MINUTES OF THE QUARTERLY MEETING OF THE SUSSEX INSHORE FISHERIES & CONSERVATION AUTHORITY on 23rd July 2026
at Sussex Yacht Club, 85/89 Brighton Road, Shoreham-by-Sea

PRESENT

Members
Prof. Peter Jones (Chair)
Councillor Deborah Urquhart (Vice Chair, West Sussex County Council)
Councillor Izabela Mayne (West Sussex County Council)
Councillor Hugh Parker (East Sussex County Council)
Councillor Amanda Jobson (East Sussex County Council)
Councillor Roy Peché (East Sussex County Council)
Dr Paul Driver (MMO Appointee)
Gordon Chittenden (MMO Representative)
Julian Seaman (MMO Appointee)
Kim Matthews (MMO Appointee)
Yasmin Ornsby (MMO Appointee)
Paul Johnson (MMO Appointee)
Jon Barnes (MMO Appointee)

Staff
Rob Pearson (Chief Fisheries & Conservation Officer)
Rebecca Belleni (Committee & Communications Manager)
Tim Dapling (Strategic Advisor & Clerk)
Christopher Hubbard (Vessels Operations Manager & Senior Skipper)
Dr Geroge Balchin (Fisheries & Conservation Manager)
Ruth Harrison (Finance Manager)
Hannah Gibbs (Enforcement & Compliance Officer)

1 CHAIR & CHIEF OFFICER's INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Chair, Prof. Peter Jones welcomed members and staff to the second quarterly committee meeting of 2026 and took time to welcome newly appointed Councillors from ESCC and WSCC.

1.2 The Chief, Rob Pearson informed that there was a substantive agenda item relating to interests later in the meeting, it remained advisable to undertake the routine declaration of interests at this stage until the proposed changes had been formally adopted.

2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Councillor Theresa Fowler (Brighton & Hove City Council)
Dr Corina Ciocan (MMO Appointee)
Louise Hutchby (NE Representative)
Mark Bennett (EA Representative)
Gary Edwards (MMO Appointee)
Sally Ashby (MMO Appointee)

Absent

Shaun Brewer (MMO Appointee)
Councillor Gerry Thompson (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 Kim Matthews and Yasmin Ornsby declared an interest regarding Commercial fishing representatives.

3.3 Cllr. Amanda Jobson as a volunteer for SAS and Plastic Free Hastings.

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.

ALL RESOLVED to approve the minutes.

5. MATTERS ARISING

5.1 Prof. Peter Jones asked if there were any matters arising from the minutes.

None.

- Prof. Peter Jones informed Members that, before moving to the first decision item (Agenda Item 6), there was an additional procedural item requiring a decision before the substantive business of the agenda.

- Rob Pearson raised that, following the appointment of new councillors to the Committee, appointments to the various sub-committees would ordinarily be made at the Annual General Meeting. However, this would leave two further Committee meetings before such appointments could be made. He noted the particular importance of appointing members to the Finance Subcommittee to ensure it remained quorate for the remainder of the municipal year. He therefore invited the newly appointed councillors who were willing, to indicate their interest, and asked members to approve their appointment to the Finance Subcommittee:

- Cllr. Amanda Jobson
  Cllr. Hugh Parker
  Cllr. Roy Peché
  Cllr. Izabella Mayne

DECISION ITEMS

6 Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

6.1 Tim Dapling presented the procedural report, explaining that its purpose was to provide clearer guidance, update the authority's internal procedures, and ensure they reflected current best practice and regulatory requirements. He advised that the report included a commissioned review by the Association of IFCAs on declarations of interest and associated procedures, setting out best practice for IFCAs. It also reviewed SxIFCA's existing declarations of interest documentation and proposed amendments to strengthen and update these arrangements. The recommendations included revisions to the Register of Interests for non-elected members, the Declaration of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests for non-elected members, and the introduction of a formal process for granting dispensations to enable members to participate in committee discussions and business where appropriate.

6.2 Tim Dapling reminded members that SxIFCA is a statutory body established under the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 and associated secondary legislation. He explained that, due to its constitution, the authority is legally constituted as a joint local authority committee, rather than a committee of a single local authority, and is subject to relevant local government legislation. He advised that we are bound by the Localism Act 2011, which sets out the requirements for declaring Disclosable Pecuniary Interests (DPIs) and granting dispensations where appropriate. He noted that the current framework provides greater clarity by focusing on financial interests.

6.3 Tim Dapling explained that a review commissioned by the AIFCAs and undertaken by the firm Your Clerk LLP examined how each IFCA manages declarations of interest and produced a series of best practice recommendations. He advised that, under the Localism Act 2011, members are required to declare any DPIs within 28 days of appointment. These declarations are recorded in a public Register of Interests, which should be published on the Authority's website, subject only to limited exceptions where sensitive information requires protection. He noted that the process promotes transparency by enabling the public to view members' declared financial interests.

6.4 Tim Dapling further advised that declarations of interest would remain a standing agenda item, with any identified DPI highlighted in the meeting papers. Members would remain responsible for declaring any DPI not identified. He advised that members with a DPI could only participate where a dispensation had been granted under the Localism Act 2011. The proposed dispensation process would apply to non-elected members, while elected members would continue to follow the procedures of their appointing authorities.

