

**MINUTES OF THE QUARTERLY MEETING OF THE
SUSSEX INSHORE FISHERIES & CONSERVATION AUTHORITY
on 24th July 2025**

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

PRESENT

Members

Prof. Peter Jones (Chair)
Councillor Noel Atkins (Deputy Chair, West Sussex County Council)
Councillor Theresa Fowler (Brighton & Hove City Council)
Councillor Deborah Urquhart (West Sussex County Council)
Dr Paul Driver (MMO Appointee)
Gordon Chittenden (MMO Representative)
Mark Bennett (EA Representative)
Julian Seaman (MMO Appointee)
Kim Matthews (MMO Appointee)
Danni Barrett (NE Representative)
Gary Edwards (MMO Appointee)

Staff

Rob Pearson (Chief Fisheries & Conservation Officer)
Angharad Purcell (Deputy Chief Fisheries & Conservation Officer)
Rebecca Belleni (Committee Manager and Personal Assistant to SMT)
Tim Dapling (Strategic Advisor & Clerk) [Online]
Dr Gerge Balchin (Fisheries & Conservation Manager)
Ruth Harrison (Finance Manager)
Em Denton-Smith (Conservation & Research Officer)
Dan Karparis (Conservation & Research Officer)

Guest

Marianne Glascott – Presenting (University of Sussex)

1 CHAIR & CHIEF OFFICER'S INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Prof. Peter Jones welcomed members, staff and guest to the second Sussex IFCA Principal Committee meeting for 2025.
- 1.2 Prof. Peter Jones gave a particular welcome to Gordon Chittenden who is the newly appointed MMO representative and regional South Coast Manager. He also welcomed Marianne Glascott who is presenting to the committee on 'Suspended sediment and the impact on kelp recovery.'

- 1.3 The Chief, Rob Pearson, informed members that we have a newly appointed Councillor from ESCC, Cllr. Steve Murphy who has replaced Cllr. Julia Hilton. He would have been inducted and available for today's meeting, but he is overseas and will attend in October.

2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Sally Ashby
Dr Corina Ciocan
Prof. Paul Leonard
Shaun Brewer

Absent

Councillor Tom Liddiard (East Sussex County Council)
Councillor Sam Adeniji (East Sussex County Council)
Councillor Emma Evans (West Sussex County Council)

3. DECLARATIONS 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 Gary Edwards declared an interest as commercial fishermen.

4. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- 4.1 Prof. Peter Jones 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 further asked if there were any matters arising from the minutes.

INFORMATION ITEMS

6 Hand Gathering Byelaw 2021

- 6.1 Rob Pearson informed members that the purpose of this first report was to provide the final confirmed Hand Gathering Byelaw 2021 and associated Impact Assessment, as approved in December 2024, along with an update on its implementation. Members were asked to note the actions taken since confirmation, the anticipated timelines and outstanding actions, and the supporting annexes, including promotional and guidance materials produced to aid rollout.
- 6.2 Rob Pearson explained that in the Sussex District, hand-gathering activities are undertaken both recreationally and commercially for a range of animals and plants but typically included bait collection of crabs and worms, shellfish gathering and harvesting of seaweed. These activities are often dispersed and in remote locations, meaning hand gathering fisheries have remained largely unrecorded and unregulated to date. The intention of the Hand Gathering Byelaw is to address this, enabling recording and regulation across the district. The byelaw introduces a bag limit for all hand gatherers, and a permitting requirement for those wishing to exceed these limits. This supports sustainable management and includes bespoke restrictions in Marine Protected Areas to protect sensitive features.
- 6.3 Rob Pearson reminded members that the byelaw was originally made by the Authority in October 2021, consulted on publicly in April 2022, approved in July 2022, and formally confirmed by Defra in December 2024 following over two years of delay during MMO quality assurance. He acknowledged that such a delay risked losing momentum and stakeholder engagement, so a major focus was placed on effective communication of the byelaw introduction. As reported at the January Principal Committee meeting, the Hand Gathering and Minimum Size Byelaws were both confirmed in December 2024, SxIFCA staff subsequently worked on the implementation plan, as proposed at the April 2025 meeting.
- 6.4 Rob Pearson explained further with regards to the permitting requirement, noting the team worked with database provider Cfront to develop a robust permit application and catch return system. From this, a timeline was agreed and executed. As of 1 May 2025, the permitting system was successfully trialled and launched, with an online-only application system. A communications campaign was launched in parallel, including field patrols by IFCOs, direct stakeholder emails and

distribution of guidance materials. Permits applied for between 1 May and 1 July became valid from 1 July 2025, when active enforcement of the byelaw and associated permit conditions began.

