FMP.

PO Wright informed Members that Southern IFCA continues to be involved in implementation and development of FMPs, sitting on relevant working groups and providing comment on draft proposals as well as providing information to the community on any consultation taking place.

Mrs H Guille commented that the Southern IFCA responses to the formal consultation on Tranche 3 were excellent. Dr A Jensen echoed this and thanked PO Wright for her hard work.

32. Solent Bivalve Survey Report 2024

IFCO Churchouse provided Members with an overview of the Solent Bivalve Survey Report 2024. IFCO Churchouse outlined the survey process and provided a summary of key outcomes that for Manila clam, the data suggested that current fishing pressure is not having an effect on populations within the three relevant Bivalve Management Areas and that there was a continuing trend in no significant population change during the Solent Bivalve Fishery closed season. IFCO Churchouse outlined that the average length of Manila clam in Southampton Water remained below MCRS, and above MCRS for the other two BMAs, and that catches of Manila clam were higher in the 23/24 season than both previous seasons.

IFCO Churchouse also provided a summary of data on common cockle, outlining that no significant population changes were noted within the fishing season and within the fishery closed season. IFCO Churchouse outlined that there were significant decreases in CPUE for both spring and autumn surveys compared to previous years for Portsmouth and Langstone Harbours but that there is no defined trend through the timeseries dataset or across all BMAs with some non-significant stock increases noted. IFCO Churchouse informed Members that there had been no recorded catches of common cockle to date within the permit fishery indicating that stock variation is more likely related to other factors.

Members discussed the population trend for common cockle and the potential relationship to environmental factors as well as the cyclical nature of bivalve populations which can be observed more generally.

Dr S Cripps queried fishing effort for cockle in the Solent prior to the permit byelaw. DCO Birchenough outlined that fishing effort for cockle in the Solent has always been at a low level with stocks primarily being targeted in Poole Harbour as the preferred fishing location.

33. Juvenile Fish Survey Report 2024

PO Perrins provided Members with an overview of the Juvenile Fish Survey Report, covering data from 2017-2024. PO Perrins provided Members with an overview of the survey process and the contribution of data in helping to improve understandings of the use of Essential Fish Habitats by commercial and recreational fish species.

PO Perrins outlined the key points from the report, that there were no significant differences in data detected between surveys in Autumn or Spring 2024 and across the dataset time range. PO Perrins outlined that there was also no significant difference in species richness,

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total abundance or Shannon Diversity Index between Spring and Autumn surveys.

PO Perrins outlined, for the 2024 surveys, which sites had the highest total abundance, greatest species richness and highest Shannon Diversity Index as well as the most common fish species being bass with sand smelt also being dominant in abundance.

Dr S Cripps queried how the timeseries dataset is being applied to informing fisheries management. DCO Birchenough outlined that the scope of the survey had been refined to focus on sites identified as being important EFH through net fishing management. DCO Birchenough stated that the data at present, indicating no significant change, does not indicate that management intervention is required but that there are mechanisms to feed this data into management processes in the event that data indicates a significant change which may require consideration of intervention. DCO Birchenough informed Members that data from the surveys has been provided to multiple FMPs to assist in the evidence gathering process on relevant species and the survey has formed part of a project with the University of Plymouth to explore different methods of recording juvenile fish data, exploring the use of cameras against the data collected by Southern IFCA using nets. DCO Birchenough outlined that the data could also be used in the future as a possible indicator of climate change, for example if species profiles are changing significantly over time.

Senior IFCO Condie outlined that a number of partner organisations participate in the survey program providing good opportunities for partnership working and thanked all organisations who have provided support to the surveys.

Mr N Hornby commented that the data collected through the survey enables an understanding of stability in the recruitment for these populations and that having this understanding is valuable even if it is not needed to inform management action at this stage.

Mr R Stride queried at what point any intervention would be required, using an example of consistently fewer bass being observed at the sites at Christchurch. DCO Birchenough outlined that the surveys are carried out in small parts of a wider area and at specific times of year/times of day, on this basis the survey is not able to capture the full extent of fish species populations but by repeating the same methodology over time the method enables significant changes to be identified.

34. Live Wrasse Fishery Report 2024

Senior IFCO Condie provided Members with an update on the live wrasse fishery for 2024. Senior IFCO Condie outlined that the number of fishing vessels participating in the fishery remained at 5, as per 2023, and the method of pot fishing only also remained the same. Senior IFCO Condie outlined that no fishing trips occurred within the Studland to Portland SAC and that the 2024 season concluded after 8.5 weeks.

Senior IFCO Condie outlined that compliance with requirements for the fishery had been good with a total of 15 inspections carried out, 3 inspections per each participating vessel. Senior IFCO Condie outlined that frequent communication with participants enabled Southern IFCA to proactively identify potential patterns in landings and model predicted scenarios for when landings may approach MCP Variable 1 allowing for targeted communication, in the event it had been required, to stop the fishery ahead of the trigger point being reached.

Senior IFCO Condie informed Members that no Monitoring and Control variable trigger thresholds were exceeded and that the predicted effects of Total LPUE per pot were best explained by the variables year, area fished and month. Senior IFCO Condie outlined that the stability in LPUE suggests the fishery continues to operate at a sustainable level.

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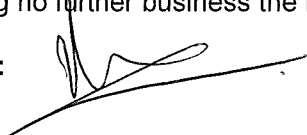
Senior IFCO Condie outlined that Officers will continue to monitor the fishery in line with the Monitoring and Control Plan for 2025.

35. Date of Next Meeting

To confirm the date of the next meeting of the Technical Advisory Committee on the 8 Mayth 2025 at Southern IFCA, Unit 3 Holes Bay Park, Sterte Avenue West, Poole Dorset BH15 2AA.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 17:20.

Chairman:



Date: 16/5/25.

