

SOUTHERN INSHORE FISHERIES & CONSERVATION AUTHORITY

TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE – 7th November 2024

Minutes of the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), held in the meeting room at the Southern IFCA office in Poole at **14:00 on 7th November 2024**.

Present

Dr Antony Jensen	Chairman, MMO Appointee
Mr Richard Stride	Vice Chairman, MMO Appointee
Ms Elisabeth Bussey-Jones	MMO Appointee
Mr Gary Wordsworth	MMO Appointee
Ms Louise MacCallum	MMO Appointee
Mr Charlie Brock	MMO Appointee
Mr Colin Francis	MMO Appointee
Mr Neil Hornby	MMO Appointee
Dr Simon Cripps	MMO Appointee
Mr Stuart Kingston-Turner	Environment Agency
Dr Richard Morgan	Natural England
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 and Cllr Rob Hughes also attended.

Mr T Ferrero (Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust) and Ms Stephanie Shillitoe (Natural England) joined the meeting from the virtual public gallery.

Election of Chairman for 2024-2025

1. That Dr A Jensen be elected as Chairman for the year 2024-2025. This motion was proposed by Mr R Stride and seconded by Mr S Kingston-Turner. All Members were in favour.

Election of Vice Chairman for 2024-2025

2. That Mr R Stride be elected as Vice-Chairman for the year 2024-2025. This motion was proposed by Ms E Bussey-Jones and seconded by Mr G Wordsworth. All Members were in favour.

Apologies

3. Apologies for absence were received from Mr James Morgan (MMO).

Declarations of interest

4. The following non-pecuniary interests were declared: Mr R Morgan (Agenda Item 6).

Minutes

5. Members considered the Minutes of the meeting held on the 22nd August 2024 (Marked A) and consideration of the following matters outstanding.

- a. **Recommendation 90:** That Southern IFCA communicates with Permit Holders in the PHDP fishery on the catch data for the 2024/2025 season to date, as presented to the TAC, and the intended course of action by the IFCA on how the fishery will be monitored and managed going forward.

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PROGRESS REPORTS

6a.Chief Executive Officer Updates

Following a recent debate in Parliament, the CEO discussed with Members that the Defra Minister acknowledged forthcoming challenges associated with the potential renegotiation of the Trade & Cooperation Agreement in 2025/26. The CEO outlined that the Minister emphasised the opportunities to look at reframing fisheries management through a social, economic and environmental lens, and the long-term sustainability to be achieved through FMPs. The Minister also referenced reforms to discards, remote electric monitoring, quota allocation, opening of new fisheries, how best to support the <10m sector, additional quota and quota trials. The CEO also discussed that reference had been made to the use of Regional Fisheries Groups (RFGs) to encourage dialogue, referencing participating organisations and encouraging consistency across the coast.

The CEO outlined the relevance of the Ministers messaging this to the meeting, particularly considering the Government looking at different opportunities to manage fisheries via a social, economic and environmental lens and the benefit of this being raised at a national level. The CEO stated that there remained work to do in having the work that IFCA's recognised in this regard, however noting how positive it was that the work being achieved on the coast in the District was being reinforced and supported, with Officers actively aiming to balance those three pillars in all aspects of Southern IFCA's work, particularly engagement.

The CEO referenced District wide and fishery specific engagement exercises that had been championed in recent weeks and how there had been a drive for such engagement across the team. The CEO provided specific examples including pre-season meetings for the Solent Dredge Permit Byelaw, which were attended by both the Chairman and the Chairman of the TAC as well as other Members, the ongoing engagement for the black seabream workstream and the Poole Harbour Dredge Permit Fishery, all of which had been fruitful. The CEO thanked PDCO Dell, SIFCO Condie, IFCO Churchouse and IFCO Mullen for their input to recent engagement events and informed Members that positive recognition has been received from industry.

The CEO informed Members that the first community forum is being held in Lyme Regis next week with the Authority Chairman Cllr P Fuller, TAC Chairman Dr A Jensen and PDCO Dell will be in attendance. The CEO emphasised the importance of the IFCA being visible to and ingrained within the community and that these opportunities would be sought on a frequent basis to maintain that presence on the coast.

6b.Emergent Updates

DCO Birchenough informed Members that there is one emergent update related to the FMP Program which would be covered under the relevant agenda item.

6c.Solent Dredge Permit Fishery 2024/2025

DCO Birchenough presented a progress update on the Solent scallop fishery under the Solent Dredge Permit Byelaw for the 24/25 season that commenced on the 1st November 2024.

DCO Birchenough informed Members that at the September Authority Meeting, an update was provided that data from the Autumn Solent Scallop Survey was in the process of being analysed and the closing date for applications for the 24/25 season for a Category A Permit was approaching.

DCO Birchenough reminded Members that in 2023, new effort controls were introduced to manage fishing for scallop as a result of survey data, consideration of representations by fishers and other relevant best available evidence. DCO Birchenough emphasised that in reviewing the scallop fishery this year, it is important to recognise the wide range of effort

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controls in place through management to support a sustainable fishery. DCO Birchenough outlined that following the implementation of the additional effort controls in 2023, the survey data from 2024 indicates that there has been a general improvement in stock levels which is positive to see, and the stock has supported the fishery during the 23/24 season with increased catch levels not leading to a decline in stock.