- 6.5 Rob Pearson briefly outlined the range of guidance and promotional materials developed to support the implementation of the Hand Gathering Byelaw. These include a press statement, a stakeholder fact sheet, stakeholder poster, frequently asked questions document, introductory guidance, technical guidance documents for each of the six management areas aligned with coastal MPAs, permit application guidance and a quick reference guide. All documents have been widely distributed, including through social media and SxIFCA website. He explained that key queries arising from stakeholders are introduced to the frequently asked questions document, which is updated and published on the website.
- 6.6 Rob Pearson reported that since the Hand Gathering Byelaw came into effect, approximately 52 permits have now been issued, with more applications currently being processed. The uptake has been encouraging, with the majority of permits issued to stakeholders involved in bait collection, particularly for marine worms.
- 6.7 Rob Pearson concluded that there has been strong engagement with the recreational fishing and bait digging community, particularly via social media, which has been the main channel for queries and feedback. Overall, the response has been positive, with some misunderstandings such as bag limits on marine worms addressed through updates to the FAQ document. Permit uptake among shellfish gatherers remains low, likely because permit conditions prevent handgathering shellfish from anywhere other than classified shellfish beds, of which there are none in the district, effectively closing a loophole on commercial gathering of shellfish from unclassified beds and the risk of this shellfish entering the human food chain.
- 6.8 Rob Pearson finally stated that that next steps include launching the catch return function, a key tool for collecting data on hand gathering activities at levels above the bag limits across the district. He emphasised the importance of an effective but straightforward catch return function to encourage accurate reporting by permit holders of their intertidal fisheries take. The system, developed with database provider Cfront, uses simple selection menus to capture key data: permit holder details, date, location, by mapped zones, method, species gathered and quantity. This user-friendly system avoids manual text entry.
- 6.9 Prof. Peter Jones thanked Rob Pearson for the incisive update and asked if there were any questions from members.
- 6.10 Gary Edwards asked for clarification on the confusion around marine worm limits.

- 6.11 Rob Pearson clarified that the worm bag limit consists of three parameters: 150 individuals, 1.5kg in weight, and 1.5 litres in volume. These thresholds were developed through the consultative process, including the Angling Trust and recreational fisher representatives. A person must exceed all three limits to require a permit or otherwise be in breach of the byelaw. He explained that the multi-parameter approach recognises the difference in size between species when considering how much bait is appropriate for personal use — For example larger species such as lug worms, results in much fewer individuals by weight, compared to much smaller worm species like maddies. This approach ensures proportionality and fairness across varied hand gathering activity. This clarification has also been added to the FAQ document.
- 6.12 Gary Edwards queried the reference to "30 crabs" in the byelaw materials, specifically whether this included harbour crabs. It was noted that although harbour crabs are not typically considered edible, they are still gathered and eaten by some individuals.
- 6.13 Kim Mathews asked if there had been any evidence of gangs hand gathering for cockles or oysters. He noted a recent report from the Thames Estuary, highlighting concerning activity where oysters were being collected.
- 6.14 Rob Pearson responded that there have been historical concerns regarding potential gangmaster-related activities. Coordination has taken place with environmental health, Border Force and local police to address these issues. A recent report from Langstone Harbour, adjacent to but outside the district, highlighted significant oyster removal by groups, indicating ongoing enforcement challenges. The team continues to work closely with joint regulators to share intelligence and monitor the situation.
- 6.15 Prof. Peter Jones advised that concerns about Chichester Harbour were a key factor in introducing the hand gathering bylaw. Previously, reports of gangs operating there could not be acted upon, but the new legislation now allows officers to intervene if intelligence is received. While it is not expected that such groups will apply for permits, the byelaw provides the necessary enforcement powers to address these issues.
- 6.16 Dr George Balchin noted that Gordon Watson's upcoming paper estimates approximately 37 tonnes of shellfish is removed from Chichester Harbour per year, based on observations.
- 6.17 Gary Edwards asked about the map shading, noting that off Littlehampton there is nothing shaded on the beach, and whether that meant no activity was allowed there.
- 6.18 Rob Pearson clarified that there are no specific management restrictions for the Littlehampton beach area within the six management zones. The zones shown are simply selectable areas for reporting collection activity.

ALL RESOLVED to approve the report and appendices.

7 Minimum Size Byelaw 2021

- 7.1 The Chief, Rob Pearson, introduced the item stating this was an update on the Minimum Size Fish, Crustacean, and Mollusc Byelaw 2021, providing an opportunity to present the final confirmed byelaw and associated Impact Assessment and give an overview of the implementation progress and stakeholder reception over the past six months. Additionally, he updated members on the development and distribution of the authority's Elasmobranch Code of Conduct, created to complement the byelaw. He added this was an information item, to note actions taken since confirmation and review promotional materials and technical guidance used to support the byelaw.
- 7.2 Rob Pearson informed members that minimum size regulations are a widely accepted tool for sustainable fisheries management. He briefly reminded members that the byelaw's minimum sizes are set out in two schedules: Schedule 1 covers species with existing Minimum Conservation Reference Sizes under EU Council regulations, which apply only to commercial fishing from licensed vessels and not recreational fishers. Schedule 1 also includes species relevant to the Sussex IFCA district not covered by those regulations. Schedule 2 defines measurement methods for different species. The byelaw was made in April 2021, approved by the authority in July 2021, submitted to the MMO for quality assurance in September 2021, and after a significant delay, was confirmed on 11 December 2024.
- 7.3 Rob Pearson continued to advise that the MMO quality assurance team gave some estimated advanced notice of the byelaw confirmation, allowing preparation of extensive promotional materials. These included publishing the byelaw, impact assessment and guidance on the Sussex IFCA website; national press adverts in Fishing News and Sea Angler magazine targeting recreational fishers; a digital communications campaign; and direct emails to registered stakeholders. Posters with QR codes were placed at key locations to direct people to further information. Additionally, fact sheets and minimum size stickers for tackle boxes were distributed to angling shops and recreational groups. A code of conduct for handling Elasmobranch species, with species-specific minimum size recommendations, was also developed, published online and shared with stakeholders alongside the byelaw notification.
- 7.4 Rob Pearson stated the byelaw introduction has been positively received by both commercial and recreational fishers, as it extends minimum size regulations to all sectors, promoting sustainability. Over 3,000 Sussex IFCA minimum size tackle box stickers have been distributed across the district, requiring a second print run due to demand. Enforcement efforts targeted popular shore fishing spots and recreational vessels, including

night inspections. This quarter, officers engaged with over 150 anglers, checking catches, whilst also providing advice and guidance and promoting compliance with the byelaw.

- 7.5 Rob Pearson advised that intelligence reports have guided effective patrols, including out of hours patrols in key areas. Since the byelaw began, three offences were recorded resulting in two verbal and one written warning. Enforcement focus will continue as recreational activity rises in August. Recently, joint operations with MMO and Environment Agency in Hastings showed strong collaboration between regulators.
- 7.6 Prof. Peter Jones thanked Rob for the detailed and useful update on the newly implemented Minimum Size Byelaw and invited any comments or questions.
- 7.7 Gary Edwards asked if laminated sheets with all the size limits could be provided for easier reference, rather than having to look them up individually. He further advised that red bream also require a minimum size and added to the list due to the numbers now in Sussex.
- 7.8 Rob Pearson noted feedback had previously been received on this, and there are plans to create a quick reference guide that extracts the size schedules into a smaller, more accessible format.
- 7.9 Cllr. Theresa Fowler commended the usefulness of the minimum size tackle box stickers through family and friend's feedback.
- 7.10 Prof. Peter Jones thanked the Chief, Rob Pearson for this useful and positive update on the Minimum Size Byelaw.

All RESOLVED to approve the report and appendices.

PRESENTATION:

Marianne Glascott – Suspended Sediment and the impact on Kelp Recovery

8 Financial Statements 2024/2025

- 8.1 Ruth Harrison started by explaining that the report covers two sections: the financial statements for the previous financial year and their audit, as well as the recently completed quarter of the current financial year. She informed that the finance subcommittee met earlier that day to review the details. James Todd and Co served as auditors for the second consecutive year, providing a smooth process and a clean audit report.

- 8.2 Ruth Harrison advised that the audit has two parts: reviewing financial systems and examining the figures for the last financial year. She informed that there were comments and recommendations. First, there is uncertainty over fixed administrative penalties; whether they belong to the authority or the Treasury, and advised members that clarification is still being sought on whether this income should be recorded. She also raised the second comment regarding the office building lease ending in January 2027 and the need to make a provision for dilapidations, which is now being accounted for in the current financial year.
- 8.3 Ruth Harrison reported that the financial statements were approved this morning by the finance subcommittee. For 2024-25, there was a deficit of just under £47,000, which was covered by reserves. The total reserves now stand at £2,007,702. The financial outturn for last year remained consistent with what was reported at the last committee, with no significant changes.
- 8.4 Ruth Harrison continued to present the past quarter report, recording a surplus of just over £25,000. A detailed report is available in Annex 3. Income was slightly below budget by just over £1,000, while expenditure, including contributions to reserves, was £35,000 below budget. This was discussed in more detail at the finance subcommittee meeting.
- 8.5 Ruth Harrison informed that salary costs were £25,000 below budget, partly due to staffing changes since the budget was set and due to the annual pay award, which is budgeted for but has not yet been called on.
- 8.6 Ruth Harrison explained vessel insurance renewal was higher than expected, resulting in a £3,000 overspend in that area. The annual lift-out of FPV *Watchful* has taken place, but final costs have not yet been confirmed and will be clearer by the next quarter.
- 8.7 Ruth Harrison said that a positive budget development came from the landlord, who reconciled service charges and found they had overcharged over a four-year period. Credit notes have been issued, which are now being partly used to help create a dilapidations provision without going over budget.
- 8.8 Ruth Harrison advised that income is forecast to be £13,300 below budget, mainly due to releasing slightly less DEFRA grants and lower than expected bank interest, although this is partially offset by higher permit income. Expenditure for the year is forecast to be £46,000 below budget, with the most significant savings expected in employee costs. As a result, we expect the forecast compared to the budget to show a gain of £33,300. However, this is the very early part of the year and will likely change as the year goes on.

ALL RESOLVED to approve report and appendices.

9 Conservation and Research Update

- 9.1 Dr George Balchin highlighted key points from the report, noting it was a report-heavy quarter. He explained that they have been working back and forth with DEFRA regarding the Beachy Head East MCZ management, but there is now progress. To support this, the team is conducting baseline data collection within the site, including baited remote underwater video (BRUV) and eDNA surveys next week, with potting and towed video surveys also planned. This data will help assess the impact of future management measures.
- 9.2 Dr George Balchin reported good progress on the Habitat Regulations Assessments (HRAs). For Chichester Harbour, Sol is working on the appropriate assessment, having moved on from the likely significant effects (LSE) stage after receiving and incorporating helpful comments from Natural England. The LSE for Dungeness, Romney Marshes and Rye Bay has been resubmitted following feedback from Natural England. Work has also begun on the Solent and Dorset Coast site, with the LSE stage in development. Overall, strong progress is being made on HRA development.
- 9.3 Dr George Balchin informed members that work continues on Fisheries Management Plans (FMPs), which remain a significant focus for the Authority. He gave an update on the Black Bream FMP, noting its primary aim is to conduct a stock assessment to inform whether further management measures are necessary. While this will be a complex process, the MMO is considered well placed to coordinate the necessary partners and resources. Regarding the Whelk FMP, the Authority is progressing with development of a Whelk permit scheme. Initial concerns from IFCAs regarding its potential resemblance to an entitlement scheme and its alignment with existing IFCA permits have been discussed in further meetings, and there is now greater reassurance that these issues will be appropriately addressed.
- 9.4 Dr George Balchin informed the Committee that, in relation to the Small Fish Surveys, he had received confirmation that Zoe Morrall, who leads those surveys under the Solent Seascape Project, has had a publication accepted into the *Journal of Fish Biology*, a respected and high profile journal. The paper includes around six years of Sussex IFCA data, highlighting the value of the Authority's contributions to long term scientific monitoring.
- 9.5 Dr George Balchin advised that in terms of training, Em Denton-Smith is currently working on obtaining her drone pilot licence, which is a valuable addition to the team following Nick Rogers departure last quarter. He also noted attendance at the recent de minimis assessment workshop,

led by the MMO and Defra, and expressed thanks to them for hosting. He added that de minimis assessments will likely be appropriate for much of our future management development, helping to streamline processes for both the authority and stakeholders.

- 9.6 Dr George Balchin stated the major focus for this financial year is the Shellfish Permit Byelaw review. The aim is to engage directly with fishers to gather their knowledge and expertise at the very early stages of the review process. SxIFCA is currently in discussion with Newcastle University and Sussex University to help structure and resource these interviews. An agreement, questionnaire, and contact list are already in place, with only a few final elements requiring completion before interviews with fishers can commence.
- 9.7 Dr George Balchin introduced the Conservation and Research Annual Report, noting that the report had been circulated and could be taken as read. He highlighted the key achievements for the 2024/25 financial year, including the confirmation of the Beachy Head East Byelaw and the near completion of the Kingmere MCZ management review during the same period. He then handed over to research officers to present two key reports: the 2024 Shellfish Permit Catch Return Report and the 2024 Fishing Effort Report, both of which have undergone a significant revamp.
- 9.8 Dan Karparis presented the Shellfish Permit Catch Return Report, explaining that the submission of monthly catch returns is a requirement under the Shellfish Permit Byelaw and forms the main method for monitoring the inshore shellfish fishery in Sussex. This annual report summarises the data collected, including total landings in kilograms, effort-based data such as the average number of pots hauled and trips made per month, and spatial data indicating which of the four ICES sub-squares within the district were fished each month.
- 9.9 Dan Karparis highlighted a general decline in commercial shellfish permits, from 115 in 2017 to just over 79 in 2024. In contrast, recreational permits have remained relatively stable over the same period, averaging around 50–60. Other key findings included a continued decline in crab landings per unit effort, defined as kilograms landed per pot hauled per month, with the decline particularly marked since 2020. Conversely, lobster LPUE has shown recovery to 2017 levels. Dan explained that this presents a current management challenge on how to respond to a declining crab fishery, while the lobster fishery increases. He reminded members that the data in the report only goes back to 2017 and therefore uses that as a baseline, which is likely already below historic baselines.
- 9.10 Em Denton-Smith presented the Fishing Vessel Effort Report, explaining that the report provides a spatial and temporal overview of inshore fishing vessel activity across the Sussex IFCA district between 2020 and 2024. The report is based on sightings data recorded by IFCOs during routine patrols. To control for observation bias, sightings are

standardised against patrol coverage by applying a 2 kilometre buffer around patrol tracks, with fishing effort calculated as sightings per square kilometre of patrol area.

- 9.11 Em Denton-Smith reported that fishing activity was observed across 967km², which is nearly half of the district, and included both mobile and static gear types. Netting and potting were identified as the most widespread methods, covering 24.3% and 21.1% of the district respectively. High intensity angling was observed in 13.2% of the district, with certain grid cells showing particularly concentrated effort. Em concluded that the report provides valuable insight into where and how fishing is occurring, which will be important for informing future management and monitoring.
- 9.12 Dr Paul Driver commended the various workstreams presented in this report and queried regarding a note in the report stating that the IFCA potting surveys were scheduled to begin in early July. It was asked whether these surveys had commenced or not.
- 9.13 Dr George Balchin responded that he had been speaking with fishers in Eastbourne as he would like to prioritise conducting surveys in Beachy Head East to gather baseline data before management measures are implemented. He noted there had been some back and forth as usual, but he was confident surveys would be completed in August. He added that he is coordinating this with the scallop potting trial work, aiming for the two projects to proceed in sync now that our vessel is back in the water.

ALL RESOLVED to approve report and appendices.

10 Compliance and Enforcement Update

- 10.1 Angharad Purcell, Deputy Chief Officer, presented another detailed report covering the period from April to June, noting that she was happy for the majority to be taken as read. She highlighted a few key points: 39 intelligence reports were submitted, and 30 patrols were carried out, split between sea, road and shore. Enforcement priorities continued to focus on the Shellfish Permit Byelaw, particularly in the areas of Eastbourne, Brighton, Shoreham and Selsey.
- 10.2 Angharad Purcell informed that recreational bass fishing activity had increased significantly due to favourable weather, and inspections of recreational anglers both at sea and on land had increased to ensure compliance with the Sussex IFCA Minimum Size Byelaw. There was also a focus on compliance in relation to the scallop dredge fishery in the Rye area, specifically within the three nautical mile limit and the protected

area toward the more eastern extent of the district. She also noted the start of the closed season in June. The netting fleet had struggled to fish during this quarter due to high levels of spider crab and seaweed in the water column.

- 10.3 Angharad Purcell concluded that a total of five offences were reported, three advisory letters, one verbal warning and three official written warnings. She directed members to where further details of the offences can be found in the report. She said that the higher risk fishing activities identified for the next quarter are listed toward the end of the report and will form the primary focus of the compliance and enforcement team.

ALL RESOLVED to approve the report.

11 Vessel Maintenance Log

- 11.1 Rob Pearson advised that this report could be taken as read.

ALL RESOLVED to approve the report.

12 Communications Report

- 12.1 Angharad Purcell said she was happy for most of the report to be taken as read. She explained that, as Rob Pearson had covered in a previous report, particularly for the benefit of new members, the report outlines actions taken to engage with stakeholders through various channels including the website and social media. The website and database continue to function well, with over 4,700 visits to the website during this quarter.
- 12.2 Angharad Purcell updated members that publicity efforts focused on recruitment and the continued promotion of the Minimum Size Byelaw. The main communications event was the promotion of the Hand Gathering Byelaw, which had been discussed earlier in the meeting. This included placing a notice in *Sea Angler* magazine and making a comprehensive package of hand gathering documents available on the website. Community engagement also continued, along with contributions to partnership meetings, the details of which can be found toward the end of the report.
- 12.3 Rob Pearson added a brief update, noting that an additional section had been included at the end of this report because of actions arising from

the consideration of issues raised in the IFCA Conduct and Operations report. One of those issues related to the handling of formal complaints. He informed members that any formal complaints will be reported through the Communications Report going forward.

- 12.4 Rob Pearson confirmed that there had been one formal complaint this month. While it was not directed at Sussex IFCA itself, instead related to Mallydams RSPCA releasing seals, though SxIFCA still provided a full response to the complainant within the required 10-day service timeframe.
- 12.5 Prof. Peter Jones thanked Rob for the useful clarification and noted that the Communications Report is particularly important at this time, given the introduction of the Minimum Size Byelaw and the Hand Gathering Byelaw. He emphasised that these changes mean there is now a much wider constituency that SxIFCA needs to engage and reach effectively.

ALL RESOLVED to approve the report and appendices.

13 Chief Officers Report

- 13.1 Rob Pearson provided an update on byelaws and related matters. He noted that members had already received updates on the Hand Gathering and Minimum Size byelaws but highlighted progress on the Marine Protected Areas (MPA) byelaw and confirmed that discussions with the IFCA Lead Marine Officer team earlier this week indicated the byelaw would be submitted to DEFRA very shortly, which was welcomed as good news. Rob also advised that the Netting Permit Byelaw remained outstanding, with no further updates from DEFRA and that it still sat within their quality assurance (QA) process.
- 13.2 Rob Pearson informed members that DEFRA had asked all IFCAs to make members aware of the Fair Funding Review 2.0, which has been circulated within local government in the context of devolution proposals. Although the implications of this review for IFCA funding are still unclear, communications from DEFRA are remaining positive, and no operational impacts are currently anticipated. A link to the live consultation has been shared with members.
- 13.3 Rob Pearson took time to inform members on the MMO's Stage 3 Marine Protected Areas (MPA) Consultation, which is now live and has attracted significant national media attention, primarily due to the public interest in the management of bottom towed gear. The consultation proposes a series of management interventions, including the prohibition of bottom towed gear in 41 offshore (>6nm) MPAs and a prohibition on traps and pots in one MPA. These proposals are set to be implemented through

four new regional byelaws and will also incorporate existing MMO MPA measures.

- 13.4 Rob Pearson raised the most significant to SxIFCA is the Eastern Channel Marine Protected Areas Fishing Gear Byelaw, which introduces management measures for seven MPAs closest to our district. This includes Offshore Overfalls, where a small portion intersects with the SxIFCA boundary, and Beachy Head West MCZ, which lies just outside the district and prohibition on bottom towed gear is proposed for both sites.
- 13.5 Rob Pearson confirmed that SxIFCA intends to respond to the MMO's Stage 3 Marine Protected Areas Consultation. He highlighted that for many of the offshore MPAs, the MMO has adopted a whole-site management approach, particularly concerning bottom towed gear. In contrast, IFCA's have generally used a feature-based approach, as highlighted in the development of the Schedule 5 byelaw for Beachy Head East. That byelaw was the result of extensive stakeholder consultation and aimed to protect specific ecological features while also considering the interests of local fishers and other stakeholders.
- 13.6 Rob Pearson emphasised the importance of acknowledging this difference in management. While the MMO's approach may be broader, the IFCA model is typically more evidence-based and spatially detailed. Inshore fisheries activity is often monitored more intensively by IFCA's, enabling more targeted and proportionate management. The IFCA model also benefits from early co-management with stakeholders, which helps in shaping byelaws that are both practical and ecologically robust.
- 13.7 Rob Pearson highlighted growing media and public attention on bottom towed gear, partly due to films like *Ocean* by Sir David Attenborough. He said that he anticipates potential press interest and enquiries following confirmation of the Sussex IFCA MPA byelaw and has prepared key messaging to explain its management approach. These key lines, included in the MMO consultation response, emphasise SxIFCA's more comprehensive and detailed monitoring of fishing activity and spatial understanding of inshore marine habitats. This supports an evidence-based management approach with less reliance on the precautionary principle compared to broader offshore approaches. He added there is a greater need for a feature-based management approach in inshore MPAs due to increased spatial pressures in these areas.
- 13.8 Rob Pearson explained that marine spatial pressures are greater in the inshore zone, which can increase the socioeconomic impacts of management. Smaller-scale fishers are particularly vulnerable to displacement since they have limited range from their home ports. Additionally, small-scale fishers are often subject to more comprehensive inshore management, affecting the use and impact of bottom towed gear. He continued to state that in the Sussex district, measures such as the Vessel Length Byelaw, controls on towed gear through Fishing Instruments Byelaw, and a scallop closed season provide important

controls on bottom towed gear. He noted that these differences in approach have been carefully considered, emphasising the need for the IFCA to be prepared to clearly explain the rationale behind their management decisions.

- 13.9 Rob Pearson informed that Robert Clark, Chief of AIFCA, had recently written to the Fisheries Minister to outline the IFCA's approach to inshore management. A response has since been received from the Minister, which Rob described as very positive. The response acknowledged the considerable efforts made by IFCAs in managing inshore fisheries over recent years and recognised that IFCAs are often ahead of broader government objectives, particularly in relation to implementing robust, evidence-based management.
- 13.10 Kim Mathews raised that while many in the fishing sector feel let down by the EU agreement, it does allow the UK to set its own conservation measures. He stated that the MPA and bottom trawling restrictions may effectively reduce foreign vessel activity—highlighting that around 95% of vessels active within MPA's are French, Belgian or Dutch—and could be a mechanism to further exclude foreign vessels. He questioned whether any information had been received in response.
- 13.11 Rob Pearson responded that Gordon might be better placed to explain what has happened at MMO level regarding response to the consultation so far, but confirmed that the proposed measures under the Stage 3 MPA consultation would also apply to the EU fleet. He noted that available evidence indicates those offshore sites are currently used far more by EU vessels, so the measures may have a disproportionate impact on them which, it was added, may not necessarily be a bad outcome.
- 13.12 Prof. Peter Jones noted that the strong objections from various EU countries and fishing organizations demonstrate the impact of the proposed measures. He explained that while such measures do not require pre-approval under the TCA, they could still be challenged under it. Referring to the North Sea sand eel ban, he highlighted that a similar decision had previously gone in the UK's favour, suggesting a challenge may be likely but not necessarily unsuccessful. While the UK cannot explicitly use these measures to exclude foreign vessels, the coincidental consequence of reduced access for EU fishers may nonetheless be seen as a positive outcome.
- 13.13 Rob Pearson informed that the MMO took its first enforcement case against a French vessel earlier this year, which was viewed positively.
- 13.14 Danni Barratt raised a typo in the report, clarifying that it should be *Beachy Head East* that overlaps with the MMO boundary.

ALL RESOLVED to approve the report and appendices.

14 Chief Officers Group

- 14.1 Rob Pearson provided an update on ongoing actions being coordinated through CORRIS, a subgroup of the Chief Officers group reviewing outcomes of the conduct and operations report, with more detailed reporting expected in future meetings.
- 14.2 Rob Pearson briefly addressed recruitment and governance, announcing that IFCO Max Blighton will be leaving in August to travel across Asia and Australia. Max, recruited from the MMO, has been a valuable team member. Recruitment is underway for three new IFCOs: one to replace Max, one to backfill James Tapley's substantive role as he acts up to Senior IFCO Skipper, and one to fill the vacancy left by Nick Rogers last quarter. This recruitment is partially supported by supplementary DEFRA grant funding. He noted three strong candidates have completed second interviews on FPV *Watchful* and are set to start in August.

ALL RESOLVED to accept the report.

15 Association of Inshore Fisheries & Conservation Authorities

- 15.1 Rob Pearson stated he was happy for this item to be taken as read.

ALL RESOLVED to accept the report.

16 AOB

- 16.1 Prof. Peter Jones asked the members present if they wished to raise any other matters.
- 16.2 Dr Paul Driver raised the breakdown of the FPV *Merlin* prior to the meeting, specifically asking for an estimate on how long it might take before repairs are completed and the vessel is back in service.
- 16.3 Rob Pearson provided a full update on FPV *Merlin*, the eight-meter RIB used for enforcement operations. The engine failed the week before last due to what is believed to be a manufacturing fault, a conrod failure, resulting in the engine being effectively written off. This issue was not in the maintenance log as it occurred prior to the report. Rob informed that the engine was removed the following day, and two Volvo dealers have

provided quotes for a replacement engine, ranging from approximately £20,000 to £38,000. Fortunately, the vessel is insured, and the quotes have been submitted to the insurer. There is no confirmed date yet for the engine installation. Rob noted that the FPV *Watchful* returned to service on Tuesday after her annual lift out.

- 16.4 Mark Bennett expressed thanks for the assistance provided by SxIFCA Officers recently during an incident involving a net across the River Adur.
- 16.5 Rob Pearson thanked Mark, describing it as a good enforcement action. An Angling Trust volunteer bailiff reported the intelligence, which led to a joint response by the Environment Agency and SxIFCA to seize the net. Communications regarding the action will be released in the coming days.
- 16.6 Rob Pearson raised an important issue that was highlighted after the meeting papers were distributed. Rob took time to remind members that SxIFCA is a long standing partner in the Sussex Kelp Recovery Project (SKRP). The partnership supports the Nearshore Trawling Byelaw's aims, including monitoring, research, and communications. Recently, SKRP alerted the authority to a serious concern involving a potentially fraudulent carbon credit scheme. A third-party organisation, Carbon Neutral Britain, has been selling carbon offset credits to businesses, falsely linking them to SKRP and using large portions of SKRP's website text without permission. At least one business referenced the Nearshore Trawling Byelaw on their own webpage. SKRP has had no prior contact with Carbon Neutral Britain and is likely a victim of exploitation by this organisation.
- 16.7 Rob Pearson advised that this risk was anticipated by the Chair as part of the SKRP research group three years ago, when there was emerging interest in the potential of blue carbon linked to kelp recovery. However, evidence suggests kelp sequesters very little carbon in marine sediments. At the time, the Chair's concerns about clarifying this publicly were critically dismissed by the research group. Recently, it was revealed that Blue Marine Foundation, an SKRP partner, received £2,500 funding from Carbon Neutral Britain in 2024. Blue Marine Foundation stated there was a written agreement preventing the funds' association with blue carbon credits tied to Sussex kelp. However, the Foundation failed to declare this funding to SKRP or conduct due diligence on Carbon Neutral Britain, despite clear links on their website and those of organisations that had bought into the scheme.
- 16.8 Rob Pearson stated Blue Marine Foundation and SKRP are taking the issue seriously, seeking legal advice, and issuing cease and desist letters to Carbon Neutral Britain. Rob emphasised that SxIFCA has not participated in or supported any carbon or biodiversity credit schemes. The authority recognises this is an emerging, unregulated area with significant reputational risks.

- 16.9 Rob Pearson informed that SxIFCA will work with SKRP and Blue Marine Foundation to fully understand the situation and any potential outcomes.

The authority may need to consider whether it remains appropriate to continue as an SKRP partner. Rob raised the importance of making the authority's position clear to members and added that the Chair of SxIFCA met with the Chair of the partnership and Chief Executive of SWT yesterday.

- 16.10 Rob Pearson read a statement from Henri Brocklebank, chair of SKRP, highlighting why SxIFCA's continued involvement is vital. She noted our role in shaping governance as terms of reference are revised, its importance in guiding legal actions related to the Carbon Neutral Britain issue and our active participation in key partnership decisions. Henri concluded that SxIFCA's membership is essential to the success and integrity of the partnership.

- 16.11 Rob Pearson concluded by acknowledging that potentially tough decisions lie ahead. He emphasised the importance of remaining rational while awaiting full details and proposals once the situation is fully understood. He assured members that updates will be shared as information becomes available and that their input may be sought to help guide future decision-making.

- 16.12 Prof. Peter Jones said that at this stage, they would welcome any preliminary views on continued membership of the SKRP partnership, acknowledging the news is very recent. He noted that the issue will likely arise in future meetings. He said there are concerns about the partnership's governance and the level of influence SxIFCA has over it. While not predicting an outcome, he suggested that if membership continues, it will likely be conditional, with a review in six months to assess whether those conditions are being met.

ALL RESOLVED to accept the report.

- 17 To confirm no requirement for the Technical Subcommittee meeting in September.**

18 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

18.1 23rd October 2025.

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

Prof. Peter Jones, Chair Sussex IFCA.