

**MINUTES OF THE QUARTERLY MEETING OF THE
SUSSEX INSHORE FISHERIES & CONSERVATION AUTHORITY
on 22nd January 2026**

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) [Online]
Councillor Deborah Urquhart (West Sussex County Council)
Councillor Tom Liddiard (East Sussex County Council) [Online]
Dr Paul Driver (MMO Appointee)
Mark Bennett (EA Representative)
Kim Matthews (MMO Appointee)
Louise Hutchby (NE Representative)
Prof. Paul Leonard (MMO Appointee) [Online]
Julian Seaman (MMO Appointee)
Gary Edwards (MMO Appointee)
Gordon Chittenden (MMO Representative)
Sally Ashby (MMO Appointee) [Online]
Shaun Brewer (MMO Appointee)
Yasmin Ornsby (MMO Appointee)
Paul Johnson (MMO Appointee)

Staff

Rob Pearson (Chief Fisheries & Conservation Officer)
Angharad Purcell (Deputy Chief Fisheries & Conservation Officer)
Rebecca Belleni (Committee & Communications Manager)
Dr Geroge Balchin (Fisheries & Conservation Manager)
Dr Sol Lucas (Senior Conservation & Research Officer)
Dr Alberto Kavadellas (Senior Fisheries & Conservation Officer)
Ruth Harrison (Finance Manager)
Christopher Hubbard (Vessels Operations Manager & Senior Skipper)
Vanessa Simons (Enhanced Conservation & Research Officer)
Dan Karparis (Conservation & Research Officer)

1. CHAIR & CHIEF OFFICER'S INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Prof. Peter Jones welcomed members and staff to the fourth Sussex IFCA Principal Committee meeting for 2025 taking place at Sussex Yacht Club at an earlier scheduled time of 1:30pm.

- 1.2 Prof. Peter Jones gave a particular welcome to Louise Hutchby who is representing Natural England.
- 1.3 The Chair also took a moment to congratulate Julian Seaman on being awarded the Merchant Navy for Meritorious Service, recognising his outstanding contribution to maritime safety, leadership, and community service over 43 years.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Councillor Steve Murphy
Dr Corina Ciocan

Absent

Councillor Sam Adeniji
Councillor Emma Evans

3. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

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

None.

DECISION ITEMS

6. Annual Plan Objectives 2026/2027

- 6.1 Rob Pearson introduced the purpose of the report; to present members with proposed priorities for the forthcoming financial year. He noted that IFCAs are required under the Marine and Coastal Access Act to submit an annual plan and an annual report of activities. Defra has issued guidance on how these plans should be developed and how high-level objectives should be embedded. Following that guidance, a longer-term four-year plan 2024–2028 had been produced and shared with members at the January 2024 Principal Committee meeting before submission to Defra, satisfying statutory requirements. A streamlined annual report is then developed within that framework, providing an opportunity to report year-specific highlights before each financial year. He added that some proposed activities ensure Defra milestones are met, while others are independent of statutory guidance and reflect SxIFCA fisheries and MPA management priorities and service delivery.
- 6.2 Rob Pearson stated that, under duties relating to commercial and recreational inshore fisheries management through Section 153 of MACAA, the Authority anticipates implementation of the Netting Permit Byelaw 2019 in the forthcoming year. This will include engagement, education and compliance work to support its introduction, the development of a permitting system database, and appropriate review of existing byelaw management measures. He further noted the continuation of the review process for the Shellfish Permit Byelaw alongside reviews of legacy byelaws, including the Fishing Instruments Byelaw, the Scallop Close Season Byelaw and the Vessel Length Byelaw.
- 6.3 Rob Pearson explained that alongside the main priorities, other activities will continue to support the Authority's objectives through an evidence-based approach, co-management with stakeholders and partnership working. He noted that additional workstreams are expected to be supported by Defra funding in 2026–27 and that AIFCA has led a bid to support all IFCAs in delivering fisheries management plans, MPA management and maintaining good ecological status. He added that the plan recognises the resource requirements for these workstreams, with fishery management plans as a key example, and also highlighted the government's compensatory Marine Protected Areas programme, which could have significant resource implications for the IFCA.

- 6.4 Rob Pearson highlighted that 2025 was a more settled year for staffing following key appointments at the start of the year, including the Vessel Operations Manager and new Compliance and Enforcement Officers. Focus on training and development has ensured officers are integrating effectively, and the return of two officers from maternity leave in early 2026 further strengthens capacity to deliver annual objectives.
- 6.5 Rob Pearson added that the new *FPV Osprey* was successfully commissioned in summer 2025 and, together with *FPV Watchful*, provides an effective platform for compliance operations. *FPV Merlin* is currently out of service, but a new engine is expected shortly, restoring the fleet to full operational capability.
- 6.6 Rob Pearson informed members that, at the start of the current four-year planning cycle, the Authority had three fishery management byelaws under development: the Minimum Size Byelaw, the Hand Gathering Byelaw and the Netting Permit Byelaw. As the Authority enters the final quarter of the third year of the plan, both the Minimum Size and Hand Gathering Byelaws have been confirmed and successfully implemented. Both byelaws will be subject to future review in the next four-year planning period. The introduction of the Netting Permit Byelaw and the Shellfish Permit review will be a considerable focus for the coming year.
- 6.7 Rob Pearson explained that the plan includes support for national projects, such as the Coastal Health Project, responding to marine licence applications, and continuing partnership research on environmental impacts. A key project involves working with the Channel Coast Observatory to develop an updated district-wide habitat map, supporting improved fisheries management in Sussex. In-house monitoring will also be expanded with new equipment procured, including baited remote underwater video stations and a towed flying video array. The Conservation and Research and Marine Operations teams have worked closely to deliver a robust survey programme, enabling evidence-based management of Sussex fisheries.
- 6.8 Rob Pearson informed members that the report highlights planned work under our duties towards MPA's. The introduction of the new Marine Protected Areas Byelaw, introducing management for Beachy Head East MCZ, is now close to confirmation. Once in place, fisheries management measures will protect sites, support conservation objectives and contribute to government targets, including 30% of UK sea and land becoming protected areas by 2030. Resources for 2026–27 will focus on education, guidance and enforcement of the new byelaw, while further MPA work for the remainder of the 2024–28 cycle will focus on monitoring and reviewing existing measures.
- 6.9 Rob Pearson said that significant commitments for the forthcoming year include the scheduled review of the Chichester Harbour European Marine Site and the ongoing programme of habitat regulation assessments for protected sites. He added that the Authority will continue to work in partnership with relevant organisations, particularly Natural England, to