DCO Birchenough outlined the points covered in the report which formed the key considerations in the decision-making process for the 24/25 season, referencing Catch Per Unit Effort (CPUE) from the surveys, understanding the caveats which exist within this data collection program, controls on the fishery under Category A Permit Conditions, other management measures such as a conservative MCRS and management under the Scallop Fishing Byelaw 2019 and catch rates in the fishery for 23/24 which were higher than all previous years. DCO Birchenough informed Members that considering all best available evidence the conclusion was reached that there did not need to be any further changes to Category A Permit Conditions for the 24/25 season. DCO Birchenough informed Members that this conclusion had been discussed with and supported by the Chair of the TAC.

DCO Birchenough outlined that, to date, 47 permits had been issued to applicants who met the eligibility criteria and have the ability to fish for scallops. There were 54 applicants in total, 2 were deemed to be ineligible, 1 applicant is unable to fish for scallop. There has been an indication from 2 applicants that they no longer intend to take out a permit.

DCO Birchenough outlined that it takes time to understand the impact of any newly introduced management, such as that introduced for the 23/24 season, and all the factors which may influence trends in stock levels, environmental as well as fishery related. DCO Birchenough informed Members that actions being taken forward in monitoring the fishery for the coming season will continue to help build that evidence base, including the continuation of the mid-season survey and higher spatial resolution for catch reporting within the Bivalve Management Area (BMA) which sees the highest levels of scallop fishing, developed in conjunction with the Permit Holders, to better relate landings data to survey data. DCO Birchenough outlined that an updated survey methodology would also be introduced from January 2025, developed with the fishing industry to ensure survey areas align with fishing areas and with Cefas to ensure that the methodology aligns with national data collection practices so the survey outputs can be fed into national datasets. A new dredge has been procured for the survey to provide additional data on the smaller size fraction of the King scallop population in the Solent.

DCO Birchenough informed Members that work would be ongoing over the coming months on looking at dredge fishing in the Solent in general, exploring the appropriateness of current measures and understanding any further work that may be required on the management of this fishery. DCO Birchenough outlined that it is intended that permits will move to an online platform in the future.

Ms E Bussey-Jones stated that the management employed in 2023 appears to have been useful in managing the fishery. Ms E Bussey-Jones queried, on the basis of the increased catch for the 23/24 season how much confidence was held in the survey outputs to demonstrate the correlation between an increased catch rate and sustainability in the fishery.

DCO Birchenough responded that consistency in the survey methodology to date allows for confidence in comparisons of data between years. DCO Birchenough also outlined that there were generally high levels of compliance with catch reporting in the fishery and an understanding in the industry of why the catch data is useful and that it is in the interest of the industry to report accurately. DCO Birchenough added that the IFCA has the ability to cross-check catch data with other sources such as the MMO landings data. The CEO added that there is also confidence in the additional controls that the fishery is subject to and through

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Compliance and Enforcement and more regular catch data monitoring there is information on the fishery feeding into decision making on a regular basis.

Mr R Stride queried whether a change in survey methodology would impact the ability to compare data with previous surveys. DCO Birchenough responded that there is an identified need to update the methodology based on input from the industry and an improved understanding of the fishery over the last three years and therefore there does need to be a point where there is a move from one methodology to another. DCO Birchenough outlined that whilst the same spatial data comparisons may not be possible initially, the same data will be collected allowing for comparisons over time and then as the new methodology is used, an updated time series dataset will be developed to allow for more direct spatial comparisons between years again.

6d. Black Seabream management development

Senior IFCO Condie presented members with an update on the black seabream workstream. Senior IFCO Condie outlined that following agreement at a Members Working Group in August, Officers held a Bream Co-Management design workshop with industry at the RNLI College at the end of October. Senior IFCO Condie informed Members that the meeting was well attended and well received, with over 20 representatives from different sectors, including charter vessels, recreational anglers and commercial plotting and netting fishers. Skippers that attended worked out of ports from Mudeford down to Weymouth and Portland. The Chair and Vice Chair of the TAC also attended.

The workshop gave the opportunity for industry to have a facilitated discussion on management measures that they felt could be appropriate for the management of black seabream across the three relevant Dorset MCZ's. Topics covered include bag limits, commercial limits, charter vessel logbook, changes to MCRS, gear types, fish handling and spatial areas. Feedback from attendees on the workshop and the opportunity provided for them to participate was really positive and officers are now looking to explore draft measures from the outcomes of these discussions with a view to providing an update at the February TAC meeting.

Dr S Cripps queried whether there had been any general agreement on potential measures between different sectors. Senior IFCO Condie outlined that there was broad agreement in relation to certain types of measures.

Dr A Jensen explained to Members that there were three facilitated tables at the workshop and there had been a large degree of agreement between each which had been positive to see.

Dr S Cripps questioned whether there was anything contributing to the general level of agreement. Senior IFCO Condie and PDCO Dell responded that there is a broad understanding across sectors of the need to explore management for black seabream in relation to the IFCA's legal duties for MCZ management. PDCO Dell emphasised the importance of the industry across all sectors having taken the opportunity to feed into this process and be involved in the identification of potential measures.

Dr S Cripps stated that the effort that had been put into providing context to what was being discussed, outlining what the issues are and the challenges the IFCA and the fishery has to operate under has led to a very positive outcome. PDCO Dell emphasised the importance of engagement and that Officers had faced any challenges in this regard to deliver a successful outcome.

Mr G Wordsworth informed Members that he had received really good feedback on the

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workshop including from stakeholders who are potentially more critical of the IFCA at times.

Ms E Bussey-Jones queried whether there was any more detail that could be provided on proposed measures. PDCO Dell outlined that Officers are working to review the outcomes of the workshop and further engagement with representatives who could not attend the workshop was ongoing with input from this also feeding into this process.

