

**MINUTES OF THE QUARTERLY MEETING OF THE
SUSSEX INSHORE FISHERIES & CONSERVATION AUTHORITY
on 23rd April 2026**

at Sussex Yacht Club, 85/89 Brighton Road, Shoreham-by-Sea

PRESENT

Members

Prof. Peter Jones (Chair)
Councillor Noel Atkins (Vice Chair, West Sussex County Council)
Councillor Theresa Fowler (Brighton & Hove City Council)
Councillor Steve Murphy (East Sussex County Council)
Councillor Paul Redstone (East Sussex County Council)
Sally Ashby (MMO Appointee) [Online]
Dr Paul Driver (MMO Appointee)
Prof. Paul Leonard (MMO Appointee)
Gordon Chittenden (MMO Representative) [Online]
Mark Bennett (EA Representative)
Julian Seaman (MMO Appointee)
Kim Matthews (MMO Appointee)
Louise Hutchby (NE Representative)
Yasmin Ornsby (MMO Appointee)

Staff

Rob Pearson (Chief Fisheries & Conservation Officer)
Angharad Purcell (Deputy Chief Fisheries & Conservation Officer) [Online]
Rebecca Belleni (Committee & Communications Manager)
Tim Dapling (Strategic Advisor & Clerk) [Online]
Dr George Balchin (Fisheries & Conservation Manager)
Ruth Harrison (Finance Manager)
Sol Lucas (Senior Conservation & Research Officer)

1 CHAIR & CHIEF OFFICER'S INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Prof. Peter Jones welcomed members, staff and guests to the AGM for 2026/27 and declared the meeting open.
- 1.2 Chief Officer Rob Pearson thanked members for attending and advised that there were points of business on the agenda related to the AGM to complete.

- 1.3 Rob Pearson advised the committee that this would be Cllr Noel Atkins final meeting after being with SxIFCA for many years. He thanked Cllr Noel Atkins for his commitment to the meetings as a member from WSCC and as Chair of the SxIFCA Finance Subcommittee and Vice Chair of the Principal meetings.
- 1.4 Cllr Noel Atkins thanked the Chief and added that he had thoroughly enjoyed his time at SxIFCA.

2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Councillor Deborah Urquhart (West Sussex County Council)
Dr Corina Ciocan (MMO Appointee)
Paul Johnson (MMO Appointee)
Shaun Brewer (MMO Appointee)
Gary Edwards (MMO Appointee)

Absent

Councillor Emma Evans (West Sussex County Council)

3. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

- 3.1 Julian Seaman as Harbour Master for Shoreham Port Authority, berthing providers for SxIFCA vessels and various inshore fishing vessels.
- 3.2 Cllr Noel Atkins as West Sussex County Councillor and for Worthing Borough Council. Member of Littlehampton Harbour Board. Chair of Worthing Royal Naval Association and Armed Forces Champion for Worthing.
- 3.3 Kim Matthews and Yasmin Ornsby declared an interest as Commercial fishermen.

4. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- 4.1 The Chief, Rob Pearson asked members for any comments and corrections on the minutes from the previous Quarterly Committee Meeting.

Propser: Paul Driver

Seconder: Julian Seaman

ALL RESOLVED to approve the minutes.

5. MATTERS ARISING

- 5.1 Rob Pearson asked if there were any matters arising from the minutes.
None.

DECISION ITEMS

6 Appointment of Chair and Vice Chair

- 6.1 Rob Pearson explained that due to being our AGM and before further business it was necessary to make the annual appointments for both the Chair and Vice Chair. He reminded members of each of the roles responsibilities.
- 6.2 Rob Pearson highlighted that at the previous AGM it was raised that if any members were interested in the Chair or Vice Chair roles to notify either him, the Chair or the Clerk, who would be happy to provide more information about what the roles entail.
- 6.3 Rob Pearson informed that within the voting timeframe, we received one nomination for Professor Peter Jones to remain as Chair and one nomination each for Councillor Deborah Urquhart and Dr Corina Ciocan for the role of Vice Chair.
- 6.4 Rob Pearson asked Committee Members present to kindly vote for the re-election of Prof. Peter Jones as Chair.

Prof. Peter Jones – 11 votes

- 6.5 Rob Pearson asked Committee Members to vote for Vice Chair position.

Cllr. Deborah Urquart – 7 votes

Dr Corina Ciocan - 6 votes

ALL RESOLVED to approve Prof. Peter Jones as Chair and Cllr. Deborah Urquhart as Vice Chair for the forthcoming year both with majority votes.

7 Appointments to Subcommittees

- 7.1 The Chief Officer, Rob Pearson, introduced the item by explaining that subcommittees were established to ensure the Authority operates effectively and efficiently. Details of each subcommittee are included in the meeting pack, and their constitutions are outlined in the Standing Orders. He noted that these are reviewed annually at the AGM, noting any changes to the memberships and providing an opportunity for new

members to join relevant subcommittees. He reminded the room that the Chair and Vice Chair serve as ex-officio members of all subcommittees, with the exception of the Appeals Subcommittee. He explained that the Finance Subcommittee and Technical Subcommittee meet routinely, whereas the three remaining are used less frequently and are stood-up as required.