monitor activity within protected sites and improve understanding of impacts on designated features.

- 6.10 Rob Pearson highlighted the proposed work supporting wider initiatives, policy, and partnership, guided by the current four-year plan. Key objectives include being evidence-based, operating a fair and effective enforcement regime, supporting sustainable natural capital, and working in partnership. The report notes continued adoption of the marine natural capital ecosystem approach and support for UK fisheries management plan development, through local IFCA engagement and national communications via the AIFCA senior officer lead. Key engagement for SxIFCA staff includes the Bass Management Group and the Whelk Working Group, with additional Defra funding confirmed for these workstreams in the forthcoming year.
- 6.11 Rob Pearson added that the Authority will continue to engage with commercial and recreational fishing communities through local groups, forums, and targeted communications, including the Chichester Harbour Conservancy Advisory Committee and port meetings such as at Newhaven, Rye Harbour and Worthing. Digital communications will be refined across platforms, ensuring all communications activity meets the standards in the published service plan.
- 6.12 Rob Pearson further added that SxIFCA will continue working with AIFCA, national partners and key local groups, supporting monitoring initiatives such as the Small Fish Survey Programme and responding to marine licensing applications via the MMO, with Defra-funded resources. He also said that SxIFCA has considered strategic resourcing to respond to significant external projects, with key infrastructure projects anticipated in the coming year, including Rampion 2 and Pevensy Bay and Selsey Bill coastal flood schemes.
- 6.13 Kim Matthews raised a general point that the report is heavily focused on fishery management, with very little on conservation. He highlighted that, in the Coastal Health Project, fishery pressure was not identified as a significant factor affecting water quality; instead, impacts are largely driven by chemical pollution and environmental quality. Drawing on Marianne Glascott's presentation on kelp monitoring, he noted that coastal habitats are influenced by broader factors beyond fisheries. Kim emphasised that household activities contribute significantly, citing that there are approximately 730,000 households in Sussex, the majority near the coast, and that virtually all use washing machines, who's discharge can affect water quality.
- 6.14 Rob Pearson responded that he agreed with the point about wider environmental impacts impacting fisheries and conservation. He explained that the plan relates to the Authority's duties under Section 154 on conservation, specifically relating to marine conservation zones. As a fisheries regulator under the Marine and Coastal Access Act, the Authority can only regulate fishing activities. Wider environmental impacts are addressed through supporting workstreams and partnerships with other

agencies and academic institutions, including those whose role is more focussed on water quality impacts such as the Environment Agency, but the Authority is not legislated or resourced to lead on that type of investigative work.

- 6.15 Kim Matthews suggested more emphasis on wider environmental impacts, noting household pollutants from washing machines and dishwashers, and referencing sub-lethal changes to sediment. He asked if the Authority's research programmes could monitor sediment and share findings with relevant partners.
- 6.16 Rob Pearson explained that SxIFCA participates in a number of forums, including the ChASM Sediment Forum. He noted that the Authority is not resourced to actively monitor sediment but it is exploring how existing data can support such investigations. He explained, through the Shellfish Permit Byelaw review, the Authority has an opportunity to consider how catch return data could be collected and used to assess impacts from environmental factors, such as changes in catch returns following heavy rainfall.
- 6.17 Rob Pearson added that SxIFCA will undertake this type of data sharing and analysis and is very appreciative of receiving information from fishers, as it helps to understand long term fishery performance and the factors influencing it. SxIFCA routinely shares its data with partner organisations who are better placed to analyse these environmental aspects. He reminded that the Authority has also facilitated water quality sampling for the Cefas Coastal Health project, from FPV Watchful. He emphasised that these environmental concerns are something the Authority is very aware of and considers as part of its routine day-to-day processes.
- 6.18 Prof. Peter Jones noted that SxIFCA supports wider environmental work through data sharing with Cefas, the EA and the Sediment Working Group. However, he stressed that the IFCA is a fisheries management body with fisheries/ecology expertise rather than eco-toxicologists, but acknowledged Kim's point.
- 6.19 Prof. Paul Leonard referenced work with the University of Exeter on the *Future Fibres* project, which is assessing washing machine impacts and prompting manufacturers to consider changes. A further meeting is planned for the summer, and he offered to report back. He acknowledged the defined role of the IFCA and noted that other agencies will have responsibilities.
- 6.20 Gary Edwards raised a point regarding evidence-based decision making. He noted that, in many past cases, there has been limited evidence supporting some measures. Referring to kelp, he questioned whether the NTB is still necessary, as evidence suggests that fishermen were not causing significant damage. He emphasised that any continuation of the NTB should be clearly supported by current evidence.