Dr R Morgan queried what the timeline would be for this workstream going forward. DCO Birchenough outlined that an update would be provided at the February TAC which would include more clarity on the next stages. PDCO Dell responded that there may also be a requirement for further engagement with the community dependent on agreed next steps. The CEO clarified that the Authority has not yet determined whether the workstream would proceed down a statutory or non-statutory route at this stage, part of making this determination is dependent on the information that Officers are currently reviewing to ensure that Members have the most informed position to make those decisions going forward.

The CEO outlined that in regard to Defra timelines, Defra are aware of the complexity with regards to managing this species, not least because of the engagement required to make a fully informed decision, and on that basis, there is flexibility in the timeline for resolving this workstream, understanding that the timeline should be reasonable and the IFCA wants to take this forward in a timely manner. The CEO emphasised that it is important to maintain industry interest in engaging in this workstream and at the same time ensure that there is a robust evidence package to inform any decisions.

6e.REM/AI Project

PDCO Dell spoke to Members about the report which had been presented to the Authority meeting in September and requested to be brought to a TAC meeting for further discussion.

PDCO Dell reminded Members that funding had been approved for a small-scale trial of REM and AI across a number of vessels in the Southern IFCA District. PDCO Dell shared, with permission from the relevant fisher, a live stream on the screen of REM that has been deployed in partnership with Devon and Severn IFCA on an under 12m fishing vessel operating a single trawl in Lyme Bay.

PDCO Dell outlined that the report also includes a short Literature Review on the use of REM and AI in fisheries management, credit goes to IFCO Payton in the Compliance and Enforcement Team who has been assisting with this area of work.

PDCO Dell informed Members that in terms of progress with priority fishery 2 and the project in general, the Research and Policy Team had been engaging with Net Fishing Byelaw Permit Holders to ascertain levels of activity in harbour and estuarine areas, specifically those subject to the monitoring and control plan. It has been determined that the fishing activity is significantly minimal at present and discussions are ongoing with relevant operators.

PDCO Dell informed Members that there is currently an ongoing assessment to determine how the project moves forward in line with planned outputs, with an intention of another set of equipment being deployed within this financial year. The challenge remains getting industry volunteers within the priority fisheries, further discussions have taken place this week and will remain ongoing.

PDCO Dell informed Members that since Southern IFCA embarked on this project several other REM and AI projects have been established. PDCO Dell outlined that the MMO and Cefas have publicised a project which focusses on large scale pelagic offshore fisheries, and informed Members that the Southern IFCA report has been sent to the Remote Electronic

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Monitoring Policy Team at Defra.

Dr S Cripps queried the purpose of the use of REM on fishing vessels and what information it provides

PDCO Dell explained that on the live feed being shown, there are two cameras focusing on trawl doors which are also fitted with sensors, recording deployment and recovery. The system also provides a position for the vessel, the combination of the equipment enables identification of the vessel location and any activity being undertaken at that time.

Dr S Cripps queried whether species or size of individuals could be determined.

PDCO Dell responded that is not possible with the current cameras, but moving forward in line with the project plan, the intention is to look at the AI element related to the catch being brought inboard. Further deployments of equipment could be used to identify bycatch within net fisheries.

Mr C Brock queried what benefit the fisher is seeing from volunteering to have the equipment onboard. PDCO Dell responded that one benefit to the BTFG fleet would be to be able to keep fishing gear on the surface of the water rather than having to haul it inboard. PDCO Dell also outlined that fishers are supportive of the ability to demonstrate compliance with regulations, particularly concerning BTFG and in relation to MPAs. PDCO Dell informed Members that volunteer fishers are looking at having further cameras installed for additional benefits, for example in the engine room and to observe crew operations from within the wheelhouse.

DR R Morgan asked how the technology works alongside IVMS. PDCO Dell explained that IVMS currently sits separately to REM. Work related to positional data associated with REM is looking at potential links and exploring the technical and procurement processes that would be required to align both systems.

Mr C Brock queried the vessel set up to support REM including the power required and the smallest size of boat where REM would be able to be used.

PDCO Dell responded that this determination is one output of the current project. Currently there is concern from industry that the equipment is not robust enough for use on under 12m vessels, a determination of whether the technology is viable for the smaller vessels will form one output of the report.

Mr N Hornby raised that there may be learning opportunities from the different projects which are looking at REM and AI but that at present the projects do not appear to be joined up to facilitate this. Mr N Hornby referenced work through the AIFCA and how this may provide such opportunities for joined up working. Mr N Hornby also queried whether the information being collected through REM is related to building data on fisheries or whether it is related to compliance and enforcement and how the project is addressing this conundrum.

PDCO Dell responded that the project aims to be all encompassing. PDCO Dell stated that there is an element of compliance and enforcement but there is also an identified appetite for improved data collection, the more information that can be provided that more positive outcomes there are for industry and regulators. PDCO Dell outlined that the project is still exploring how data would be processed and how data from REM would be used in relation to compliance and enforcement.

Mr N Hornby queried who owned the data. PDCO Dell responded that the fisher would own the data for their particular vessel and that this is emphasised when engaging with potential

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volunteers in a collaborative approach to delivering the project.

The CEO informed Members that there are a number of IFCA's that are piloting REM and AI initiatives and many other organisations which are further advanced in exploring REM/AI but that this is mostly focused offshore. The CEO outlined that this project is the only one looking at inshore solutions, recognising that the output may be that inshore the technology is not viable. The CEO outlined that there is discussion ongoing with IFCA CEOs on whether the AIFCA can collate relevant projects together or whether a national working group can be established to draw together initiatives and pilot projects from different fisheries that are all inshore to avoid duplication and share lessons learned across all fisheries.