6.5 Tim Dapling referenced Section 33 of the Localism Act 2011 which sets out the circumstances in which dispensations may be granted to members with a DPI. He advised that the proposed approach for Sussex IFCA was to grant dispensations to non-elected members to enable them to contribute their knowledge and expertise to discussions where their participation would otherwise be restricted. He noted that the purpose of the dispensation was to avoid impeding the committee's consideration of business through the loss of relevant expertise, rather than to address issues of quorum, and that the proposed dispensations would permit members to speak but not vote on matters in which they had a DPI.

6.6 Kim Matthews raised that it had always seemed unusual that members appointed because of their fishing knowledge, expertise, or as representatives of the fishing industry were able to contribute to discussions but were not able to vote on matters affecting those interests.

6.7 Tim Dapling advised that the proposed approach was consistent with guidance commissioned by the AIFCA. He noted that the guidance recommended granting dispensations to enable members with a DPI to speak and contribute their expertise during discussions, but not to vote, as allowing participation in debate was considered sufficient to support informed decision making.

6.8 Kim Matthews noted that, at the January 2026 meeting, there were 17 members attending, including four online, who would not be eligible to vote in future. He said that this would leave 13 voting members, four of whom were fishing representatives, representing approximately 30% of the committee. He stated that excluding such a proportion of the authority from voting could impede the transaction of the authority’s business. He further noted research by Sarah Courtard which indicated that 85% of people in Sussex value or highly value the inshore fishing fleet. He said

that, given the level of representation affected and the importance of the inshore fleet to the local community, dispensations would support the effective functioning of SxIFCA.

6.9 Tim Dapling explained that the authority's approach to date was consistent with the guidance; that a DPI would only impede the functioning or transaction of the authority's business where it prevented the authority from being able to make a decision, for example through issues with quorum. He noted that, although members with a DPI may be unable to vote on certain matters, they would still be able to participate in discussions where a dispensation had been granted, ensuring their expertise could be considered. He added that elected members continued to represent the interests of their communities and clarified that restrictions would only apply to specific matters where a DPI existed, rather than all fisheries-related matters. He stated that the proposed approach was to consider dispensations by fishing method and emphasised the need to balance member participation with the risk of decisions being challenged if members with a DPI were permitted to vote. The focus of the report was therefore on enabling members with DPIs to contribute to discussions while maintaining the integrity of the decision making process.

6.10 Rob Pearson provided further background and context on the issue, explaining that, through Defra's previous Conduct and Operations Report, inconsistencies were identified in how conflicts of interest were being managed across IFCAs. He noted for example, that some IFCAs had previously allowed fishers with a DPI to vote, contrary to how we had operated. These highlighted inconsistencies led to the commissioning of an independent legal review. He advised that Sarah Broadford of Your Clerk LLP, who undertook the review and provided training for Chief Officers and Clerks, had confirmed explicitly that members with a DPI should not vote under the Localism Act, except in a rare occasion that the Authority could not continue its function without their vote. He emphasised that the aim was to ensure fishers continued to contribute their expertise and influence discussions while protecting the integrity of the authority's decision-making process. He explained that SxIFCA had previously managed this through verbal arrangements at meetings following these principles, but the proposed changes would introduce a formal written dispensation process to ensure compliance and consistency.

6.11 Kim Matthews sought clarification on whether the position being outlined meant that the situation was not considered to be impeding the business of the authority.

6.12 Rob Pearson confirmed that Sarah Broadford's advice was clear that the issue related to whether the meeting was quorate. He explained that a dispensation could be considered where the meeting was unable to function due to a lack of quorum.

6.13 Tim Dapling clarified that not all declared interests would constitute a DPI. He explained that Julian Seaman and Yasmin Ornsby did not have a DPI in to today's decision item relating to the Shellfish Permit Byelaw and could

therefore participate and vote. He advised that Kim Matthews circumstances would depend on the information recorded in the register of interests, but as he did not hold a shellfish permit or receive income from shellfish activities, it was unlikely to constitute a DPI. He added that the revised process would help members understand when an interest required declaration and when they could continue to participate fully.

6.14 Kim Matthews raised that Julian Seaman's role as manager of a port with the highest shellfish landings in England could be considered relevant.

6.15 Tim Dapling explained that a DPI relates to a direct financial interest and that Julian Seaman's income would not be affected by shellfish landings. He noted that this differs from the previous concept of a prejudicial interest, and reiterated that the proposed approach provided safeguards for the authority's decisions while allowing members to participate in the majority of discussions and votes.

6.16 Tim Dapling advised that the report included a number of annexes, including the independent review report, the relevant regulations setting out DPI requirements, and SxIFCA internal governance documents.

6.17 Prof. Peter Jones reitterated that the changes aimed to provide clarity and consistency on what constitutes a DPI, ensuring it relates to a direct financial interest rather than excluding those involved in commercial fishing from all related decisions. He noted that conflicts would need to be specific to the relevant gear type or species and highlighted the importance of maintaining defensible decisions while balancing the authority's fisheries and conservation responsibilities.

6.18 Kim Matthews asked for clarification on who would be responsible for deciding whether a dispensation should be granted.