- 6.21 Rob Pearson explained that the original impact assessment for the NTB considered habitat types across the district and created a matrix of value for ecosystem services versus sensitivity to trawling. Kelp was identified as both highly valuable and sensitive, but other nearshore habitats were also important, for example as nursery areas. He stated that kelp has become the headline focus, often highlighted by partner organisations, but it is only one component of the wider habitat protection measures.
- 6.22 Gary Edwards agreed that certain areas, such as chalk reefs, need protection, but stated the importance of evidence before restricting. He raised the Netting Permit Byelaw, noting that assumptions had been made without firm evidence regarding salmon. He urged the Authority to proactively gather and use evidence in the future, stressing that management decisions directly affect people's livelihoods.
- 6.23 Prof. Peter Jones noted that management decisions balance evidence-based and precautionary approaches, as required by legislation. He explained that the NTB addressed not only kelp protection but also essential fish habitats and bycatch reduction. These aspects will be reviewed for effectiveness during the forthcoming five-year review.

Recommendations:

- i. That members note the legal requirements and guidance concerning IFCA annual plans and reports.**
- ii. That members agree to the management priorities described.**
- iii. That members agree that annual planning priorities are provided to Defra as part of the Sussex IFCAs four-year planning cycle, 2024 to 2028.**

ALL RESOLVED to accept recommendations.

7. Shellfish Permit Byelaw Management Review

- 7.1 Dr George Balchin informed members that the management review of the Shellfish Permit Byelaw, which regulates shellfish fisheries in Sussex through permits, placing conditions on permit holders such as escape gaps and pot limits, has commenced. The report updates members on progress and assesses whether the available evidence supports continuing the review and moving towards informal consultation with fishers and wider stakeholders. He noted that the annexes are extensive, so his focus would be on the Part 1 and Part 2 reports and the potting review.

- 7.2 Dr. George Balchin described the potting review, led by Dan Karparis, as a valuable piece of work. It covers the history of shellfish potting, ecological impacts, and the fishery's importance to fishers' livelihoods, providing important background. The review has been shared with stakeholders ahead of informal consultation workshops, to inform discussions.
- 7.3 Dr. George Balchin provided an update on the semi-structured interviews with commercial pot fishers, engaging around 50% of permit holders in late 2025, providing a representative sample. Five recreational fishers were also interviewed, though commercial fisheries accounts for over 99% of landings. He noted the report is extensive and would not be covered in detail within discussion today. It is in two parts: Part One presents thematic analysis of interviews, with minor updates by the CNR team, an updated version will be shared ahead of the next meeting. Part One explains why elements work well or less well, including suggested solutions. Part Two provides demographic and contextual information, capturing fishers' overarching views and reviewing bylaw elements.
- 7.4 Dr George Balchin outlined the next steps: internally assessing the current byelaw, identifying areas of alignment or divergence with permit holders, and collating key focus areas for the review. Sub-themes from Part One will be collated with SxIFCA responses added, providing discussion points for consultations and clarifying aspects of the byelaw, including insights from multivariate analysis of catch return data. He proposed a technical subcommittee in March to review assessments, areas of focus, and draft proposals, alongside materials for informal workshop consultations.
- 7.5 Dr Paul Driver welcomed the return of Vanessa Simons, noting it provides additional resource for monitoring crab and lobster fisheries. He asked whether V-notching is currently carried out in Sussex.
- 7.6 Dr. George Balchin explained that V-notching is not common in Sussex, but the byelaw prohibits landing V-notched, berried or mutilated lobsters.
- 7.7 Dr. Paul Driver asked whether SxIFCA's Minimum Size Byelaw for lobsters needs updating, following the increase of the legal minimum size to 90 mm.
- 7.8 Dr. George Balchin explained that the lobster minimum size will increase gradually to 90 mm, by 1 mm per year from the current 87 mm, over three years.
- 7.9 Rob Pearson clarified that the new minimum size will initially apply as an MMO license condition from March. National legislation takes precedence over regional IFCA byelaws, so fishers will need to comply with the new measures within the District. However, he reminded members that IFCA officers are not warranted to enforce MMO licence conditions, so it is important to note that IFCA officers will not be able to enforce this MCRS change until it is supported by a Statutory Instrument.
- 7.10 Kim Matthews raised that the report does not reference the spider crab fishery, which was historically significant around 25 years ago, with some

landings dominated by spider crabs. He also shared concerns about data reliability, highlighting that while fishers may pot inside the six-mile limit, they could have additional pots outside this area, making it unclear how landings would be accurately separated in the data.

- 7.11 Kim Matthews praised Sarah Coulthard's executive summary and suggested all committee reports should include a summary with a link to the full report. He noted this would improve clarity, reduce paperwork, and help focus committee discussions.
- 7.12 Rob Pearson noted that while papers are distributed digitally before meetings, members generally prefer hard copies to ensure everyone is referring to the same document in the meeting, supporting defensible decision making. He cautioned that relying only on executive summaries could omit important details. He suggested a possible compromise: keeping large appendices online while retaining key content in hard copy for meetings.
- 7.13 Prof. Peter Jones emphasised the need to balance between providing full information with keeping reports succinct. He explained that while detailed content may be online, much of it may not be read, so preliminary pages with recommendations often serve as an executive summary to support informed committee decisions.