The CEO informed members that the project remains in its early stages and that there have already been some challenges from discussions on engaging industry to participate, noting that without participating volunteers it will be difficult to move the project forward.

The CEO emphasised that the IFCA remains keen to progress this work, looking at the application in the inshore sector to ensure progress is made in developing the understanding of the application of this technology to this sector which has historically been lacking. The CEO referenced the intention to work with the net fishery utilising AI to determine if industry can demonstrate visually a lack of interactions with salmonids which would provide a benefit to those operating in informing future management.

Mr C Brock stated that the outputs need to be about both data and compliance and enforcement, emphasising that if fishers can see a benefit there they are more likely to work with regulators.

Ms L MacCallum queried whether there were inshore fisheries in other parts of the world that were more advanced with studying this technology that could be reviewed. PDCO Dell outlined that the literature review contains some examples from other countries but there would be challenges tying in with projects outside the UK.

Mr R Stride outlined some concerns about the technology as a fisher and whether industry would view it as intrusive with cameras observing fishers at work. PDCO Dell outlined that the aim is that sensors on the gear being deployed trigger the camera and that, otherwise, the camera would not be running. PDCO Dell emphasised that the project is exploring ways of protecting privacy and identifying where the technology would be beneficial which may not be across the entirety of the fleet.

Mr R Stride queried whether in using AI to recognise species, fishers would need to present the catch to the camera. PDCO Dell responded that the aim is not to disrupt fishing operations or for fishers to have to change their normal practice. PDCO Dell outlined that the project will be looking at suitability of camera placement and how the best visuals can be achieved.

Mr R Stride stated that fishers should not be expected to pay for these systems and likened it to the situation with IVMS and concerns from industry related to the regulatory implementation of that system.

Dr S Cripps stated that AI will be required in order to use REM systems efficiently in identifying species and size of individuals and that the set up will need to be specific to the fishery to capture the appropriate information which would involve a large expense in specialised equipment.

Dr S Cripps outlined that where REM is being used in offshore fleets there is a lot of positive feedback as it is being used to assist in issues around labour laws and inappropriate behaviour. Mr S Kingston-Turner agreed emphasising the health and safety application and

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associated benefit to operators.

Mr S Kingston-Turner queried whether there was any funding that could be accessed from Defra to support the project budget. The CEO outlined that joint working would aid in this regard to provide joint outcomes to Defra from pilot projects that could then potentially support taking the application of REM/AI further.

Mr G Wordsworth outlined that camera technology has been used in aquaculture operations for many years as a health & safety tool. Mr G Wordsworth outlined that Seafish is also a potential source of further funding.

ITEMS FOR DECISION

7. Shore Gathering Byelaw and Fishing for Cockles (Amendment) byelaw

Senior IFCO Condie presented to Members that following the decision at the Authority meeting on 19th September 2024 to 'make' both the Shore Gathering Byelaw and the Fishing for Cockles (Amendment) Byelaw, a period of Formal Consultation had commenced in line with Defra IFCA Byelaw Guidance. Senior IFCO Condie outlined the advertising of the Byelaws and that the end date for the Formal Consultation is the 14th November 2024, allowing the required 28-day period for responding, necessitated by an error on the part of one of the advertisers which meant the second advert ran a week later than anticipated.

Senior IFCO Condie informed Members that as part of the Formal Consultation, Southern IFCA had engaged with stakeholders to provide assistance where requested, for example through the provision of coordinates for management areas in a different format and more detailed maps of management areas.

Senior IFCO Condie outlined how Standing Orders state that the Technical Advisory Sub-Committee will consider outcomes of the Formal Consultation following the making of any statutory interventions, however due to the unanticipated extension to the end date of the Formal Consultation, the Formal Consultation would end after this meeting of the TAC had taken place and therefore Members were provided with an indicative position from Southern IFCA on the basis of any objections received to date.

Senior IFCO Condie outlined that 2 objections had been received, one to the Shore Gathering Byelaw only and one to both Byelaws, and summarised the main points contained within these as well as the intended response points to be included in response letters from Southern IFCA. Senior IFCO Condie informed Members that work was ongoing to ensure impacts raised through one of the objections could be captured in the Impact Assessment for the Byelaws. Senior IFCO Condie stated that based on the 2 objections received the indicative position of Southern IFCA was that no changes were required to either Byelaw, and that an update would be made to the Impact Assessment on receipt of further information from one objector.

Senior IFCO Condie outlined that if any further objections are received during the Formal Consultation that indicate a change is required to either Byelaw then a Members Working Group will be convened for Members of the TAC to consider the objections and the proposed scope of the Southern IFCA response to help inform the decision of the Executive Sub-Committee when considering the outcomes of the Formal Consultation.

Dr R Morgan queried who would make the decision to hold a Members Working Group. DCO Birchenough outlined that it would be Officers based on consideration of any objections received between the meeting today and the end of the Formal Consultation.

Ms E Bussey-Jones suggested that the recommendation be updated to refer to any 'substantial' amendments.

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Mr S Kingston-Turner queried whether the inclusion of information on impacts to push-netting activity in The Fleet in the Impact Assessment would lead to any changes to the Byelaws. DCO Birchenough outlined that the point in relation to this activity had been made in the objection which had been received and that Southern IFCA's indicative position on this was that no change was required based on this point. DCO Birchenough outlined that in order to fully capture impacts from the proposed measures there was a need to include this information in the Impact Assessment but that the consideration of this activity in this site being incompatible with the Southern IFCA's ability to meet legal duties under conservation legislation indicated that there would be no change to management.