6.19 Tim Dapling responded that the decision to issue a dispensation would primarily sit with the Chief Officer and Chair in consultation with one another. He added that they could seek advice from the Clerk where required.

6.20 Rob Pearson confirmed that members would be able to complete the new DPI forms, identifying any relevant interests, including specific fishing methods or gear types. He advised that any applications for dispensations must be made in writing and that the information would be used to update the public Register of Interests. Dispensations would remain valid for four years, with members only needing to notify the authority of any changes.

6.21 Tim Dapling highlighted that there was a clear legal obligation on members to complete the process correctly. He noted that this was not only a responsibility of the Authority but also a legal requirement for members.

6.22 Kim Matthews said he would like more clarity on the decision making process for dispensations.

6.23 Cllr. Deborah Urquhart sought clarification on whether elected members appointed by local authorities would also be required to complete the new forms, noting that this was the usual practice when appointed to other public bodies.

6.24 Tim Dapling advised that elected members already complete DPI declarations through their appointing councils, and these registers could be referred to where necessary. He noted that, while MMO appointees were more likely to have fisheries-related DPIs, councillors could also have relevant pecuniary interests and remained individually responsible for declaring any such interests to the authority.

6.25 Yasmin Ornsby noted that fishermen often change the way they fish depending on conditions and availability, resulting in fishing methods they use can changing often in respect to future fishing representative members and this DPI process would negatively impact recruitment.

6.26 Tim Dapling advised that members should record all the fishing methods they use when completing their DPI forms. He explained that fishers using multiple methods, such as potting and netting, should declare each method, with updates only likely to be needed where there was a significant change.

6.27 Tim Dapling assured members that staff would provide any assistance required to help them complete the DPI and dispensation forms correctly.

6.28 Kim Matthews reiterated his concern was one of principle rather than paperwork. He noted that fishers may change the fisheries they operate in at short notice and questioned whether members would remain willing to serve on the committee if declaring a DPI could prevent them from voting on matters affecting their livelihoods.

6.29 Tim Dapling explained that members should declare the fishing activities they were undertaking at the time of completing the form. He advised that, if their fishing activities later changed, they would be required to notify the authority and update their declaration accordingly.

6.30 Paul Johnson acknowledged that many fishers operate multiple fishing methods, depending on conditions. He said this would not discourage fishers from serving on the committee, noting that members would still be able to declare relevant interests at meetings verbally alongside the formal paperwork process.

6.31 Rob Pearson finally raised that, as highlighted by Your Clerk LLP, members could continue to attend and participate in meetings remotely but would not be able to vote unless attending in person. He noted that a recent local governement consultation showed strong support for permitting remote voting in future, and the position could change if legislation is updated.

Recommendations:

i. That members note the report commissioned by the Association of IFCAs, produced by Your Clerk LLP (Annex I).

ii. That Members approve the amendments to relevant Sussex IFCA documentation to reflect recommendations within the report and the requirement to disclose DPIs in accordance with the Localism Act 2011 and the Relevant Authorities (Disclosable Pecuniary Interests) Regulations 2012. The amended Authority documentation include:

Standing Orders (Annex III)
Code of Conduct for members (Annex IV)
Register of Interests (Annex V)
Members Register of Interests form (Annex VI)

iii. Members approve that, upon application, dispensations to speak, or speak and vote, on matters for which non-elected members have a DPI are issued by the Chief Fisheries and Conservation Officer and Clerk, in accordance with Section 33 of the Localism Act 2011. The dispensation to speak will apply for no longer than 4 years.

iv. That Members approve that non-elected members shall complete the declaration of interests form within 28 days of their appointment, and that they inform the Chief Fisheries and Conservation Officer and Clerk of any changes to their disclosable pecuniary interests during their period of appointment.

Approve – 10 **Against – 1** **Abstention – 0**

ALL RESOLVED to approve Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

7 Shellfish Permit Byelaw 2015 Management Review

7.1 Dr George Balchin introduced the report, explaining that its purpose was to update members on progress with the authority's review of the Shellfish Permit Byelaw, outline the anticipated next steps, and provide an update on preparations for the informal consultation following discussion at the technical subcommittee on 12 March 2026. He advised that the recommendation was for SxIFCA to proceed with the informal consultation on proposed changes to the management measures, in accordance with the agreed 2026–27 Annual Plan.

7.2 Dr George Balchin provided background to the review, noting that the current Shellfish Permit Byelaw, introduced in 2016, regulates the whelk, crab, lobster, cuttlefish and prawn pot fisheries through a permit system. He explained that permit conditions include measures such as pot limits, escape gaps, protection for berried lobsters and the submission of monthly catch returns. He advised that the authority has a duty to review its management measures periodically to ensure they remain fit for purpose and that the review of the Shellfish Permit Byelaw had been identified as a priority.

7.3 Dr George Balchin explained that evidence gathered from catch returns had been analysed and published as a report, which also formed the basis of a YouTube video shared with permit holders. He advised that Officers had also completed an internal review of the byelaw and conducted semi-structured interviews with around 50% of permit holders to identify priorities for the review. The findings, prepared by social scientists at the University of Newcastle, were reviewed by the technical Subcommittee, which identified key themes and agreed that proposals should be developed for informal consultation through stakeholder workshops. He noted that the authority approved this approach in April 2026 and agreed to progress to a detailed engagement plan.