Recommendations:

- i. That members note the evidence provided, contained in the body and Annexes of this report:**
 - Annex I: Shellfish Permit Byelaw Guidance
 - Annex II: Review of Sussex potting fisheries
 - Annex III: Survey Questions Part 1 (Commercial)
 - Annex IV: Survey Questions Part 1 (Recreational)
 - Annex V: Survey Questions Part 2
 - Annex VI: Thematic analysis and Report – Newcastle University
 - Annex VII: Survey Questions Part 2 Report – Sussex IFCA

- ii. That members consider and approve that the available evidence is sufficient to continue with the formal review of management.**

- iii. That Sussex IFCA begin to consider areas of focus for the byelaw review, and begin to plan for informal, and the possibility of Statutory Consultation, with stakeholders and the wider public.**

All RESOLVED to accept the recommendations.

INFORMATION ITEMS

8. REM AI Strategy

- 8.1 Rob Pearson introduced the newly produced IFCA and AI Strategy, a national policy document approved at December's AIFCA Members Forum. Although the annex is labelled draft, no substantive changes have been made. He explained that the joint fishery statement outlines how UK authorities, including IFCAs, will work to deliver the eight objectives of the Fisheries Act. Key principles include use of best available evidence, scientific advice, transparent decision-making, partnership and supporting the UK's ambition to lead in science and innovation. He noted that effective monitoring and well-documented fisheries are essential for a sustainable future for the fishing industry. He highlighted that the statement encourages fisheries authorities to explore technologies such as vessel monitoring systems and remote electronic monitoring for scientific purposes and sustainable fisheries management. Advanced technology can support the joint fishery statement's principles by enabling use of best scientific advice, delivering sustainable management, reducing bycatch, minimizing impacts on sensitive species and reducing illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing.
- 8.2 Rob Pearson explained that IFCAs, through the Chief Officers Group, developed a national strategy on REM and AI to ensure a coordinated approach and to maximize benefits from shared platforms and learning. The strategy, developed by Matt Mander (Devon & Severn IFCA) with AIFCA support and Chief Officers Group oversight, was approved at the December AIFCA Committee meeting (Annex 1).
- 8.3 Rob Pearson informed members that the strategy highlights five national IFCA, REM and AI trials, which will test how byelaws can support effective use of these technologies. Findings will be shared nationally to promote learning. The strategy also focuses on three key areas to maximize technology impact, starting with funding and interoperability, including securing funding, identifying low-cost and shared solutions, exploring external opportunities, and selecting preferred technology providers for consistency across IFCA districts.
- 8.4 Rob Pearson continued to explain that the strategy's remaining areas focus on innovation, knowledge, and training, which lays a framework for adopting a strategic approach to innovation, technical exploration, and robust testing through trials, building capacity across IFCAs through knowledge exchange and the establishment of an IFCA REM Advisory Group. He also outlined data management and back-office arrangements, detailing robust data management and the establishment of data sharing protocols to meet data protection and privacy requirements, while considering how data access could be provided to fishers and industry. He noted that REM and AI have the potential to be transformative in the effective management of inshore fisheries, with the possibility of creating

a fully integrated fisheries monitoring framework. However, he stated that adoption carries financial, regulatory and reputational risks, highlighting the importance of transparent industry engagement, robust trials, and careful analysis to ensure any REM measures are well tested, fit for purpose, and minimize reputational risk.

- 8.5 Rob Pearson outlined opportunities for REM in Sussex, including live monitoring of fishing gear, vessel tracking and recording fishing activity. He noted that the national vessel monitoring system will support enforcement and compliance, for example by detecting spatial incursions of prohibited gear under the Marine Protected Areas byelaw. AI also has potential to reduce officer workload, with a current SxIFCA partnership proposal seeking funding for a PhD to develop AI analysis of underwater video footage, potentially saving hundreds of hours of officer time. He highlighted that trials by other IFCAs, such as Southern IFCA's monitoring of bycatch in fixed net fisheries, could be applied in Sussex, providing a way to gather evidence and reduce reliance on precautionary approaches.
- 8.6 Gary Edwards commented that monitoring could be done directly on boats without expensive systems, as catches are already recorded through landings declarations. He suggested that officers are not fully acting on information available from fishers, citing lots of examples of anglers catching bass outside regulations, and emphasised the importance of effective on-the-ground enforcement before relying on technology.
- 8.7 Rob Pearson responded that there have not been hundreds of intelligence reports received of recreational anglers taking bass, and SxIFCA have acted on the reports received, with some sanctions issued for bass offenses this year.
- 8.8 Gary Edwards stated that illegal bass fishing occurs every weekend in the summer and expressed frustration that officers are unable to catch them.
- 8.9 Dr Alberto Kavadellas raised that if inspections are conducted but no infringements are found, this would indicate that infringements are not occurring.
- 8.10 Shaun Brewer strongly disagreed, noting that many people observe illegal activity occurring regularly at the harbour walls.
- 8.11 Rob Pearson stated that SxIFCA is not receiving the large number of reports suggested and emphasised the importance of using the intelligence reporting system to capture such information.
- 8.12 Gary Edwards expressed concern that investing heavily in a new system may duplicate existing systems and add unnecessary pressure on fishermen.
- 8.13 Rob Pearson provided perspective on costs, noting that Southern IFCA net trial uses video cameras to record migratory salmon, supporting evidence-

gathering. He acknowledged concerns about expensive REM strategies, citing Devon & Severn IFCA's cost-effective approach of using readily available logistics units at £28 each as vessel monitoring systems for monitoring MPA's. He added that the aim is to identify value-for-money solutions without incurring excessive costs.