Mr R Stride queried the reference to considering potential impacts of activities with reference to The Fleet. DCO Birchenough outlined that the best available evidence had been used to inform the assessment of potential impacts from different activities on designated features of relevant sites and that, whilst evidence is not always available for specific activities in a specific site, the wider literature and evidence base informed those assessments to indicate where management is required to address any potential adverse impacts on those designated features. DCO Birchenough outlined that for The Fleet specifically evidence indicated that seagrass habitat and certain bird features were at risk from all shore gathering activities and therefore the proposed management was to mitigate those risks identified through that assessment process in order for Southern IFCA to meet legal duties under relevant conservation legislation whilst being proportionate to the level of risk posed by those activities.

Dr S Cripps asked for clarification over the process of reviewing Formal Consultation outcomes and the different roles of the TAC, Executive Sub-Committee (ESC) and the full Authority. The CEO responded that the Standing Orders had been updated 2 years ago, based on a request by Dr S Cripps, to include that the TAC reviewed the outcomes of a Formal Consultation prior to consideration by the ESC. It was outlined that the ESC includes the Chair and Vice Chair of the TAC to represent the views of the TAC. Dr S Cripps queried why the ESC stage of the process is required and DCO Birchenough outlined that there needs to be oversight of the full content of any objections and the Southern IFCA responses to those which contains confidential information on respondents which cannot be shared publicly. DCO Birchenough outlined that the ESC makes a recommendation on submission of any byelaws to the MMO for confirmation by the Secretary of State and the Authority makes the final decision in that regard having reviewed a non-confidential summary of Formal Consultation outputs.

The recommendations were proposed by Dr S Cripps and were seconded by Ms E Bussey-Jones. All members voted in favour.

Resolved

- 8.** On reviewing feedback to date from the formal consultation, that Members agree the indicated scope of Southern IFCA responses in relation to the Shore Gathering Byelaw and the Fishing for Cockles (Amendment) Byelaw.
- 9.** That a summary of the TAC discussion is provided to the Executive Sub-Committee to inform their subsequent decision to make recommendations to the Authority regarding the submission of the Byelaws to the MMO for confirmation by the Secretary of State.
- 10.** That Members agree to hold a Working Group prior to the Executive Sub-Committee in December in the event that any substantial amendments are identified as being required to either Byelaw as a result of further submissions to the formal consultation.

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ITEMS FOR INFORMATION

11. Poole Harbour Dredge Permit Fishery

IFCO Mullen outlined that at the August TAC Members had been informed of reports to Southern IFCA by fishers in the Poole Harbour Dredge Permit Fishery on declines in the catch of Manila clam at the start of the 2024/25 fishing season. At the August meeting Members were presented with an analysis of monthly catch return data from May, June and July 2024 which showed catch rates were lower than the period 2020-2023 for the same months but were consistent with catch rates from the 2016-2019 period. It was communicated to Members at this meeting that the reason for the decline in catch rates was unknown but there had been a suggestion, not confirmed by evidence, that a spring mortality may have occurred after the 2024 Southern IFCA Poole Harbour Bivalve survey had taken place.

IFCO Mullen outlined that Southern IFCA had communicated the information presented at the August TAC with Permit Holders in the fishery via a letter and that feedback in response had been mixed but there was a general input that whilst it was recognised catch levels were lower it was not to a level that had not been seen before and there may be a cyclical pattern in stock levels being seen or a response to environmental conditions.

IFCO Mullen provided Members with an update on analysed catch data for August and September 2024 as presented in the report. IFCO Mullen outlined that, as with previous data analysis, the landed weight was converted into a catch per unit effort value to remove the influence of changes in the number of active fishers and hours fished. IFCO Mullen outlined that data for both months also showed a consistency with catch values from 2016-2019, only September showed CPUE values lower than all previous years however this was by a small margin of only 0.02-0.1 kg/hour. IFCO Mullen informed Members that to date there has been consistency in the change in catch level between 2022-2024 for each month rather than a progressively worsening decline.

IFCO Mullen outlined that the average CPUE serves as a general efficiency model for Poole Harbour, reflecting the activity of all fishers for each month. It is noted however that there can be a significant variation in the fishing effort by individual fishers and there is need to report the data in both a format which reduces influencing variables, as has been done to date, and in a format which is more relevant to fishers' assessments of their catches, using a kg/hour figure. A kg/hour value has been calculated for the analysis of all months to date which will be communicated to fishers going forward as part of ongoing communications, the analysis shows the same pattern to the data for kg/hour/fisher.

IFCO Mullen informed Members that Southern IFCA has received concerns from a small number of Permit Holders that the decline in catch levels is related to the oil spill incident which occurred in Poole Harbour in 2023. An update on the work undertaken in relation to the oil spill incident was provided at the October meeting of the Poole Harbour Study Group, with conclusions from sampling indicating that no residual contaminants had been detected in the water or the sediment. IFCO Mullen informed Members studies would continue to take place to monitor habitats, bird species and protected areas of the Harbour.

IFCO Mullen outlined that high level monitoring and analysis of catch data would continue on a monthly basis and that communications would be maintained with Permit Holders to report updated information. IFCO Mullen informed Members that the information contained in the report would be sent to Permit Holders following this meeting along with information on the intended review under the Poole Harbour Dredge Permit Byelaw focusing on the development of a Monitoring and Control Plan for the fishery and a review of potential changes to permit

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conditions which could be implemented in the event that best available evidence indicates further management is required to support a sustainable fishery.