- 7.2 **The Finance Subcommittee's** function is to consider expenditure reports and specific financial decisions requiring Committee approval, to make necessary recommendations to the Principal Committee. The finance Subcommittee was delegated (*Art. 17*) with the authority to approve various financial matters and was currently comprised of representatives from the three contributing local authorities:

Professor Peter Jones (Chair)

West Sussex County Council
Cllr Deboarh Urquhart (Vice Chair)

East Sussex County Council
Cllr Steve Murphy
Cllr Paul Redstone

Brighton and Hove City Council
TBC – Cllr Theresa Fowler stepping down due to Mayoral role.

Cllr Deborah Urquhart would Chair the meeting.

- 7.3 Rob Pearson asked members if there were any individuals with financial qualifications that would be willing to step into this role to inform him.

- 7.4 **The Technical Subcommittee**
Rob Pearson expressed the importance of this for the technicalities of byelaw development and for members with technical expertise and knowledge in areas of fisheries and conservation. He added that this year will be busy for the Technical Subcommittee due to programmed byelaw work. Alongside the Chair, Prof. Peter Jones and Vice, Cllr. Deborah Urquhart the current members for the Technical Subcommittee are:

Membership:

Sally Ashby
Mark Bennett
Gordon Chittenden
Dr Corina Ciocan
Dr Paul Driver
Gary Edwards
Paul Johnson
Prof. Paul Leonard
Kim Matthews
Julian Seaman

Louise Hutchby
Shaun Brewer
Yasmin Ornsby

- 7.5 Tim Dapling informed that Shaun Brewer as a Commercial Fisherman would be valuable to include on the Technical Subcommittee and therefore listed.
- 7.6 Rob Pearson agreed and took an action to send correspondence to Shaun Brewer regarding this.
- 7.7 Rob Pearson advised that the three other subcommittees, which are Compliance, Staffing and Appeal Subcommittees, have not been required to meet in the past three years and therefore suggested instead of assigning members today – this could be done ad-hoc in the event of a subcommittee needing to be stood-up, with an appeal to appropriate members. He asked the members if this was a reasonable approach for the next year.

All RESOLVED to accept the appointments proposed.

8 Affirmation of Standing Orders

- 8.1 The Chief, Rob Pearson introduced this item by explaining that the Affirmation of Standing Orders was required annually and was a form of due process. He explained that these Standing Orders are included in the annex for this report and this is to reaffirm and consider any proposed amendments. He added that the SOs are always made available in the public domain through the SxIFCA website for transparency.
- 8.2 Rob Pearson informed that the SOs are derived from legislation and guidance including MaCAA, SxIFCA Order, local authority Code of Conducts, Defra guidance and terms of appointment for our MMO appointees and relevant local government legislation and Nolan Principles. These SOs were established in 2010 and as part of SxIFCA governance it is appropriate to consider and reaffirm these regulations at each annual meeting.
- 8.3 Rob Pearson further informed that there are number of minor proposed amendments to the SOs. He stated that the first, as per paragraph 4.1, was to replace 'Deputy Chair' with 'Vice Chair' to keep consistency throughout IFCA documents.
- 8.4 Rob Pearson informed of the proposed modernisation of terminology by removing gender specific pronouns with a change to gender neutral language.

- 8.5 Rob Pearson explained that to reduce the complexity of the SOs it was proposed placing articles in footnotes to leave clearer text. He also proposed a minor amendment to the introduction to better reflect the applicable legislative requirements.
- 8.6 Rob Pearson informed the formality of changing the listed start time to the principal committee to 1:30pm.
- 8.7 Rob Pearson finally added the last amendment was to update the use of audio recording of the meeting to include video, due to the use of Zoom and online members to facilitate meetings.
- 8.8 Kim Matthews questioned if there was an update on the national review of the representation of fishing members on IFCA committees and declaration of interests, which prevent those members from voting on decision items in which they have declared an interest.
- 8.9 Rob Pearson clarified that, under the authority's CoC and SO, members with a declared interest are permitted to remain in the room and contribute to discussions. He noted that voting arrangements, particularly where there is a pecuniary interest, have been discussed previously and advised that a national work programme arising from the Conduct and Operations review is underway, led by a lawyer on behalf of the AIFCAs, to review code of conduct practices and promote greater consistency across IFCAs, with further updates expected.
- 8.10 Rob Pearson requested to agree to these changes on block unless any members would like to discuss points further.

Recommendations:

- i. **That members reaffirm the Sussex IFCA Standing Orders with the proposed amendments described.**
- ii. **That signed copy of the current Standing Orders is made available on the Authority's website.**

ALL RESOLVED to accept the recommendations.

9 Shellfish Permit Byelaw Review

- 9.1 Rob Pearson introduced the main decision item, providing an update on the Shellfish Permit Byelaw review and proposed next steps. The report includes draft minutes and recommendations from the Technical Subcommittee meeting in March, which considered the priority themes

following delegation from the Principal Committee in January 2026. The report summarises the outcomes of the Technical Subcommittee discussions in March and sets out the proposed direction and next steps towards the informal consultation phase.

- 9.2 Rob Pearson informed members that the first priority theme identified through stakeholder engagement and internal review was on permit costs; Technical Subcommittee members agreed to explore a progressive fee structure linked to pot numbers and supported improved transparency on use of permit income.
- 9.3 Rob Pearson advised that Technical Subcommittee members agreed a proposal for a two-tag system covering the 0–3 nautical mile zone and the 3–6 nautical mile zone should be developed for informal engagement. He said that members acknowledged the potential administrative and financial burden on fishers but noted that the approach had been raised by fishers themselves and agreed it was appropriate for fishers to consider the cost-benefit trade-off at the informal engagement stage.
- 9.4 Rob Pearson stated that Technical Subcommittee members noted gear marking is already covered by the byelaw and permit conditions, with existing flexibility supporting safe fishing practices, and agreed that this can be managed within current arrangements without further development now. However, byelaw amendments should be considered to reflect REM and enable future technologies such as gear in-gear out monitoring.
- 9.5 Rob Pearson raised catch returns as a key theme and that Technical Subcommittee members recognised concerns on catch return requirements, including duplication with MMO reporting and inconsistent recording, while acknowledging their importance for fishery monitoring. He added that recently new video guidance had been developed to improve consistency. He said that proposed inclusion of soak time reporting and improved spatial resolution of catch data in response to concerns about stock pressures will be taken to informal consultations.
- 9.6 Rob Pearson advised that the fixed species list in the Shellfish Permit Byelaw limits the Authority's ability to respond to emerging pot fisheries such as scallop and common octopus. Technical Subcommittee members agreed proposals to add these species and consider moving the list to flexible permit conditions should progress to improve adaptability, with pot limits to be developed, if required, to control effort and protect existing management.
- 9.7 Rob Pearson reminded members of proposed changes to lobster minimum conservation reference sizes over the next three years, initially through MMO licence conditions and later via statutory instrument. Technical subcommittee members supported aligning the SxIFCA minimum size to 90mm in 2028 through an amendment to the minimum size byelaw, with interim changes in 2026–27 applied through flexible

permit conditions. They also supported exploring a voluntary maximum size limit to protect larger lobsters, potentially via a v-notching scheme.

- 9.8 Rob Pearson clarified that some themes discussed are not being taken forward at this stage, including limiting permit numbers. While concerns were raised that numbers are too high, officers advised they have declined since the byelaw was introduced. Stock pressure continues to be monitored through catch returns and landings per unit effort data, including potting surveys for crab and lobster.
- 9.9 Dr George Balchin advised that some fishers raised concerns about escape gaps for crab and lobster, mainly due to potential catch damage. Officers noted these are an important conservation measure and proposed no change at this stage, as current sizes are already used in other IFCAs with a 90mm lobster minimum and are considered suitable, though this may be reviewed in future. It was also proposed to move the condition into flexible permit conditions.
- 9.10 Dr George Balchin stated that enforcement of the byelaw was raised as a concern, with perceived non-compliance and questions over adequacy of enforcement. Officers outlined the Authority's compliance approach, including its powers and range of enforcement activity. Technical Subcommittee members agreed no further development was required but noted the need to improve communication and engagement with fishers around enforcement activity, effectiveness, and timing.
- 9.11 Dr George Balchin further added that concerns were also raised about relationships and engagement with stakeholders. Officers emphasised that staff are professionally trained and that enforcement is applied in a fair and proportionate way, and highlighted ongoing work to build trust through a co-management approach with early engagement of fishers and stakeholders.
- 9.12 Dr George Balchin finally informed members that a Technical Subcommittee member raised a proposal to link fishing effort to the market value of targeted species, so that increases in value would trigger tighter management and reduced effort. This was discussed, but it was noted that there are significant practical difficulties with implementing such a system, and it was therefore not progressed to the next stage of the management review process.
- 9.13 Dr George Balchin concluded by summarising the next steps. Subject to agreement on the recommendations, the informal engagement plan will be developed between now and July, with the plan presented to the July Principal Committee for approval. If agreed, informal consultation will be undertaken between August and October, with preliminary findings reported to the October 2026 Committee meeting. Subject to approval, a further Technical Sub-Committee meeting will be held in November/December to consider detailed responses and finalise proposals for the management review, with outcomes expected to be presented in January 2027.

Recommendations:

- i. **That members note the work undertaken to progress the Shellfish Permit Byelaw 2015 review, including stakeholder engagement, analysis of responses, and identification of priority areas of focus.**
- ii. **That members approve the identified priority areas for the focus of the next stage of the management review, as detailed within this report and the following Annexes, considered at the Technical Subcommittee of 12th March 2026:**
 - Annex II – Compiled analysis reports**
(Executive Summary provided at principal committee only. Full report available upon request)
 - Annex III – Summary table**
 - Annex IV – SPB Review Internal Priorities**
 - Annex V – Shellfish Permit Byelaw 2015**
 - Annex VI – Shellfish Permit Guidance & Flexible Conditions**
- iii. **That members consider and approve the recommendations of the Technical Subcommittee; that the Sussex IFCA progresses to the next phase of the byelaw review, including the preparation of detailed draft proposals for the agreed focus areas to be presented as options for informal consultation, along with developing a planned informal engagement process.**
- iv. **That members agree that officers work to present the informal consultation plan, detailing proposed options to support district wide stakeholder engagement on the byelaw review, to the Principal Committee of the 23rd July 2026 for approval.**

Proposer: Cllr Steve Murphy

Seconder: Cllr Paul Redstone

ALL RESOLVED to accept recommendations.

10 Annual Focus and Priorities 2026 to 2027

- 10.1 Rob Pearson took a moment to confirm to members that, in line with the agreement at the January Quarterly meeting, the annual plan and priorities were submitted to Defra as part of statutory reporting requirements. No changes were made following approval in January, and receipt has been confirmed by Defra, although no further feedback was received. He also drew attention to the RAG (red, amber, green) status

report on the final page, which outlines progress against themes identified through the previous management measures review.

- 10.2 Rob Pearson advised that, following confirmation from Defra last week of the Authority's new Marine Protected Areas Byelaw for Beachy Head East MCZ, three RAG status indicators relating to MPA management can now be moved from amber to green. This was noted as a positive outcome, which will be reported back to Defra in the annual report later this year. He also indicated that he would return to discuss Beachy Head East MCZ later in the agenda.
- 10.3 Prof. Paul Leonard noted that the report refers to dredging and oyster dredging but does not explicitly include other non-fisheries dredging activities, such as those at Brighton Marina, which can still impact fisheries. He highlighted that dredging could create plumes which may adversely affect shellfish and fisheries, suggesting that this should be explicitly acknowledged in the report.
- 10.4 Rob Pearson agreed and noted that this is addressed in the report under the work stream relating to responses to marine licensing applications, which is where most of these dredging proposals are considered.
- 10.5 Prof. Peter Jones noted that SxIFCA can also contribute through conservation and research work and has previously provided substantive responses to proposals but agreed this does not need to be included as a distinct theme.
- 10.6 Cllr Paul Redstone asked how SxIFCA assesses whether it has sufficient capacity to deliver the range of responsibilities, including whether a bottom-up assessment of staff time, such as estimating days required for each task, is undertaken.
- 10.7 Rob Pearson responded that resource management is built into the planning process. He explained that this is based on a four-year plan with detailed resourcing and an annual plan updated each year with current priorities and added that he is happy to share further detail on the process.

Recommendations:

- i. **That members note the legal requirements and guidance concerning IFCA annual plans and reports.**
- ii. **That members agree to the implementation of the management priorities as described and submitted.**
- iii. **That members note that the annual planning priorities, as presented and approved at the Principal Committee of 22nd Jan 2026, were submitted to Defra in accordance with guidance as part of the Sussex IFCA's four-year planning cycle, 2024-28.**

- iv. **That members note the summarised management progress shown in RAG table (Annex 1) describing delivery of the Authority's review of management measures over past planning cycles.**

ALL RESOLVED to accept the recommendations.

INFORMATION ITEMS

11 Financial Performance Report – Quarter 4 2025/2026

- 11.1 Ruth Harrison briefly updated on the last of the quarterly financial performance reports for 2025-2026, which considers both the most recent 4th quarter and the full financial year, and noted that a detailed version was discussed at the Financial Subcommittee meeting earlier that morning.
- 11.2 Ruth Harrison reported that for the quarter January to March the Authority made a surplus of just over £20,000. Other income was around £10,000 below budget, mainly due to lower bank interest and no recovered court costs. Expenditure was generally under budget, with most areas in the green. Marine Operations was £18,000 under budget following receipt of an insurance payment for the FPV Merlin engine. Compliance was around £4,000 over budget due to equipment and permit scheme costs, while other costs were just under £8,000 under budget, partly due to reallocation of research budget to capital expenditure.
- 11.3 Ruth Harrison presented that for the year as a whole, SxIFCA achieved a surplus of just over £58,000, with income broadly on target and expenditure around £100,000 below budget, partly due to a cautious initial budget. Direct employee costs were under budget by just over £50,000 due to staffing changes. Premises costs were around £16,000 under budget, largely due to a refund of service charge overpayments from the landlord, providing the ability to set aside £15,000 towards future dilapidations. Administration was approximately £18,000 under budget due to no legal costs, underspends on printing, and lower premises insurance costs.
- 11.4 Ruth Harrison advised that during the year movements to and from earmarked reserves resulted in a net movement of just over £11,000, mainly relating to capital expenditure contributions to cover future depreciation. The overall surplus of just over £58,000 will be added to reserves, bringing total reserves to £1,643,365 (excluding the revaluation reserve), subject to independent audit.

ALL RESOLVED to approve the report.