- 8.14 Kim Matthews expressed concern about REM and AI, citing iVMS issues with equipment not working and data-sharing contracts not being in place. He highlighted the D&S system being used on 35 vessels at significant cost, and questioned the practicality of applying a vehicle fleet monitoring system to boats. He also warned that using such a system carries reputational risk, referencing the Marine Management Organisation's damaged reputation, and cautioned against taking similar risks with inshore vessels.
- 8.15 Rob Pearson clarified that the strategy outlines REM and AI principles in general and the importance of these guidelines if IFCA's are to consider any type of REM project in the future. The D&S IFCA trial is specific to their district, feedback from Devon & Severn shows the system works well, with only one unit replaced at a cost of £28. There is no current need highlighted in Sussex, but the Authority is observing other trials and whether lessons learnt could be applied if required.
- 8.16 Kim Matthews raised the high initial costs of iVMS, noting his first unit was £600 and the subsequent Succorfish unit £1,000. He cautioned that, as these systems carry a legal obligation, faulty or inactive equipment could expose operators to legal risk, likening it to a speed limit enforced with a broken speedometer, and urged caution.
- 8.17 Paul Johnson informed members that the first VMS terminals were fitted on vessels over 15 meters in 2020. While the industry was initially uncomfortable, it has now become normal practice. He added that prosecutions have occurred when vessels deliberately obstructed the VMS aerial to conceal activity, but he is not aware of any prosecutions solely for iVMS operation issues. He explained that the VMS system works effectively and acts as a conduit to iVMS for smaller vessels, and that enforcement for smaller vessels is applied pragmatically.
- 8.18 Rob Pearson explained that iVMS is only one component of REM, with other technologies being trialled, including remote cameras, gear sensors and monitoring systems. He explained that the strategy ensures coherent development and engagement with industry when IFCA's implement or trial such technologies.
- 8.19 Prof. Peter Jones reminded members that this is another IFCA led trial in partnership with the AIFCA. He noted that there is already a large volume of REM data and that the main opportunity is to use AI to analyse it and flag potential breaches. He emphasised that this is a careful exploration of REM and AI's potential, not a proposal to adopt a fully automated system, and that no decisions were made at the meeting to implement it.

- 8.20 Gordon Chittenden raised the use of observers onboard, noting that having one on every boat is labour intensive and costly. He highlighted that REM cameras, combined with AI to analyse data, could provide reliable evidence at a lower cost over the longer term. He described REM as a positive step forward, with AI enhancing its value as it learns from more data.
- 8.21 Gordon Chittenden provided an iVMS update, noting a breakthrough is expected and an announcement is anticipated in the coming weeks, but no further details could be shared at this time.
- 8.22 Dr Paul Driver asked about funding, noting that DEFRA cannot provide the necessary funds and queried where the resources are likely to come from.
- 8.23 Rob Pearson explained that Defra is developing its own REM and AI strategy, with a dedicated REM team that may oversee future funding, though this is not yet confirmed. In the meantime, IFCAs are exploring external and internal funding sources. He noted that a small funding pot currently exists for some trials, but efforts are focused on expanding this to support further trials in the future.

ALL RESOLVED to approve report and appendices.

9. Financial Performance Report Q3 2025-26 & Annual Budget 2026/27

- 9.1 Ruth Harrison reported that the Financial Subcommittee had a positive meeting earlier in the day, approving both the Quarter Three financial performance report and the Annual Budget for the next year. She noted that figures were reviewed in detail and suggested taking the report as read.

ALL RESOLVED to approve report and appendices.

10. Conservation and Research Update

- 10.1 Dr George Balchin provided an update on the Conservation and Research highlights from the quarter. He reported progress on Habitat Regulations Assessment's (HRAs), noting support from Kelly Jones at NE. The (HRA) for Chichester Harbour has been completed and signed off. He added that work continues on the remaining HRAs for Dungeness and Romney Marsh; the Likely Significant Effect section has been signed off by NE, with a final

review pending before submission. The Solent HRA had been delayed due to prioritisation of Shellfish Permit Byelaw work but is now progressing. He expressed hope that all HRAs will be completed by July.

- 10.2 Dr George Balchin informed members that the habitat mapping scoping study is progressing well and offers good value for money. Existing data is largely sufficient to produce a high-resolution map, with some additional ground-truthing. This reduces costs and accelerates phase two of the project. The final report will be shared at the April committee meeting, and he suggested presenting key aspects at the March Technical Subcommittee, without needing Principal Committee recommendations to proceed.
- 10.3 Dr George Balchin informed members on FMP work streams, stating there was a Whelk FMP science subgroup meeting in October to discuss research priorities, including identifying stock boundaries, informing stock assessments and considering climate change impacts. He added that officers also attended a Defra-led workshop in December on implementation of the front-runner FMPs, with proposals from that session now under review across the IFCAs.
- 10.4 Dr George Balchin confirmed that Tim Dapling remains the SxIFCA lead on Marine Case Management System and had recently responded to a Solent Seascape Project licence application to expand the trial oyster reef in Chichester Harbour. He informed that SxIFCA did not object but reiterated its view that historic reefs were likely maintained through aquaculture rather than naturally existing oysters, highlighted opportunities missed to involve local fishers in the project, and noted that non-fishery pressures may have contributed to native oyster decline.
- 10.5 Dr George Balchin reported that SxIFCA attended several education and engagement events in the most recent quarter, including the Ocean Symposium, the AIFCA/IFM briefing series and a Defra seminar on rebuilding trust in fisheries. He said that Rob Pearson and Sol Lucas also participated in a workshop for the Coastal Health Project, in which the IFCA remains involved.
- 10.6 Dr Paul Driver asked, in regard to the Chichester oyster project, if there were any plans to pursue dredging to clean existing cultch, as previously suggested by Gary Edwards.
- 10.7 Dr George Balchin responded that he was unsure whether such an approach was planned. SxIFCA sits on the Solent Seascape technical working group but has limited influence over project methods. He suggested it was unlikely the project was currently considering dredging, though SxIFCA had recommended it be considered.
- 10.8 Gary Edwards noted he had seen a news report stating that 10,000 oysters had been placed in cages in Chichester Harbour.

- 10.9 Rob Pearson clarified that some oysters were placed in cages beneath the jetties, which did not require a marine licence, so SxIFCA had not had the opportunity to consult on this aspect of the project.
- 10.10 Gary Edwards emphasised that SxIFCA should play a more active role in oyster projects, warning that confining oysters in cages or bags can stress them and promote bonamia outbreaks. He said that oyster decline is a result of water quality, climate change and sedimentation rather than larval shortage, and that pollution and regulatory restrictions often prevent maintaining clean cultch long enough to support a sustainable fishery.
- 10.11 Prof. Peter Jones stated that he strongly agreed with the point raised, noting that while some actions may be misplaced, SxIFCA can only seek to influence these organisations with projects related to oyster restoration. He added that reducing pressures, as Kim had mentioned earlier, must be a key priority, although most pressures lie outside the IFCA's sectoral remit.
- 10.12 Kim Matthews stated that oyster beds required regular dredging to remain productive, much like farmers ploughed fields. He added that he would like to monitor oysters placed near traditional beds outside the six-mile limit, though this is beyond SxIFCA jurisdiction.
- 10.13 Gary Edwards advised that Sussex has enough natural oysters to produce a viable spat fall, but a commercial fishery is an artificial construct. He explained that intensive oyster dredging removes much of the seabed life, and clears the seabed leaving oysters to survive, and that a fishery cannot be maintained without annual dredging.
- 10.14 Dr George Balchin explained that oysters can establish either through dredging or in areas with sufficient wave action. He noted that oyster reefs are unique habitats supporting significant biodiversity, and with effective management, fisheries can balance harvesting with maintaining or even enhancing biodiversity.

ALL RESOLVED to approve the report.

11. Compliance and Enforcement Report

- 11.1 Dr Alberto Kavadellas reported that operations have been proceeding normally over the past three months, with nothing unexpected occurring and no significant issues anticipated for the next quarter. The upcoming period will include focus on Chichester Harbour, including the Shellfish Permit Byelaw and Bass regulations, particularly regarding the closed season and changes affecting recreational fishermen, which will involve an educational period.

- 11.2 Dr Alberto Kavadellas advised that marine operations are currently limited to *FPV Watchful* and *FPV Osprey*, with plans to bring *FPV Merlin* back into service in the next quarter. He reported that sea patrols have been conducted whenever weather permitted. Almost every sea patrol involved conducting at-sea inspections and boardings using *FPV Osprey*, despite challenging weather conditions over the past three months.
- 11.3 Dr Alberto Kavadellas informed that the three new IFCOs, introduced at the last quarterly meeting, are progressing well. They are receiving intensive training and are expected to gain more autonomy this quarter, through gaining their warrant cards.
- 11.4 Dr Alberto Kavadellas highlighted that one successful investigation resulted in the payment of a Fixed Administrative Penalty (FAP), notable because all evidence was provided by members of the public, highlighting their awareness and engagement. He also noted that another investigation is ongoing, but no details could be shared at this time, with updates expected at the next quarterly meeting.
- 11.5 Shaun Brewer questioned the reported enforcement activity, noting that while many pieces of information about fishing were received, the report indicated only five road patrols and 24 port visits. He queried how the IFCA could claim to be acting on all reports with that level of activity.
- 11.6 Dr Alberto Kavadellas responded that multiple reports can relate to a single incident, and some patrols may occur without inspections. He explained that intelligence may include several reports from one location and only require one patrol. He also noted that adverse weather can limit the ability to respond, despite receiving intelligence.
- 11.7 Angharad Purcell clarified that the 63 intelligence reports were not just incoming reports from the public but also included submissions from IFCA officers, of intelligence picked up whilst on patrol.
- 11.8 Kim Matthews raised concerns about data reliability, noting discrepancies in reported vessel numbers. He highlighted that while Sussex inshore fleet numbers were 196 last year for the same quarter, the current report lists 219 vessels, an increase of 23 boats, which he questioned given the current state of the fishery.
- 11.9 Dr Alberto Kavadellas explained that three new officers, who cannot yet conduct inspections independently, have been tasked with checking ports thoroughly. This may have identified vessels not previously recorded, contributing to updates in the vessel list. He explained that vessels will also be moved in and out of the District and between ports throughout the year.
- 11.10 Paul Johnson asked why data could not be obtained directly from MMO licensing, noting that the MMO should already have the numbers of licensed vessels.
- 11.11 Dr Alberto Kavadellas stated that he prefers to know the physical location of every vessel in each harbour, such as whether it is in Newhaven or