Mr N Hornby queried the period when the fishery is active and whether there is time between the end of the current season and start of the next season to implement any actions that may be required. IFCO Mullen outlined that the evidence gathering as part of the review was already underway and that there was sufficient time to incorporate all necessary elements of a review before the start of the 2025/26 season in May 2025. DCO Birchenough outlined that the outcome of the review would be brought to the February TAC for Members consideration. DCO Birchenough also outlined the intention to move the annual survey to later in April to aim to capture any indication of spring mortality in the event that one were to occur.

Mr S Kingston-Turner asked whether the survey includes any work on the sediment of the sites sampled.

DCO Birchenough informed Mr Kingston-Turner that sediment analysis was outside of the ability of the IFCA to resource but that other organisations had undertaken sediment analysis in the Harbour historically.

Mr S Kingston-Turner asked whether there was any evidence to indicate a change in the composition of the sediment as a result of the dredging activity. Dr A Jensen outlined that the University of Southampton had previously analysed sediment changes based on the hand scoop methodology and that no statistical difference had been observed over several months. Dr A Jensen stated that there was a loss of the very fine fraction of the sediment, but the analysis was not significant. DCO Birchenough informed Members that the most recent work was through a PhD looking at the benthic composition of the sediment which indicated that although there were some changes to individual species on a small scale, the overall biotope did not change significantly between areas fished and not fished.

Dr A Jensen queried the bird population data. Dr R Morgan stated that the shelduck population had decreased based on wetland bird survey data with a suggestion that this decline is linked to local factors but currently there is no evidence to link this to the fishery. Dr R Morgan informed Members that there was an ongoing aspiration to undertake further survey work to understand benthic impacts, but funding has not been available.

12. Solent Scallop Survey Report 2024

IFCO Churchouse provided Members with an overview of the Solent scallop surveys carried out in 2024 in January, April and September to capture data from the mid-season, post-season and pre-season points. IFCO Churchouse presented the data from these surveys to Members outlining that the data is presented as a CPUE value, representing kg of scallop/meter of dredge/hour, for total scallop, scallop above the MCRS and scallop under MCRS. IFCO Churchouse outlined that data comparisons had been made for during the fishing season and during the closed season and between years.

IFCO Churchouse informed Members that the pattern in King scallop stock from the 2024 surveys was as would be expected based on fishing activity, a significant decrease in CPUE during the 23/24 fishing season and an increase in CPUE when the fishery was closed. CPUE data from the period when the fishery was closed in 2024 (Spring 24 to Autumn 24) showed an improvement compared to this period in 2023 for Total CPUE, CPUE over MCRS and CPUE under MCRS. IFCO Churchouse outlined that there was a mixed picture when looking at individual sites, not all sites showing an increase in CPUE during the closed season, however the number of sites where an increase was seen is greater than in 2023. CPUE data also showed an increase in the Autumn 2024 survey compared to the Autumn 2023 survey with a non-significant increase in Total CPUE and a significant increase in under MCRS

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CPUE, over MCRS CPUE remained consistent between years. IFCO Churchouse outlined that analysis found a statistically significant effect of survey of width, with mean width of the Autumn survey lower than the winter and spring surveys in 2024. For all three surveys, the majority of sampling sites had peaks in the size distribution for a class above MCRS.

IFCO Churchouse outlined the next steps in the survey program to maintain the mid-season survey and implement an updated methodology developed in consideration of key areas for the King scallop fishery in the Solent, engagement with industry and with Cefas on national data collection. IFCO Churchouse also outlined that monitoring of catch data would take place through the monthly provision of data by permit holders with sub-areas defined for one Bivalve Management Area to improve understandings of catch rates in relation to survey data.

Mr N Hornby queried whether the survey data had been collected before new measures agreed in 2023 for the Solent scallop fishery had been put in place. DCO Birchenough responded that the surveys in 2024 had taken place following those measures being brought in.

Mr N Hornby asked whether the survey data indicates success of those new measures recognising there is only one year of data collection post-implementation. DCO Birchenough responded that it would take time to understand the implication of new measures but that there has been an improvement in survey data, further data collection over time will help understanding of how that pattern may be related to management or other factors. DCO Birchenough emphasised that a key point is that a further decline in stock levels has not been observed following the implementation of additional management measures in 2023.

Mr N Hornby asked when a second year of data would be available. DCO Birchenough responded that the Solent scallop survey program would continue to run with three surveys per year and that although the methodology would be updated there remained comparisons that can be made between survey years and that a timeseries dataset would be built with the new methodology. DCO Birchenough outlined that generally 5+ years of data is a starting point for looking at influencing factors with confidence in analysis increasing with the increasing length of the dataset.

Mr G Wordsworth stated that the data is looking positive and that the early indication is that implementing additional management measures in 2023 appears to have been beneficial to the fishery and the work between the Authority and the industry in determining these measures has achieved a good outcome.

Mr C Brock outlined that the fishery is a good news story and that there is good buy in from the industry who want the fishery to be a success and are supportive of the actions taken by the Authority. Mr C Brock suggested going forward whether the more environmentally friendly dredge types could be looked at in relation to stipulating use through permit conditions given that the majority of fishers are already operating this dredge type.

DCO Birchenough informed Members that during 2024 there had been a lot of positive engagement with fishers engaged in the Solent fisheries, with two meetings held pre the 24/25 season covering multiple locations to maximise attendance. DCO Birchenough outlined that the Chairman and the Chair of the TAC had attended these meetings and Mr C Brock had attended the Portsmouth meeting with 24 industry attendees participating across the two meetings which made for productive and informative discussion. DCO Birchenough thanked PDCO Dell and IFCO Churchouse for their work in this regard.