7.4 Dr George Balchin further informed that since April, officers had been developing a more detailed informal consultation plan based on a co-development approach. He explained that the proposed discussion themes were set out in Annex 1 and that further engagement resources, including a video summarising the findings of the semi-structured interviews, were being prepared. The video, together with the full report and details of the informal workshops, would be circulated to permit holders to encourage participation in the consultation process.

7.5 Dr George Balchin further added that it had been decided to hold in-person workshops, reflecting fishers' preference for face-to-face engagement and recognising the value of building trust and encouraging detailed discussion. He said that the workshops would be tailored specifically for fishers to support the development of effective management measures through their knowledge and experience. Workshops were proposed at Hastings, Eastbourne, Newhaven, Brighton, Shoreham and Selsey, reflecting the distribution of active permits across the district. They would be held in late September and October, when fishing activity is generally lower, and scheduled for late afternoon to maximise attendance. Each workshop would begin with a presentation summarising the evidence gathered during the review, followed by structured discussion and the collection of feedback on the proposals and consultation process.

7.6 Cllr. Deborah Urquhart asked whether the increase in octopus catches reported in Cornwall, and their known predation on shellfish and crustaceans, was also being observed in Sussex and whether this could have implications for the Shellfish Permit Byelaw review.

7.7 Dr George Balchin advised that octopus were not currently having a significant impact on Sussex shellfish fisheries. However, he confirmed that the review was taking account of the emerging octopus fishery, recognising both the opportunities it may present and the potential management needs.

7.8 Dr George Balchin outlined the proposed next steps, advising that communications would be issued to permit holders in September with details of the workshops, supported by background reports and videos explaining the evidence and proposals. Informal consultation workshops would take place in October, with a summary report presented to the October Committee meeting. He explained that a technical subcommittee would then be held in November or December to review the consultation outcomes and develop proposals, ahead of a formal consultation planned for April 2027, subject to approval by the Authority.

7.9 Cllr. Roy Peché asked whether councillors would be able to attend the informal consultation workshops.

7.10 Rob Pearson confirmed that invitations to the informal consultation workshops would be circulated to all councillors.

Recommendation:

i. To proceed in accordance with the Authority's agreed 2026-2027 Annual Plan and implement an informal consultation process for proposed changes to management measures in support of the Shellfish Permit Byelaw review.

All RESOLVED to approve recommendation.

8 IFCA AI Policy

8.1 Rob Pearson introduced the report, explaining that it followed the authority's Remote Electronic Monitoring (REM) Strategy and proposed a policy framework to govern the use of artificial intelligence within the Authority for members' consideration.

8.2 Rob Pearson provided background to the report, noting the rapid development of artificial intelligence and its potential benefits and risks. He explained that AI could offer significant advantages to the authority, particularly in analysing large volumes of data to support research. As an example, he highlighted the potential use of AI to assist with reviewing

underwater video footage and identifying species from baited remote underwater video and towed video surveys, as well as supporting wider strategic work.

8.3 Rob Pearson explained that the policy had been developed through the IFCA Chief Officers' Group to ensure the responsible and consistent use of AI across all IFCAs. He advised that it established a framework for the lawful, safe and transparent use of AI by officers, members, contractors and consultants, while managing risks such as inaccurate outputs, data protection and information governance. Rob emphasised that AI would support activities such as research, document drafting and communications, but that all outputs would require human review and would not replace professional judgement or statutory decision-making.

8.4 Rob Pearson highlighted the importance of ensuring that confidential, personal and commercially sensitive information is not entered into unapproved public AI tools. He explained that the policy also promotes fairness, transparency and accountability, with managers responsible for overseeing appropriate AI use and all users required to comply with the policy. Subject to members' approval, the policy would be adopted by the authority, supported by staff training and ongoing review of its implementation and effectiveness.

8.5 Cllr. Hugh Parker asked how the policy would be reviewed in future, whether any proposed changes would be reported back to members for approval and what nature of AI are SxIFCA planning to use.

8.6 Rob Pearson advised that minor changes would likely be implemented by SMT, while significant amendments would be brought back to members for approval. He said that the authority was considering tools such as Copilot, which is widely used across the public sector due to its built-in protections, rather than more open public AI platforms. He added that the authority was also exploring collaboration with academic institutions and PhD students on AI tools, particularly for analysing video data.

8.7 Prof. Peter Jones asked whether safeguards were in place to prevent AI access to sensitive information, such as personnel or confidential records.

8.8 Rob Pearson replied that our IT services were administered by a company called Phoenix, who provide cyber security support. He explained that SxIFCA was reviewing its Microsoft Office licensing with a view to incorporating Copilot and would seek assurance on the associated cyber security arrangements as part of that process.

Recommendations:

i. To note the IFCA AI policy provided as Annex I.

ii. **To approve implementation of the AI policy across Sussex IFCA.**

iii. **To note that the policy will be reviewed periodically to reflect changes in technology, legislation and guidance.**

ALL RESOLVED to accept the recommendations.