- Hastings. He explained that part of the IFCOs' role is to familiarise themselves with local ports.
- 11.12 Angharad Purcell explained that the enforcement activity of our three new compliance and enforcement IFCO's has been limited since joining in August, as they are not yet warranted and cannot conduct inspections independently. Familiarisation is part of their training, involving identifying vessels and gear at sea, which may account for the detection of more boats in recent months.
- 11.13 Gary Edwards questioned how many enforcement officers SxIFCA currently have, noting that if six are currently active on patrols and five of those are tasked to attend a sea patrol, only one would remain ashore to respond to any incidents.
- 11.14 Gordon Chittenden emphasised the importance of close collaboration between MMO and SxIFCA, explaining that joint patrols effectively double enforcement coverage.
- 11.15 Gary Edwards noted that commercial fishermen are supportive of robust enforcement and want officers actively patrolling the fishery.
- 11.16 Angharad Purcell clarified that the IFCA is not a 24/7 emergency response service, but out-of-hours work is planned based on intelligence received.
- 11.17 Gary Edwards gave an example to illustrate unlicensed activity, of a friend storing fishing gear being approached by a drain-cleaner who offered to sell excess bass caught by an unlicensed boat.
- 11.18 Dr George Balchin said that while everyone agrees on the importance of effective enforcement and compliance, resources are limited. He acknowledged the potential benefits of REM in assisting with compliance monitoring.
- 11.19 Gordon Chittenden advised that while REM will primarily focus on commercial vessels, human officers can then be deployed strategically, particularly to manage recreational fishing activity.
- 11.20 Dr Alberto Kavadellas responded to Gary's report, explaining that the individual allegedly advertising fish for sale was pictured on a licensed commercial vessel on which he was crewing. He noted that while intelligence reports are valuable, they do not always reflect the situation as initially perceived.
- 11.21 Gary Edwards expressed frustration that individuals were offering to sell fish caught from non-commercial boats, which is illegal. He highlighted instances where people brought bass to restaurants to exchange for food, and that such bold activity indicates flaws in the current system and said fines need to be higher.

- 11.22 Shaun Brewer asked if the new IFCO'S, once warranted, will be paired with experienced officers for six months to learn about local vessels and gain practical knowledge.
- 11.23 Rob Pearson confirmed that officer development and training continues even after they become warranted.
- 11.24 Kim Matthews informed that after spending two months observing landings of bass at Brighton Marina, noting illegal angling parties and timing landings around high water. He confirmed that intelligence was passed to SxIFCA, who acted on it, inspecting at least five vessels, including one unregistered fishing boat.
- 11.25 Kim Matthews highlighted the incident where fishing nets were set close to shore due to strong northerly winds, resulting in interactions with swimmers who moved the nets ashore. A SxIFCA social media post on net awareness gained significant attention with around 3,000 interactions. He noted this was the first time he had seen SxIFCA provide clear, pro-fisheries information to explain that the nets were legally placed and should not be moved, which he felt was a positive step in countering misconceptions about fishing activity.
- 11.26 Rob Pearson advised that there have been two MP enquiries on net conflict and a ministerial inquiry via Defra. He explained that Rebecca Belleni created and shared guidance on net awareness through social media and with this was shared with MPs, advising best practice in net marking and advice for sea users. He stated that the nets in question were properly marked, that all sea users have a responsibility to maintain awareness in the marine environment, and that damaging nets can create ghost gear and additional risks.

ALL RESOLVED to approve the report.

12. Vessel Maintenance Log

- 12.1 Angharad Purcell introduced this item by informing members that Chris Hubbard is happy for the report to be taken as read. Chris will be presenting a new adopted vessel management system 'SeaFlux' to members and she advised that the maintenance report format has changed this quarter, with a brief summary in the main report and detailed maintenance and fuel logs included as annexes. She added that this reflects the use of SeaFlux, the new system managing maintenance, safety checks, drills, crew records, and patrol planning. The system provides clearer oversight, improved audit trails, more consistent records, and reduces reliance on paper logs and spreadsheets.

Presentation – Christopher Hubbard on SeaFlux system

ALL RESOLVED to approve the report and appendices.

13 Communications Report

- 13.1 Angharad Purcell informed members that in the interest of time she is happy for this report to be taken as read.

ALL RESOLVED to approve the report.

14 Chief Officers Update

- 14.1 Rob Pearson provided key updates on FMPs, noting that five new plans were published in December. He highlighted that the cockle plan was developed by the Association of IFCAs, reflecting IFCA expertise in inshore shellfish fisheries.
- 14.2 Rob Pearson informed members of the upcoming changes to lobster MCRS in March, which will initially be applied through an MMO licence condition and therefore not enforceable by SxIFCA Officers.
- 14.3 Rob Pearson noted staff changes, expressing thanks to Dan Kaparis for his service as he leaves for a new adventure in Nairobi, Kenya. He welcomed back Vanessa Simons and Jen Fletcher, who have returned to the Conservation & Research team following maternity leave.
- 14.4 Rob Pearson reported on the local government reorganisation consultation. Tim Dapling prepared SxIFCA's response, which was shared with relevant council members and is annexed to the report. He stated that SxIFCA supported the proposal for a single unitary authority in Brighton & Hove and a single unitary authority covering all of West Sussex, and again for East Sussex, noting these options as the most financially sustainable, geographically coherent, and least disruptive, and presenting the lowest risk to future operations.
- 14.5 Rob Pearson provided a brief update on health, safety, wellbeing, and HR, noting that full details are available for members to read. He confirmed that SxIFCA is meeting its duties in accordance with Health and Safety Executive requirements.

- 14.6 Kim Matthews asked Rob Pearson, as a member of the Bass Management Group, to provide an update on the bass authorisation review, highlighting the significance of the bass fishery in Sussex.
- 14.7 Rob Pearson provided an update on the bass authorisation review, noting that last year's 89-page report set out 24 recommendations for the Bass Management Group and Defra, including a raft of measures for consideration, such as to maintain stock sustainability, improve fishing opportunities, and trial a drift net fishery. He explained that while the group provides input from commercial, recreational and environmental stakeholders, final decisions rest with Defra. Some recommendations, such as sharing uplifts in bass allowance via increased authorisations rather than higher catch limits for existing authorisations, were modified during EU negotiations, resulting in increased limits for fixed net, hook and line, and recreational fishers. He said that a task and finish group is now considering further proposals, including allowing fixed-gear authorisation holders to switch to hook and line authorisations. He said he is happy to provide a more detailed update in future items.
- 14.8 Kim Matthews highlighted the potential benefits of reintroducing small inshore drift netting for bass in the southeast and Thames Estuary through scientifically monitored trials. He welcomed that the inshore fleet's views were being listened to, noting past challenges such as regulations preventing multiple fishing methods on one boat, which added costs. He also informed that concerns about bird bycatch were minimal, sharing his experience of fishing at night over 30 years without incidents. Overall, he felt the review offered hope for sustainable alternative bass fisheries.
- 14.9 Paul Johnson countered this point, citing evidence from MMO boardings of the offshore bass drift net fishery, where 280 dead guillemots were recorded on a single vessel due to nets. He noted that prosecution under the Wildlife and Countryside Act was not possible, as the deaths were unintentional. He emphasised that the offshore bass fishery has been particularly harmful to seabirds, and that the RSPB is closely monitoring the issue as part of the Bass Management Group.
- 14.10 Gary Edwards added that he had reported concerns to the RSPB and, as a former drift-net fisherman, highlighted that inshore drift netting within 1–1.5 miles result in minimal bird bycatch, whereas offshore operations coincide with large flocks and cause higher impacts of seabird fatality. He suggested that any future drift net fishery should be limited to inshore areas with short-timed shoots.
- 14.11 Rob Pearson confirmed that the pending Netting Permit Byelaw includes a flexible permit condition preventing the use of drift nets in the District.
- 14.12 Rob Pearson explained that the proposed bass drift-net trial has been put forward by Renaissance of East Anglian Fisheries, supported by Kent & Essex and Eastern IFCAs. Defra and the Bass Management Group asked for a detailed proposal that proves the fishery can be monitored and managed to minimise risks to seabirds and migratory salmonids. This could

involve tools like REM to verify bycatch impacts. With RSPB, EA, recreational and commercial sectors all at the table, discussions are balanced but risk-focused. He stated that if a trial proceeds, it must be scientifically designed to gather evidence, not simply reopen a fishery.

ALL RESOLVED to accept the report.

15 Chief Officers Group

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

ALL RESOLVED to accept the report.

16 Association of Inshore Fisheries & Conservation Authorities

- 16.1 Rob Pearson stated that the AIFCA has now appointed a new Communications Officer, Emily Bulled, who is already known in the district and highly capable. She has produced a new national IFCA newsletter, which SxIFCA has contributed to and will continue to support. Members were encouraged to view it online, as it provides a useful new platform for national IFCA communications.

ALL RESOLVED to accept the report.

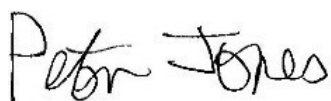
17 AOB

- 17.1 The Chair, Prof. Peter Jones asked member if there was any other business to be raised.

- 17.2 Dr Paul Driver spent a moment giving compliment to SxIFCA, stating that despite wider narratives about failing public services, the reports presented demonstrated that SxIFCA is working effectively, and thanked officers for their work.
- 17.3 Rob Pearson reminded members that the Technical Sub-Committee is scheduled for 12th March, with the Shellfish Permit byelaw review as a key agenda item.
- 17.4 Rob Pearson noted that the next meeting in April will be the AGM, and members will receive a notification requesting proposals for Chair and Vice-Chair in advance of that meeting.
- 17.5 Tim Dapling reminded members that, for those who are MMO appointees, the annual appraisal process must be completed by the end of March. He advised that he will be working with the chair to circulate the relevant information.
- 17.6 Prof. Peter Jones further added that the appraisal process is intended to be light touch, however, members who wish to discuss any issues or questions in more depth are welcome to do so.
- 18 To confirm a Technical Subcommittee meeting on 12th March 2026 being held at Sussex IFCA Office.**

19 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

- 19.1 Thursday 23rd April 2026 at the start time of 1:30pm.

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

Prof. Peter Jones, Chair Sussex IFCA.