Mrs E Bussey-Jones informed Members that there had been a recent publication in the Environmental Law Review by Emma Bean, Mike Williams and Jason Lowther related to the

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complexities of s153 duties under the Marine and Coastal Access Act, which referenced a study that suggested IFCA's were the most trusted out of the regulators and that the participatory nature of decision making and public accessibility is likely to be increasing those levels of trust in comparison to other agencies. The CEO informed Members that the paper would be included on the Authority agenda for Members to read.

13. Whelk CPUE Pilot Project

IFCO Mullen presented to Members on the Whelk CPUE Pilot Project which forms part of the Southern IFCA's whelk monitoring program in conjunction with the Whelk Population Survey. IFCO Mullen outlined that the aim of the project was to collect further data on whelk populations throughout the Southern IFCA District which would contribute to the evidence base on whelk fisheries and aid the understanding of the effectiveness of management, including the proposed Southern IFCA Pot Fishing Byelaw. IFCO Mullen outlined that the data could also contribute to the identified objectives of the Whelk FMP providing input to national data collection on whelk CPUE and contributing to the national evidence base.

PO Wright informed Members that the intention is to run the project as a pilot from December 2024 to December 2025 with data collected on a monthly basis from volunteer fishers. The information sought will include specifics of fishing trips, location, type of gear, operation of the gear and the quantity of whelk landed.

PO Wright outlined that the information annexed to the report had been provided to all fishers who indicated they undertake pot fishing with the District to seek volunteers for the pilot project. To date there are three fishers who have indicated they would wish to participate.

IFCO Mullen outlined that a report will be produced from the first year of the project which will be presented to the Authority and made publicly available. The outcomes of the pilot project will inform any improvements that could be made to data collection and help identify how data can best be used to inform the sustainable management of whelk fisheries with this information used to consider the development of a longer-term monitoring program for the District.

Mr C Brock stated that there is a difference between CPUE and LPUE the latter being proposed to be looked at through this project but that it is important to be able to look at both and the difference between what is retained in a pot (CPUE) and what can be landed (LPUE) as this will indicate the health of the stock. Mr C Brock highlighted that this varies a lot between areas and within wider areas as whelk do not move far therefore it is important to seek data at a very local level.

Mr R Stride queried whether CPUE could be obtained alongside LPUE.

DCO Birchenough explained that the pilot project is looking at LPUE but that the Whelk Population Survey which will run annually alongside the pilot project looks at CPUE, collecting data from four locations across the District with fishers provided the total contents from 15 pots under a dispensation which gives a CPUE value. DCO Birchenough outlined that data from both sampling programs can be analysed together to build the understanding of the District's whelk populations.

14. Whelk Population Survey Report

IFCO Mullen presented the outputs of the 2024 Whelk Population Survey Report to Members as the second year of data collection under this survey. IFCO Mullen outlined that data was collected from March to June 2024 using local fishers in Weymouth, Poole Bay and the Solent.

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IFCO Mullen presented the key findings of the analysis to Members, identifying that total CPUE and CPUE over MCRS from Weymouth Bay were greater than in the Solent and that total CPUE and CPUE over MCRS was significantly higher in Weymouth Bay in 2024 compared to 2023. Poole Bay was statistically similar between both years and the Solent displayed significantly lower total CPUE, CPUE over MCRS and CPUE under MCRS in 2024 compared to 2023.

IFCO Mullen outlined that the longest and widest whelks were found in Weymouth Bay with a significant increase compared to 2023. IFCO Mullen informed Members that analysis revealed variations in work populations across the district, indicating that there is potential for populations with differing characteristics. For example, Weymouth Bay showed larger whelks and higher catch levels than those in Poole Bay and in turn Poole Bay showed larger whelks and higher catch rates than in the Solent. IFCO Mullen informed Members that this supports observations of varying whelk sizes across the UK, even over small spatial areas.

IFCO Mullen outlined that variations in CPUE and size frequency may be attributed to several factors, including fishing pressure, genetic variation, ecological and environmental conditions such as depth, predation pressure, and food availability. Variations in the population can be monitored throughout the annual time series dataset from this survey and, as the time series is developed further throughout the years, analysis then can be made into possible influencing factors.

15. Fishery Management Plans

PO Wright presented a Fisheries Management Plans (FMP) update to Members outlining that following the pause in this workstream resulting from the General Election, the FMP program had recommenced on the 25th September with the development and implementation of FMPs continuing under the new Government.

On 10th September Defra published a package of FMP materials across multiple tranches. The package included a consultation on proposed amendments to Annex A of the Joint Fisheries Statement relating to, of relevant to the Southern IFCA District, the publication dates for T3 and T4 FMPs, a proposed change to the name of Black Seabream FMP to 'Seabream FMP' and the inclusion of gilthead bream, and the inclusion of cuckoo wrasse in the Wrasses Complex FMP. DCO Birchenough provided Members with the emergent update referenced in this meeting, stating that following a review of the consultation the proposals were logistical rather than technical and that the intention is that the Southern IFCA would be supportive of the proposals. DCO Birchenough outlined that the rationale for the amendments is to make sure that there is an appropriate timeframe over which to make the FMPs as robust as possible, incorporating evidence gathering and appropriate stakeholder engagement and opportunities to feed into the development process before the FMPs are finalised. DCO Birchenough outlined that, in relation to the proposed Seabream FMP, gilthead bream are being increasingly seen in the District therefore it is proposed that Southern IFCA are supportive of the inclusion of this species in the FMP. In addition, cuckoo wrasse are also found in the District, and therefore the inclusion of this species in the Wrasses Complex FMP would also be welcomed alongside the ability for Southern IFCA to share experience of management practices for wrasses through the FMP development process. DCO Birchenough outlined that it is proposed that Southern IFCA respond to the consultation on this basis.