12 Conservation and Research Update

- 12.1 Dr George Balchin stated that he is happy to take the majority of the report as read but will talk through key points.
- 12.2 Dr George Balchin introduced the Conservation and Research annual plan, drawing members' attention to Annex 1. He highlighted the key priority for the financial year as the Shellfish Permit Byelaw review. He also noted that the annual plan has been reformatted and slightly streamlined to improve clarity and accessibility.
- 12.3 Dr George Balchin informed that the annual plan includes a strong focus on monitoring, which is intentional, and outlined his aim to take a more high-level review of monitoring activity to standardise how data is collected, recorded and reported. He emphasised the importance of robust evidence for decision-making and suggested an audit of current monitoring practices to improve efficiency and consistency.
- 12.4 Dr George Balchin highlighted fishing effort analysis based on sightings data from FPV Watchful, noting that the current "black box" model limits transparency despite being widely used across IFCAs. He suggested that bringing the process in-house could enable additional outputs, such as fishing diversity mapping by gear type, and noted that Em Denton-Smith is leading this work, with confidence that progress will be made this year.
- 12.5 Dr George Balchin added that a scoping study on habitat mapping was completed with the Channel Coastal Observatory (CCO) last financial year, with the original expectation that it would identify data-poor areas requiring survey work. However, the study concluded that there are no significant data gaps in the district and that existing publicly available data is sufficient to produce the required habitat map without additional survey work. As a result, the workstream has been refocused on securing funding for a phase two project, with further updates expected at the next committee meeting.
- 12.6 Dr George Balchin advised that towed video survey work for monitoring the Nearshore Trawling Byelaw is continuing. He stated that towed video surveys have also been undertaken in Beachy Head East since last summer and will continue this summer, providing a useful baseline dataset. Following confirmation of the MPA Byelaw covering Beachy Head East by the Secretary of State, this baseline will support monitoring of the effects of the introduced management measures over time.
- 12.7 Dr George Balchin advised that SxIFCA has agreed to take on the BRUV monitoring programme previously led by the University of Sussex

following the end of external funding. Fieldwork will be delivered over the summer, with analysis options still to be confirmed, including potential AI project development with partners or student support. He emphasised that ensuring footage is collected is the priority so data can be analysed in future.

- 12.8 Dr George Balchin updated members that research on scallop potting, which was discussed last year but did not progress, will be taken forward this year. He confirmed that Dr Sol Lucas has been tasked with the work to ensure progress is made.
- 12.9 Dr George Balchin provided a brief update on Fisheries Management Plans. Responses to both the Wrasses and Bream FMPs have been developed and are currently under internal review, with submission planned before the 5th May deadline. He said that SxIFCA continues to contribute to FMP implementation, including attendance at MMO drop-in events across Sussex and wider engagement activity. He noted that permit schemes remain focused on managing access and improving monitoring data for future fisheries management. He also reported participation in the Whelk implementation group, which has introduced a risk-based framework, considering measures such as pot limits, catch limits, escape gaps and seasonal closures, with a likely combined approach emerging. Finally, he noted Rob Pearson's continued involvement in the Bass FMP task and finish group, which is exploring improved fishing opportunities through bass management measures.
- 12.10 Dr George Balchin advised that the Brighton Marina dredging and disposal licence has recently been raised again. Following previous engagement on a proposed 10-year licence, a new application has been submitted for a one-year MMO licence to undertake essential works. He said that SxIFCA has not objected, recognising the need to maintain safe navigation and that the short-term licence may provide an opportunity to identify longer-term disposal solutions and develop appropriate monitoring. He confirmed that SxIFCA's previously expressed concerns remain unchanged and were again highlighted in this recent response.
- 12.11 Cllr. Theresa Fowler raised concern about the proposed dredging disposal at Brighton Marina, highlighting local residents' opposition and reported visible changes in sea colour during disposal activity. She questioned whether objecting at this stage would encourage the applicant to seek an alternative disposal site and stated that SxIFCA should object strongly to the proposal.
- 12.12 Dr George Balchin acknowledged the point raised and explained that, in principle, if Premier Marinas could demonstrate through robust monitoring that the activity would not adversely affect conservation features, the Authority would not object. However, he noted that this evidence is not currently in place, which is why objections have been made. He emphasised that our position is based on process and evidence rather than principle and also highlighted the need to take a pragmatic

approach while recognising the importance of maintaining safe use of the marina.

- 12.13 Cllr Theresa Fowler noted that Brighton & Hove City Council and the Wildlife Trust have objected to the MMO application, alongside a large volume of public responses and questioned whether this level of opposition should be taken into account.
- 12.14 Rob Pearson advised that SxIFCA must remain consistent with its established process for assessing activities within Marine Conservation Zones, which focuses on the impact on conservation objectives. He noted that management decisions are based on evidence of environmental impact rather than principle alone, and that the same approach must be applied in this case.
- 12.15 Prof. Peter Jones noted that the Authority has previously expressed grave concerns about the activity and provided a detailed and critical response to the original consultation. He clarified that not objecting to the current one-year application does not reflect a lack of concern, but rather recognition that time is needed to identify an alternative site while essential dredging continues in the interim.
- 12.16 Prof. Paul Leonard stated his previous experience within Defra's licensing science team and raised concerns about the potential impacts of dredging, including whether sediment composition is changing and the risk of contamination from biofouling and chemicals associated with vessel hulls. He supported the proposed one-year licence and its review but highlighted the value of enhanced monitoring, including targeted sampling across different areas of the harbour to better understand contamination levels and material movement. He offered to advise further on this work.
- 12.17 Julian Seaman informed that the dredging and disposal processes are separate, covering both the authority to dredge and the disposal of dredged material. He noted that as part of the licensing process, samples of material from the dredging areas will be taken and submitted to Cefas for analysis.
- 12.18 Prof. Paul Leonard stated the need for robust sampling and analysis, noting that results can vary significantly depending on depth and location. He cautioned that without clear sampling methodology, conclusions on contamination may be unreliable, and called for more information to strengthen the evidence base.
- 12.19 Dr Paul Driver emphasised that the dredging method is critical, highlighting concern over direct pumping and disposal from the marina, and stating that changes to methodology is required, not just limits on disposal volume.

- 12.20 Tim Dapling outlined two dredging methods: standard barge removal and a fluidisation process, where material is pumped via pipes and discharged into the MCZ east of the marina. He noted that this can be visually apparent in nearshore waters and stressed that while dredging is necessary, concerns relate to the methodologies. He also referenced ongoing correspondence with the MMO on the issue over six years.
- 12.21 Prof. Peter Jones reiterated that SxIFCA has consistently raised critical concerns regarding the original application and the current one-year extension and will continue to do so. He acknowledged the pragmatic need for a one-year period to identify an alternative site. He added that the issue had been appropriately discussed within the Conservation and Research report and recommended that members simply note the report.

ALL RESOLVED to approve the report and appendices.

13 Compliance and Enforcement Report

- 13.1 Dr Alberto Kavadellas reported that poor weather conditions during January to March resulted in limited fishing activity, though some activity continued during better weather periods. Enforcement and engagement work focused on hand gathering, particularly in the Rye and Chichester Harbour areas, with associated road patrols and stakeholder engagement.
- 13.2 Dr Alberto Kavadellas stated that there was one verbal warning and two written warnings issued (relating to a single shellfish permit byelaw offence involving both master and owner of a vessel). In addition, there was one verbal warning for a minimum size byelaw offence and a £1,000 Fixed Penalty Notice issued for an offence committed in December.
- 13.3 Kim Matthews asked where the activity took place and what the fixed administrative penalty was for.
- 13.4 Dr Alberto Kavadellas responded that he could not disclose the location or further identifying details of the incident, as it was not a prosecution and therefore not made public. He confirmed he could explain the nature of the offence and penalty but could not provide additional detail, noting that such information would only be publicly available if the matter had proceeded to court.
- 13.5 Dr Alberto Kavadellas advised that the next quarter will see increased focus on shellfish permit compliance, including continued unattended gear inspections and enforcement activity, with further compliance correspondence already being issued. He noted that as weather improves, activity in hand gathering and recreational rod and line fishing

typically increases, bringing associated compliance pressures, particularly around bass regulations for recreational anglers. He confirmed that the team will be working closely with the MMO over the coming quarter to support compliance across these activities.

- 13.6 Prof. Paul Leonard noted that drone use is not mentioned in the report and suggested it could be a useful addition to monitoring data alongside patrol and vehicle mileage information. He asked whether reporting of drone activity should be included going forward.
- 13.7 Dr Alberto Kavadellas suggested that flight time would be a more appropriate measure, as the drone may remain stationary for periods rather than covering distance.

ALL RESOLVED to approve the report and appendices.

14 Vessel Maintenance Log

- 14.1 Rob Pearson advised that a significant update relates to the FPV Merlin, our eight-metre RIB. Members may recall it previously suffered an engine failure, which was replaced under insurance, with the Authority receiving an insurance payment of just under £40,000 this quarter. However, two weeks after the new engine was installed it failed again and has been returned to Volvo, who identified a faulty injector sleeve. A replacement engine will be provided under warranty, so there is no additional financial impact, but the vessel is currently out of service again awaiting installation, creating operational disruption.

ALL RESOLVED to accept the report.

15 Communications Report

- 15.1 Rob Pearson introduced the communications and engagement report as a comprehensive informational update, recommending that members note its contents. He highlighted strong performance in communications and social media activity, thanking Rebecca Belleni for driving this with support from the wider team. He drew members' attention to page 206, which provides a snapshot of key communications themes over the past quarter, including the five-year anniversary for the Nearshore Trawling Byelaw, Sussex shellfish trends, research calls for information, and the Hand Gathering and Minimum Size Byelaws. He noted that the report

demonstrates regular high quality communications and engagement activity and confirmed he was content for the report to be taken as read.

- 15.2 Dr Paul Driver commented positively on the increasing volume of activity and communications work, noting that it is very good. He queried whether SxIFCA has sufficient resources and staffing capacity to continue delivering this level of work.
- 15.3 Rob Pearson advised that Rebecca's formal role is now Committee and Communications Manager, and that communications are a key part of her remit. He noted that she excels in this area but relies on officers to provide content, with teams improving their provision of photos, videos and supporting information. He emphasised the importance of this work, stating that SxIFCA is ahead of other organisations nationally in producing engaging content. He also highlighted the value of social media in communicating with fishers and stakeholders and noted that effective communications help support and reinforce compliance and enforcement outcomes by increasing awareness of Authority activity.
- 15.4 Kim Matthews raised the five-year anniversary of the Nearshore Trawling Byelaw and evidence that it has made a difference. He noted that Defra is increasingly focused on outcomes rather than inputs and questioned whether sufficient evidence exists to demonstrate improvements in inshore stock levels. He acknowledged positive recognition of this byelaw but expressed concern that outcomes are not being clearly measured or evidenced and highlighted that, despite reduced fishing effort, expected stock increases have not been clearly demonstrated, with limited exceptions to areas such as Kingmere MCZ and called for a more outcome-focused approach supported by clearer evidence.
- 15.5 Rob Pearson acknowledged the risk of narrative outpacing evidence and the need for careful communication of outcomes, noting that some organisation's messaging has required correction to reflect the long-term nature of recovery, and agreed that robust monitoring is essential. He also recognised that inshore fishers bear much of the regulatory burden whilst wider stock outcomes are often influenced by offshore activity beyond the Authority's control, but emphasised that this should not detract from taking action within our remit to improve stocks and habitats.
- 15.6 Dr George Balchin reiterated that SxIFCA has sought to temper, rather than amplify claims on the effects of the Nearshore Trawling Byelaw, noting this was a key reason we withdrew from partnership with SKRP. He explained that recovery was always expected to occur over a decadal timescale and that changes at five years are likely to be subtle and difficult to detect. He cautioned against assuming that protecting a proportion of an area would result in equivalent stock increases, given multiple external pressures on stocks. He outlined ongoing monitoring, including annual towed video surveys, eDNA work and other studies, describing the byelaw as one of the better monitored nationally, with

peer-reviewed outputs emerging. He acknowledged concerns about regulatory pressure on inshore fishers but emphasised that the Authority must continue managing fisheries within its remit.

- 15.7 Kim Matthews argued that inshore fishers are making significant sacrifices through increased regulation and questioned whether other sea users are making comparable contributions. He cited activities such as marine dredging and aggregate extraction, and suggested that similar measures, such as seasonal restrictions during key periods like brown crab migration, should be considered for these sectors.
- 15.8 Dr George Balchin explained that the Authority raises such concerns when acting as a consultee on licence applications, contributing evidence to inform decisions. However, he noted that we do not have direct control over the final decisions made by other regulators.
- 15.9 Kim Matthews also questioned the contribution of offshore wind developers, raising concerns about rock placement associated with turbine installations and the potential for material movement under tidal conditions.
- 15.10 Dr George Balchin advised that during consultation on Rampion 2, SxIFCA raised concerns about cable route backfilling, including reports of rock movement affecting fisheries from previous works. He said these concerns were submitted through the consultation process, but recognised that this does not control how the works are ultimately delivered.
- 15.11 Kim Matthews suggested there has been a shift in attitude over the past year, with increased “championing” of inshore fishing. He stated that byelaw measures may have gone too far and argued that other sea users, including energy, aggregate and offshore fishing sectors, have not been similarly impacted, warning of a potential tipping point for inshore fisheries.
- 15.12 Rob Pearson noted that SxIFCA seeks to raise concerns with partners where issues fall outside its remit. He acknowledged the Nearshore Trawling Byelaw has impacted the trawl fleet but emphasised it is intended to support more sustainable small-scale fisheries and deliver longer-term benefits for inshore fishery productivity.
- 15.13 Dr George Balchin used bream as an example, noting that recent improvements in stock are likely driven by multiple factors, including climate-related shifts, management measures in areas such as Kingmere, and protections provided by the Nearshore Trawling Byelaw, particularly the safeguarding of nursery areas, which may support improved recruitment through reduced disturbance. He said that both declines and recoveries in stocks are likely the result of a combination of interacting factors rather than a single cause.

- 15.14 Prof. Peter Jones advised that while outcomes are a priority, these must include wider ecosystem and biodiversity recovery as well as stock levels. He cautioned that in complex marine systems it is extremely difficult to establish clear cause-and-effect relationships, and that changes are rarely attributable to a single factor. He noted that the Conservation and Research programme continues to look for signals of change and to assess, where possible, links to measures such as the Nearshore Trawling Byelaw, but that outcomes are typically the result of multiple interacting factors.
- 15.15 Kim Matthews responded that, in his view, a lack of evidence has previously been used to justify precautionary management decisions over the past 15 years. He suggested this approach has, at times, been applied too readily in the absence of strong evidence and cited sea trout as an example where he felt decisions were made despite limited supporting data.
- 15.16 Prof. Peter Jones raised that the reduction in sea trout populations was itself a key piece of evidence.
- 15.17 Kim Matthews stated that there was no evidence of a decline in sea trout in Sussex and questioned whether monitoring had been undertaken, citing examples in the Arun, Adur and Ouse.
- 15.18 Mark Bennett noted that because sea trout cannot be legally taken, any removals would be unlikely to be recorded, meaning reliable catch figures would not be available. He added that evidence on the impacts of netting on sea trout, including a supporting report, had been used to inform the assessment. He further advised that evidence of sea trout decline could be inferred from reductions in angler catch data in rivers, although this may also be influenced by changes in angling effort and activity.
- 15.19 Prof. Peter Jones emphasised the importance of an evidence-based, outcomes-focused approach. He noted that while the precautionary principle may apply, it does not remove the need to assess whether intended outcomes are being achieved and stressed the importance of continuing to strengthen the evidence base despite challenges in detecting change and attributing causation. He also noted that some outcomes may be beneficial to parts of the industry, highlighting that many inshore static gear fishers, given their history of conflict with the sector, were supportive of the Nearshore Trawling Byelaw.
- 15.20 Kim Matthews noted positively the collaborative fieldwork undertaken for Marianne Glascott (University of Sussex) collecting water samples and commented on concerns regarding water quality potentially having sub-lethal effects on larvae.

ALL RESOLVED to accept the report.

16 Chief Officers Update

- 16.1 Rob Pearson reported confirmation from Defra that the Minister has signed off the Marine Protected Areas Byelaw 2023, introducing fishery management measures for the Beachy Head East Marine Conservation Zone. He thanked staff and members involved over several years since designation in 2019, noting the lengthy QA process. He also highlighted excellent communications work led by Rebecca Belleni, including website updates, direct emails to fishers and stakeholders, and the distribution of hard copy waterproof information leaflets in relevant areas to support awareness of the byelaw and wider fishery management plans.
- 16.2 Rob Pearson briefly advised that consultation on the wrasse and bream FMPs have been submitted and are available in hard copy for members to review. He noted the consultation remains open until 5th May and encouraged relevant members to engage where possible.
- 16.3 Rob Pearson informed on recruitment and governance, indicating that this may not be Prof. Paul Leonard's final meeting as discussions are ongoing with the MMO governance team.
- 16.4 Prof. Paul Leonard noted ongoing uncertainty regarding his tenure, commenting that administrative processes between Defra and the MMO had created confusion over timing and appointments. He confirmed he has signed paperwork setting 7th July as his formal leaving date but added that he has been encouraged to reapply promptly to remain within the system.
- 16.5 Rob Pearson stated that if this is Prof. Paul Leonard's last meeting, he would be greatly missed and expressed gratitude for his contribution since the inception of the IFCA.
- 16.6 Rob Pearson advised that, following a period of acting up and completion of an internal development and assessment process, James Tapley has been appointed to the permanent role of Senior IFCO Skipper within the Marine Operations team, supporting Senior Skipper Chris Hubbard. He congratulated James on his appointment, noting his commitment over the past 18 months, and highlighted that the appointment strengthens operational resilience with two fully qualified skippers available to support FPV Watchful.
- 16.7 Rob Pearson reported on a call for evidence from the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Fisheries regarding an action plan for a thriving and sustainable UK fishing industry, noting this as an initiative aligned with longstanding industry calls for a national fisheries strategy. He advised that the action plan is being led by the former Defra Minister Daniel Zeichner and that AIFCA is preparing a joint response to support

the strategy, which will be shared with members for review at the next quarterly meeting.

ALL RESOLVED to accept the report.

17 Chief Officers Group

- 17.1 Dr Paul Driver congratulated Rob Pearson on becoming the Chair for COG.
- 17.2 Prof. Peter Jones congratulated Rob Pearson along with other members in the room.

ALL RESOLVED to accept the report.

18 Association of Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities

- 18.1 Rob Pearson noted the appointment of Emily Bulled as Communications Officer at the Association, highlighting her previous role with Blue Marine Foundation and positive links with IFCA work. He welcomed the appointment as an opportunity to strengthen communications and advised the launch of a national IFCA newsletter to which SxIFCA has contributed, helping to promote IFCA work more widely.
- 18.2 Rob Pearson reported the recent nominations of Dr Sarah Coulthard and the Small-Scale Fishers Consortium in the Fishing News Awards. He highlighted that, while results are not yet known, it is positive to see their work, supported by AIFCA, being recognised for its efforts to promote and support small-scale fisheries.

ALL RESOLVED to accept the report.

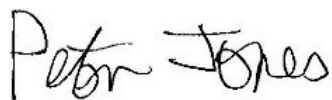
19 AOB

- 19.1 Prof. Peter Jones welcomed Cllr Paul Redstone, noting this was his first meeting as the new East Sussex County Council representative, and extended a welcome on behalf of the Committee.

20 To confirm no requirement for the Technical Subcommittee meeting in June.

21 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

21.1 23rd July 2026.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Peter Jones".

Prof. Peter Jones, Chair Sussex IFCA.