INFORMATION ITEMS

9 Financial Statements

9.1 Ruth Harrison reported that the finance subcommittee had considered the year end accounts and noted that the authority had received a clean audit. She advised that the final figures were largely unchanged from those presented at the previous meeting and would be published in the forthcoming Annual Report.

9.2 Ruth Harrison informed members of a recorded surplus of £14,000 in the first quarter but was forecasting a year-end deficit of £38,000. She explained that the projected deficit was primarily due to unbudgeted capital expenditure, which would need to be funded from reserves.

9.3 Ruth Harrison concluded that aside from those points, there were no further matters to highlight and invited any questions from members before taking the report as read.

9.4 Dr Paul Driver asked why there was a need to purchase a new navigation system at a cost of £50,000.

9.5 Rob Pearson explained that FPV Watchful's navigation system was largely the original equipment installed when the boat was built over 20 years ago and had recently experienced several faults. He advised that the upgrade was also required to meet Workboat Code 3 and MCA requirements. He noted that the new system would improve operational capability and that officers had considered tenders from specialist suppliers, including Furuno and Transas.

9.6 Chris Hubbard explained that the vessel was still operating with much of its original navigation equipment, which was now over 20 years old. He said that faults were becoming increasingly difficult to resolve due to the limited availability of specialist engineers and support for older systems. The proposed upgrade would improve safety, reliability and usability, including the introduction of a twin ECDIS system to reduce reliance on paper charts. Chris added that the new equipment would support both enforcement activities and a wider range of marine survey and research work.

9.7 Ruth Harrison clarified that the expenditure was currently included as a forecast only and had not yet been fully approved. She advised that, given the scale of the proposed expenditure, a more detailed report would be presented to a future finance subcommittee meeting for consideration before any decision was made.

ALL RESOLVED to accept report.

10 Conservation and Research Update

10.1 Dr George Balchin introduced the report on behalf of the Conservation and Research Team, noting that it reflected the work of the wider C&R team. He advised that the Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA) for Dungeness, Romney Marsh and Rye Bay had now been completed and signed off by Natural England, marking the conclusion of that process. He explained that HRAs assess the compatibility of fishing activities with the conservation objectives of Marine Protected Areas. He added that this was the second HRA to be completed and expressed confidence that the remaining assessment for the Solent and Dorset Coast site would be completed by the next quarterly meeting.

10.2 Dr George Balchin introduced the Fishing Effort Report, explaining that it combines vessel track data from FPV Watchful with sightings data collected primarily by the Compliance Team. He advised that the analysis accounts for variations in patrol coverage to provide a relative measure of fishing effort across the district. He noted that this work by the Conservation and Research and Compliance Teams provides important evidence for SxIFCA work and helps identify patterns in fishing activity and areas where fishing effort is concentrated.

10.3 Dr Paul Driver noted that lobster landings per unit effort appeared to be increasing and asked whether this reflected an increase in lobster abundance or a reduction in fishing effort.

10.4 Dr George Balchin advised that the next report would cover the shellfish permit fishing data in more detail. He noted that crab landings per unit effort had continued to decline, while lobster landings per unit effort were still increasing and added that fishing effort appeared to be increasing slightly, suggesting the improvement in lobster LPUE was not the result of reduced effort.

10.5 Dr Paul Driver noted that the report showed the geographical distribution of fishing effort but did not provide a year-by-year comparison of effort levels.

10.6 Dr George Balchin explained that the report previously included a breakdown of landings per unit effort by ICES square, but this had been removed as the data was difficult to present and interpret effectively. He stated that it had been replaced with an alternative analysis that was considered more accessible and agreed to review the report and provide further details on this to Dr Paul Driver.

10.7 Dr George Balchin introduced the Catch Return Report, explaining that it analyses data submitted by permit holders as a condition of their permits. He explained that the report summarises landings, fishing effort and landings per unit effort, enabling officers to identify spatial and temporal trends within the shellfish fisheries. He advised that members seeking a longer-term perspective could refer to the Shellfish Permit Byelaw Review report, which analyses catch return data collected since 2017.

10.8 Dr George Balchin reported that the habitat mapping project had been placed on hold pending discussions between the Channel Coast Observatory (CCO) and the EA regarding funding. He advised that SxIFCA considered the CCO to be the preferred delivery partner and had also received a positive initial response to an expression of interest submitted to the FASS funding. He said that he is confident that the project would be able to progress once the funding discussions had concluded.

10.9 Prof. Peter Jones provided additional context for new members, explaining that the habitat mapping project was a proposed study that SxIFCA intended to undertake in collaboration with the CCO, with associated financial support linked to that partnership.

10.10 Dr George Balchin explained that a scoping study, presented at a previous meeting, had identified habitat mapping as a potentially costly project due to the volume of seabed data normally required. He advised that the CCO had reviewed the availability of existing data from partner organisations and was able to secure sufficient high-quality datasets to remove the need for additional fieldwork. He added that this represented a significant saving in both cost and effort and reinforced the Authority's view that the CCO was the ideal partner to deliver the next phase of the project.

10.11 Prof. Peter Jones noted that the habitat mapping project was important because it would provide a key evidence base for the authority's ecosystem-based approach to fisheries management and support wider marine conservation and MPA management objectives.

10.12 Dr Paul Driver asked whether additional potting surveys were planned following the survey undertaken in June.

10.13 Dr George Balchin advised that another fisher from Selsey had been recruited to support the potting surveys and that the main challenge had been coordinating logistics, equipment and availability between fishers and officers. He emphasised that there was strong interest in carrying out further surveys.

10.14 Dr George Balchin informed that he had been appointed co-chair of the Sussex Kelp Recovery Project's Research and Monitoring Group, which would provide SxIFCA with greater influence over areas relevant to its statutory responsibilities while reducing resource demands. He also reported that we had taken on the BRUV monitoring previously led by the University of Sussex.

10.15 Dr George Balchin added that the BRUV surveys had been completed successfully. He thanked Chris and the compliance and research teams for their efforts in getting the work established over the previous weeks, noting that although the methodology was familiar, the use of new equipment had been implemented smoothly.

10.16 Dr George Balchin advised that the scallop potting trial project was close to implementation, with documentation largely completed. He explained that SxIFCA was sourcing additional pots but would not delay progress, and that the remaining work involved finalising dispensations and preparing the equipment for deployment with fishers.

10.17 Dr George Balchin updated members that he had taken part in a podcast-style discussion with Oceanographic magazine focused on Beachy Head East MCZ. He explained that the discussion covered both the management of the site and the story behind its designation, highlighting the role of fishers, including Graham Doswell and Paul Joy, in championing the MPA.

10.18 Dr George Balchin concluded that staff training had continued during the quarter, including small fish survey training, small fish identification training and conflict resolution training.

ALL RESOLVED to accept the report.

11 Compliance and Enforcement Report

11.1 Rob Pearson introduced the enforcement report, providing an update on enforcement activity from the previous quarter and outlining the priorities for the forthcoming quarter. He advised that SxIFCA use a structured, risk-based and intelligence-led approach to target resources effectively, relying on stakeholder reports and working in partnerships with organisations such as the MMO. He noted that, as the authority does not provide an emergency response service, intelligence is essential for identifying patterns of potential offences and directing patrol effort where it is most effective.

11.2 Rob Pearson reported that during the last quarter, there were 66 active commercial shellfish permit holders, 44 recreational shellfish permit holders and 70 hand gathering permit holders. He informed that a decline in hand gathering permit renewals was due to many in the first year of the

byelaw purchasing one as a precaution but after the year, realising they were not exceeding the daily bag limits.

11.3 Rob Pearson updated that enforcement activity continued across the eastern, central and western areas of the district, with officers gathering intelligence at key landing sites. At sea inspections focused on compliance with the Shellfish Permit Bylaw, national bass regulations, scallop dredging regulations and the MPA Bylaw. Favourable weather led to increased fishing activity during the quarter, with patrols undertaken using the authority's vessels and supported by shore based inspections, including drone deployments.

11.4 Rob Pearson informed that, across the district, fishing activity varied by port. Rye's scallop dredging fleet completed the season during the quarter, netting continued when conditions allowed, although seal activity affected catches. Enforcement also focused on hand gathering and bait digging. Commercial fishing activity remained low at Hastings, Bexhill and Pevensey, while Eastbourne's activity was mainly potting with some bass line fishing. At Newhaven, two new vessels joined the fleet, contributing to a mixed fishery, and Brighton experienced high levels of commercial and recreational line fishing during favourable weather.

11.5 Rob Pearson continued to advise that a high number of recreational angling inspections were undertaken in Brighton through both sea and road patrols. At Shoreham, fishing activity focused on whelk potting and commercial rod and line fishing for bass, with many vessels operating just outside the district around Rampion. At Worthing, the beach launch fleet primarily undertook fixed netting, although activity was limited by periods of poor weather.

11.6 Rob Pearson reported that fishing activity at Bognor remained limited, whilst at Selsey vessels returned to their summer moorings and, following the end of the whelk season, focused on lobster and crab potting. He noted the reopening of the former Selsey Fish and Lobster premises. At Chichester, low levels of hand gathering continued, with enforcement supported by regular road patrols and drone deployments.

11.7 Rob Pearson updated members on targeted enforcement of the recreational fishery around Brighton, Shoreham and Newhaven following intelligence about suspected illegal charter operations and potential bass regulation offences. He added that SxIFCA has no powers over marine safety or illegal chartering, which fall under the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) remit. IFCA officers worked with the Angling Trust and the MMO to carry out targeted patrols during May. A total of 54 recreational vessels were inspected, with no offences detected under bass regulations. He stated that the operation demonstrated a high level of compliance with fisheries regulations, while intelligence relating to suspected illegal chartering continued to be shared with the MCA. He thanked the MMO for its support and highlighted the success of the joint working.

11.8 Gordon Chittenden raised that intelligence reports had reduced significantly compared with the previous year, which he attributed to the high profile presence and regular enforcement activity undertaken. He added that the MCA had taken some low-level action against three vessels.

11.9 Rob Pearson concluded that the enforcement activity table on page 209 summarised the offences detected during the quarter. A total of 13 advisory letters and eight official written warnings were issued, with many relating to minor shellfish potting offences. He highlighted the team's work on pot hauling, which resulted in the seizure of around 200 pots that had been stolen from fishers and joined together into unauthorised strings. Most of the pots were subsequently returned to their rightful owners.

11.10 Kim Mathews reflected on the importance of the rule of law and compliance, noting that the majority of fishermen and anglers operate within the regulations, with relatively few non-compliance issues identified through enforcement activity. He questioned whether fishing, fish stocks and the marine environment were more secure than they were 15 years ago and raised concerns that the precautionary approach may have resulted in disproportionate impacts on the inshore fishing fleet and coastal communities. He encouraged SxIFCA to consider further support for small-scale inshore fishers and proposed reviewing certain restrictions, including the 1.5m below surface netting rule, and exploring options such as additional drift net opportunities for smaller vessels. He stated the need to balance conservation measures with maintaining sustainable inshore fisheries and supporting coastal communities. He asked that, through Rob Pearson's involvement on the Bass Management Group, consideration be given to exploring drift netting for bass as a way of providing the inshore fleet with an additional fishing opportunity.

11.11 Rob Pearson acknowledged Kim Mathew's points and explained that the challenge with bass regulations is that they are linked to UK–EU negotiations. He noted that there had been frustration within the Bass Management Group, as the preferred approach was to use the increase in bass stock advice to expand opportunities through additional authorisations, whereas Defra instead increased the allowances for existing authorisations. He added that drift netting remains under consideration, with Kent and Essex IFCA and Eastern IFCA currently undertaking a literature review to present to the Bass Management Group, following an action identified through the Fisheries Management Plan.

11.12 Kim Matthews requested that SxIFCA consider asking for a review of the potential for a small-scale inshore night-time drift net fishery. He proposed that consideration be given to a trial in Sussex, noting that Sussex is further removed from the EU negotiations than Kent.

11.13 Rob Pearson added that we would monitor the outcomes of the work being undertaken by EIFCA and K&E IFCA. He noted that their proposal was for a trial rather than the introduction of a new fishery, as any changes would remain dependent on Government and EU negotiations, with future decisions informed by the results and evidence from any trial. He added

that the trial would be resource-intensive, as it is expected to rely on Remote Electronic Monitoring (REM), including VMS and cameras, to record any bycatch. He noted that the associated monitoring requirements and costs would need to be considered when assessing the feasibility and scale of any future opportunity. He confirmed that he would update members as further information became available through the Bass Management Group.

11.14 Prof. Peter Jones responded that the proposal to remove the 1.5 metre headline limit was a significant suggestion to raise during an enforcement update. He noted that the existing 1.5 metre minimum head rope depth was already the absolute minimum recommended, with conservation advice having previously supported even deeper head rope restrictions.

11.15 Tim Dapling clarified the background to the 1.5 metre head rope limit, noting that this restriction does not currently apply during the winter period under the existing byelaw arrangements. He advised that the requested flexibility already exists during that period and that the absence of catches is not related to the 1.5 metre restriction. He highlighted wider concerns around fishing mortality occurring in offshore fisheries and the potential impacts on inshore stocks and communities. He emphasised the need for future Fisheries Management Plans to address the sustainability of offshore activity and ensure inshore fisheries have the opportunity to recover and thrive, using cuttlefish as an example where offshore juvenile catches may have implications for the inshore fishery. He stressed the importance of improved stock assessments and evidence-based management decisions.

11.16 Kim Matthews questioned whether the authority should be raising concerns with Defra and national policymakers regarding the monitoring and management of industrial offshore fishing activity. He expressed concern that proposals around further inshore restrictions, including the 1.5 metre head rope limit within the new byelaw, could send the wrong message and place additional pressure on small inshore vessels that already have limited fishing opportunities. He emphasised the importance of supporting sustainable local fisheries, noting the contribution of inshore fishing to food security and the potential value of locally caught fish within the wider national food strategy.

11.17 Rob Pearson confirmed that SxIFCA had raised these concerns through all relevant Fisheries Management Plans and continued to highlight the impact of offshore fishing effort on inshore fisheries. He noted that this was also a key reason for supporting the Inshore Fisheries Consortium through the AIFCAs, to raise the issue at a national level. He emphasised that the authority's duty is to promote sustainable inshore fisheries and that the challenges faced by inshore sectors as a result of offshore activity were consistently reflected in its work. He reassured members that every opportunity was being taken to make these points.

11.18 Prof. Peter Jones noted that the concerns reflected discussions at the recent Inshore Fisheries Consortium meeting, highlighting wider challenges

facing the inshore sector, including overcapacity and excessive effort in offshore fisheries. He confirmed that IFCAs had consistently raised these concerns with the MMO and Defra. Peter emphasised the need to balance ecosystem protection with fishing opportunities and noted that the Authority would continue to highlight offshore pressures, although these issues remain outside its direct jurisdiction.

11.19 Cllr. Amanda Jobson suggested that members should consider lobbying their local MPs on these issues, noting the petition relating to bottom trawling as an example.

11.20 Prof. Peter Jones clarified that the issue was not specifically against bottom trawling, but related more broadly to large-scale industrial fishing activity, which can include pelagic netting and other forms of fishing, including bass fishing. He noted that the issue was complex and that a ban on bottom trawling alone would not address the wider concerns around industrial fishing.

11.21 Paul Johnson noted that large fishing companies also play an important role in supplying food, emphasising that their activities are driven by feeding people rather than for recreational purposes.

ALL RESOLVED to approve the report.

12 Vessel Maintenance Log

12.1 Chris Hubbard reported that FPV Watchful came out of the water this year for routine maintenance, including minor repairs, deck repainting, superstructure paint touch-ups and anti-fouling work. No major issues were identified. He advised that FPV Merlin was now back and operational following the engine malfunction experienced in July last year. He explained that the issue was not caused by operator error, and after the engine was replaced, a cylinder liner malfunction occurred after only 12 hours of operation, resulting in a cracked cylinder head. FPV Merlin was towed to Chichester for repairs and, following replacement of the cylinder head, was now fully operational.

12.2 Chris Hubbard further informed that FPV Osprey had performed well with no issues. He said that, while FPV Watchful was out of the water, FPV Osprey was relocated to Brighton to maintain operational capability, particularly given the level of angling activity in the area. As she does not have anti-fouling on the bottom, it required regular removal from the water, and a reverse dock arrangement was used to keep the vessel out of the water while allowing the team to continue operating.

ALL RESOLVED to approve the report.

13 Communications Report

13.1 Rob Pearson advised that the majority of the report could be taken as read but highlighted the significant focus on the MPA Byelaw, which came into effect shortly before the previous meeting. He thanked Rebecca Belleni for the communications work and noted that the timing aligned well with coverage by BBC's Fiona Irving, Southeast Environment Correspondent, on the day the byelaw was confirmed due to a preplanned media patrol with FPV Watchful.

13.2 Rob Pearson highlighted the strong performance of recent social media activity. He noted that LinkedIn was proving effective for recruitment, with around 50% of candidates reporting that they had seen job adverts through the platform. He also highlighted the success of a bream reel, which received nearly 15,000 views, and drew attention to the leaflet design on Beachy Head East MCZ, which was distributed alongside the code of conduct.

13.3 Prof. Peter Jones commented that it was positive to see Sussex IFCA raising its public profile and particularly thanked Rebecca Belleni for her social media work on this.

ALL RESOLVED to approve the report and appendices.

14 Chief Officers Update

14.1 Rob Pearson updated members that the bluefin tuna season opened the previous Monday and noted that it was becoming increasingly relevant to the district. He reported that six vessels within the district held tuna authorisations, including three commercial authorisations and three recreational catch-and-release permits. He added that, with increasing sightings of tuna in the area, further fishing activity within the district could be expected.

14.2 Rob Pearson raised the increase in octopus fishing activity, noting that Cornwall IFCA had introduced an emergency byelaw due to increased effort from larger vessels. He advised that, while Sussex was not currently experiencing targeted octopus fishing, the authority was considering including octopus as a specified species under the Shellfish Permit Bylaw.

Rob noted reports of increased octopus presence in local pots, suggesting this may become a future issue to monitor.

14.3 Cllr. Deborah Urquhart asked whether octopus should be actively targeted to help protect shellfish stocks within the pot fishery.

14.4 Rob Pearson explained that the issue experienced in Cornwall was that the pots used to target octopus were the same as those used for crab and lobster. The increase in octopus fishing effort resulted in a significant rise in crab and lobster gear being deployed, increasing pressure on those fisheries. He noted that the pots targeting octopus can become more effective once crab or lobster are caught inside.

14.5 Rob Pearson provided an update on recruitment and governance, noting the new members already welcomed at the start of the meeting. He advised that two members of staff had resigned during the quarter. Jen Lewis, Conservation and Research Manager, would be relocating to Cornwall and George Balchin will take on the role full-time from 1st August. He also reported that James Tapley, Senior Compliance and Enforcement IFCO and Skipper, would be relocating to Cardiff and recruitment would start for this role imminently. He also confirmed that Sol Lucas had been appointed permanently as one of the two, Senior Conservation and Research Officers and that Anna Tidy would fill the other Senior position.

ALL RESOLVED to accept the report.

15 Chief Officers Group

15.1 Rob Pearson noted a minor update from COG that Sam Dell, currently Deputy Chief Officer at Southern IFCA, had been appointed as the National IFCA Training Manager and would take up the role towards the end of September.

ALL RESOLVED to accept the report.

16 Association of Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities

16.1 Rob Pearson reiterated the completion of the HRA assessments, noting the significant work undertaken to deliver them and the support received from Natural England. He advised that the AIFCA was hosting a training session on HRAs for IFCA members on 30th July and encouraged members interested in learning more about the process to attend.

16.2 Dr George Balchin noted that the MCZ assessment process is closely aligned with the HRA process. He advised that attending the HRA training session would therefore also provide members with a useful understanding of how MCZ assessments are undertaken, which are likely to be encountered more frequently.

ALL RESOLVED to accept the report.

17 AOB

17.1 Prof. Peter Jones informed that this was likely Gordon Chittenden's final meeting as the MMO Southern Region Manager and MMO representative on the committee, as he would be moving on to a new role as Deputy Chief Officer at Southern IFCA. He thanked Gordon for his contributions and input to the committee's work and wished him well in his new position.

18 To confirm no requirement for the Technical Subcommittee meeting in September.

19 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

19.1 22nd October 2026.

Peter Jones

Prof. Peter Jones, Chair Sussex IFCA.