Dr A Jensen stated that in particular with the Black Seabream and Wrasses Complex FMPs it is known that there are large evidence gaps therefore the opportunity to try and identify or address these and pull together all relevant information is a positive.

PO Wright informed Members that the final FMP from T1&2 had been published, The Southern North Sea and Eastern Channel Mixed Flatfish, and that the content of the FMP was currently

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being reviewed to determine proposed measures and relevance to the District. In addition, the first piece of legislation stemming from the FMP process has been laid in Parliament on 16th October. The measures within this legislation included MCRS for fish species which align with MCRS which Southern IFCA has for those species within the District MCRS Byelaw, restrictions on power and gear for fly seining vessels and to allow commercial catch limits for bass to be updated promptly through fishing licences following international negotiations. PO Wright outlined that Defra have stated that any changes to fishing gear or practice required to comply with these measures need to be made by 16th December.

PO Wright informed Members that the consultation documents for the T3 FMPs have been published, there are four out of five which are relevant to waters within the Southern IFCA District. PO Wright outlined that Southern IFCA is currently reviewing the consultation documents and will be formulating a process for engaging with Members on the consultations and any proposed responses. PO Wright provided Members with details of consultation events in the District taking place in December.

PO Wright updated Members that for T4 FMPs, all four of which are relevant to waters within the Southern IFCA District, engagement has been taking place with the MMO on the Black Seabream and Wrasses Complex FMPs to discuss any relevant work carried out by Southern IFCA and that working groups have been formed for these FMPs which DCO Birchenough and PO Wright will sit on, the first meeting took place on 22nd October. PO Wright provided Members with details of two surveys being run by the MMO on T4 FMPs.

Dr A Jensen informed Members that he also sat on the Black Seabream and Wrasses Complex FMP Working Groups outlining that the main focus for both was geared towards the south coast. Mr R Stride informed Members that he also sat on these Working Groups.

Mr R Stride asked about the relationship between the Black Seabream FMP and the IFCA work on black seabream. DCO Birchenough outlined that the FMP process is separate and likely to be more protracted than the IFCA process, stating that once the IFCA has reached the appropriate stage in the development of management for black seabream then this will be shared through the FMP process. DCO Birchenough outlined that information from annual wrasse fishery monitoring and the Juvenile Fish Survey Program is already being provided through the FMP to support evidence gathering along with the quantification of impact report provided to the TAC in May 2024.

Mr R Stride referenced the legislation laid in Parliament and that proposed MCRS are in line with that currently used rather than exploring if larger sizes may be required. DCO Birchenough responded that the species profiles previously developed by the IFCA on relevant species size data was provided through the FMP development process. DCO Birchenough informed Members that MCRS for the proposed species was only in place for a few IFCAs therefore there is likely to be an improvement by introducing these sizes at a national level. DCO Birchenough stated that the FMP process has impacted the Southern IFCA MCRS review and that it remained important to understand how MCRS measures may be delivered at a national level through the FMP program in order to inform any future direction for District specific work.

The CEO stated that there needs to be careful consideration when developing management as to how it aligns or may contradict measures coming from the FMP program as this may impact the ability to take such management forward.

Mr S Kingston-Turner asked whether the FMPs would therefore dictate what we can be done at a local level with regard to MCRS.

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DCO Birchenough explained that there needs to be an understanding of proposals being put forward nationally as if Southern IFCA were to progress with a District review and make changes to legislation that were then not aligned with national measures, that legislation would need to be amended again to align with any national measures. DCO Birchenough outlined that the IFCA can be more restrictive but not less restrictive than any national measures.

Mr R Stride queried whether there is a mechanism to update MCRS in line with national measures that would allow for a more responsive approach. DCO Birchenough responded that national MCRS had not changed in an extended period of time, the previous revision of MCRS in the Southern IFCA District and the introduction of the MCRS Byelaw had been in response to a change to national technical conservation regulations and a need to reinstate certain powers in this regard and, at the time, MCRS was then brought into a single byelaw from several standalone Southern IFCA byelaws, however national sizes had not changed during that period. DCO Birchenough outlined that the FMP process potentially bringing in more national sizes and/or changing existing national sizes was quite novel compared to the process over the last 10-15 years.

16. Poole Harbour Aquatic Management Plan

DCO Birchenough informed Members that a new version of the Poole Harbour Aquatic Management Plan had been published by the Poole Harbour Steering Group, on which DCO Birchenough is the representative for Southern IFCA.

DCO Birchenough gave Members an overview of the history of the Plan and the aim of the Plan being to provide a management framework to promote safe and sustainable operations within Poole Harbour across all activities. DCO Birchenough informed Members that the document is non-statutory and seeks to provide guidance to relevant regulators with all Members of the Steering Group having the ability to feed into the drafting of the Plan. DCO Birchenough stated that she had provided the information to inform the fisheries chapter and that the management objectives related to fisheries cover existing work and duties of Southern IFCA.

17. Date of Next Meeting

To confirm the date of the next meeting of the Technical Advisory Committee on the 6th February 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 16:37.

Chairman:

Date: