

AIFCA CHIEF OFFICER'S REPORT – March 2023

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[The Publication of the Joint Fisheries Statement](#)

The Joint Fisheries Statement (JFS) was published on 23 November 2022. It sets the direction of UK fisheries management following Brexit, outlining how the fisheries policy authorities of England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland will meet the eight objectives of the Fisheries Act 2020 to achieve environmental and economic sustainability. The APPG on fisheries has published a digest on the publication of the JFS. This digest focuses on how the final version of the JFS differs from the consultation draft published earlier in 2022. [The Joint Fisheries Statement: What you need to know](#)

Members will note the inclusion of a Cockle FMP in the timetable. The AIFCA has worked with Defra and IFCA on the potential for the IFCAs to lead this FMP.

[Conduct and Operations Report](#)

The Marine and Coastal Access Act (2009) requires the Secretary of State to lay a report before Parliament on the 'conduct and operation' of the IFCAs as soon as reasonably practical after the end of every four-year period. The four-year periods are measured from the date the Statutory Instruments that created the IFCAs were first made; late August 2010. The third report is now due and will cover the IFCAs' conduct and operations from 1st September 2018 – 31st August 2022.

The AIFCA and the IFCA COG are members of the Conduct and Operations Report Steering Group.

Defra state that it is their intention that relevant sectors will have the opportunity to provide feedback on the IFCAs' conduct and operations over the relevant period via a varied consultative approach. The views that we receive from stakeholders will feed into the content of the report.

Defra are keen to ensure we seek feedback from a wide range of stakeholders across different sectors and are therefore planning to use a range of engagement methods targeted at different stakeholder groups. Relevant stakeholders will be engaged using the following methods:

A consultation hosted on Citizen Space targeted at members of the public and those who are submitting a coordinated response on behalf of an organisation such as the NFFO.

Bespoke, targeted surveys sent to those most knowledgeable about IFCAs such as local authority members, MMO appointees, ALB staff who work with IFCAs at an operational level, and recreational sea anglers. Survey questions are aligned with the Citizen Space questions as much as possible.

Quayside conversations within each IFCA's district led by regional independent contractors to seek in person feedback on the IFCAs. These conversations are predominantly targeted at commercial fishers and recreational anglers but could also include other inshore stakeholders such as divers. The conversations have now been concluded.

Next Steps:

Defra Officials are working to obtain Ministerial clearance to open the consultation. The consultation and the targeted surveys will be launched simultaneously. It is anticipated that they will be open for a duration of six weeks. The report will then need to be laid before Parliament and published.

[The Environmental Targets \(Marine Protected Areas\) Regulations 2023](#)

On 31st January 2023 The Environmental Targets (Marine Protected Areas) Regulations 2023 came into effect. This instrument supports the marine environment as part of the Environment

Act commitment to improve biodiversity by setting a time-bound target for at least 70% of protected features in MPAs to achieve favourable condition before the end of December 2042, with the remainder of protected features to be in recovering condition.

Currently 44% of protected features in MPAs are assessed as being in a favourable condition on the date this instrument is made. Favourable condition means that protected features are in a good and healthy state and aligns with the conservation objectives of the relevant MPAs. Appropriate management of MPAs in line with their conservation objectives will secure achievement of the target.

Regulation 3 of the SI sets the target for the condition of protected features in relevant MPAs, as follows, that: before the end of 31st December 2042 the number of protected features which are in favourable condition within all relevant MPAs is not less than 70% of the total number of all protected features within relevant MPAs, and all other protected features within relevant MPAs are in recovering condition.

Regulation 4 imposes a requirement on Natural England and JNCC to provide, at the request of the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, advice needed to enable the Secretary of State to perform functions in relation to the target. This will include advice in relation to monitoring and assessing progress towards reaching the target and reporting on it.

An assessment of whether features are in recovering condition will be based on whether the necessary measures have been put in place for the removal or management of the site-specific pressures caused by human activities carried out in or in the vicinity of relevant MPAs which have an adverse impact on protected features. It will not include non-site-specific pressures. It will also not include invasive non-native species which are present in or near an MPA to such an extent that it is not reasonably practicable to implement management measures.

Assessing 'recovering condition' by checking if damaging activities have been removed or not will identify exactly what rapid remedial action is required by regulators to ensure our MPAs are being properly protected.

Advice will be obtained as necessary from Natural England and JNCC to monitor the target and assess and report on the progress features are making toward favourable condition as required under the Environment Act.

Setting this MPA target reinforces the existing legal obligations of public authorities in relation to MPAs by specifying a time limit by which a specified minimum percentage of protected features in MPAs must achieve favourable condition, with the remaining percentage of protected features being in recovering condition.

The MPA target will be measured through direct condition assessments to measure feature condition. This can either be through direct surveys or vulnerability assessments. Most assessments are currently done through vulnerability assessments that predict the state of a feature based on a mix of evidence including whether activities occurring on it are damaging or not.

The AIFCA has worked with the IFCA Chief Officers Group (COG) to establish an IFCA byelaw tracker and this includes establishing a risk matrix to identify strategic risks which will contribute to the attainment of the objectives of the MPA targets. Examples of strategic risks include, amongst other things, an absence of conservation advice and relevant condition assessments of sites and features.

Members recruitment campaign

The Marine Management Organisation commenced a national recruitment campaign for IFCA members. Details of the campaign are on the [.GOV website](#) and on the [AIFCA website](#)

The schematic below shows the development of the process to engage IFCAs in the process. The deadline for applications was extended to 28th February 2023 following a relatively low number of applications at the beginning of the process.



IFCA byelaw development

The Association of IFCA's have published explanatory notes outlining the development of IFCA byelaws which are now available on their website. The notes aim to clarify the opportunities stakeholders have to get involved in the byelaw development process as well as the roles different organisations have in IFCA byelaw development. You can find more information at the Association of IFCA website here:

- [The role of IFCAs and byelaws](#)
- [What is a byelaw?](#)

This information was advertised through the Defra stakeholder bulletin.

Update on Highly Protected Marine Areas

The Association of IFCAs has continued to engage in the HPMA process, sitting on the national steering group and the delivery group as well as chairing the management group. Of note is the Publication of high-level conservation advice for candidate HPMA's for public authorities. Natural England and Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) have published high-level conservation advice for HPMA's to support public authorities to fulfil their duties under the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 (MCAA) for candidate HPMA's. See [here](#) for details.

Any pilot HPMA's in English waters would be designated as Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs) under MCAA, so the candidate sites became a material consideration at the point of the consultation launch on 6th July 2022 (see [here](#)). The advice determines whether an activity is likely to hinder the achievement of the HPMA conservation objective. Additional site-specific advice would be provided at the point of designation of any HPMA's.

Natural England and/or JNCC will provide additional case by case advice to support public authorities, if required, as is currently the case for existing MPAs. The advice can be found at [here](#). If you have any questions on the advice, please contact the Natural England HPMA mailbox at hpmas@naturalengland.org.uk or the JNCC mailbox at

offshoreMPAs@jncc.gov.uk.

HPMAs Summary of from the public consultation

On 6 July 2022, Defra launched a 12-week consultation for five candidate HPMAs in English Waters. The consultation closed on 28 September, and Defra had intended to publish their summary of responses late December however this may not occur until the Government response is decided. Defra received over 900 responses to the consultation and their detailed analysis of all the evidence provided has taken longer than expected.

Defra will provide the resulting evidence to the Secretary of State, for consideration before her decision on any pilot sites and final site boundaries to progress towards designation. Any HPMAs would be designated through the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 by 6 July 2023. This would be a year from the start of the consultation as required by the Act. For any queries on HPMAs please contact hpma@defra.gov.uk.

HPMA Decision?

On 25th February the [BBC reported](#) that Berwick MP Anne-Marie Trevelyan tweeted a copy of a letter she received from Environment Secretary Therese Coffey stating her department would not designate Lindisfarne (Holy Island) an HPMA.

In the letter it states that “Along with Holy Island, the Environment Secretary told Ms Trevelyan Inner Silver Pit South off the coast of Lincolnshire was also no longer considered suitable for HPMA designation. She said the government intended to designate the North East of Farne Deep, 35 miles (55km) off the coast of Northumberland, as a site for marine protection as well as Allonby Bay in Cumbria and Dolphin Head off West Sussex.”

A formal announcement was made on the 28th February and may be accessed here; [press notice](#), [written ministerial statement](#), updated [policy page](#), and [summary of responses](#) are all online now

Office of Environmental Protection: Progress in improving the natural environment in England, 2021/2022

The Office for Environmental Protection (OEP) presents [here](#) its independent assessment of Government’s progress in improving the natural environment in accordance with its Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP) for England in 2021/2022. The headline of the report is “Government’s progress on delivery of its [25 year plan](#) to improve the environment has ‘fallen far short’ and opportunities to change course must be taken.”

The report published on the 19th of January identifies a number of key themes to help improve future delivery of the EIP. These include better alignment and co-ordination at all levels of Government, local and national, with actions that extend beyond Defra; better targeted and timely data collection and collation, with the goals of the EIP in mind; and improved assessment of progress, with a purpose-driven monitoring, evaluation, and learning framework. This report identifies eight attributes that in our view will mean the next EIP is effective. An EIP should:

- clearly translate vision into policies, commitments, and actions for the whole of government
- establish clear and simple governance arrangements that drive delivery on the ground
- have a unifying overall delivery plan and one for each goal area

- set and pursue clear and achievable interim targets that are as ambitious as possible in the areas needing most attention
- make clear use of robust and current data and analyses that are well aligned with all targets
- establish an evaluation framework and use it to generate feedback on actions and progress, to learn and to improve delivery
- use enhanced understanding to diagnose the cause of adverse trends, identify the most urgent, harmful or widespread concerns, and develop effective and timely responses
- develop assessment regimes that look more to the future

These are supported by five recommendations that build on 16 made in our previous EIP monitoring report, 'Taking Stock: protecting, restoring and improving the environment in England'. The Report can be accessed [HERE](#). Of the 23 environmental targets none where Govt targets were on track.

State of the Environment: the Coastal and Marine environment.

The Environment Agency's Chief Scientist's Group has published a [new report](#) on the State of the Environment: the Coastal and Marine environment. England's coastal and marine wildlife is ecologically and economically important, with growing evidence that spending time at the coast has many health and wellbeing benefits. The report highlights the long term, damaging effects human activities have had on our coastal and marine ecosystems including pollution, physical loss and disturbance of habitats, unsustainable fishing, and invasive non-native species. The report also draws attention to the many consequences of climate change.

However the report also shows important progress towards tackling these threats to our marine and coastal environment, be it salt marsh restoration, helping fish populations recover, or improving water quality in designated bathing waters.

UK Strategic Evidence Framework for Fisheries (SEFF)

The AIFCA has represented the IFCA's on the development of the SEFF programme. The SEFF partners include Defra (as programme owners), Seafish (as facilitators), CEFAS and MMO.

What problems currently exist with UK fisheries evidence provisioning?

- Limited strategic oversight connecting data collection, storage, accessibility, and use.
- Gaps in fishery dependent data limit usefulness for scientific assessment purposes.
- Data is not always readily available to multiple end users (i.e. to support scientific innovation).
- Data is not always geographically relevant, and/or collected at a suitable scale to support Fishery Management decisions.
- Limited industry collaboration in the design and delivery of scientific outputs and research.
- No transparent peer review process for signing off research as suitable to support Fishery Management decisions.
- Inefficiencies created by duplication of data collection effort across fishery management bodies.
- Data collection, storage, and access arrangements are not fully digitalised.

What will the SEFF do to address this?

Establish a strategic framework to support cost-efficient collection, storage, access, and use of all evidence required to support agile and responsive fisheries management outcomes – covering:

- Data and information requirements of the DCF and non-quota species.
- All biological, environmental, socio-economic, and spatial data and information requirements.

Six inter-dependent work packages will deliver improvements to:

1. Mandatory data collection (fishery dependent and independent) *
2. As required data collection*
3. Data storage
4. Data access (enabling wider use of data)
5. Data use and open transparent peer review process (supporting delivery of research to meet Fisheries Management questions)
6. Programme of annual reports on data / research outputs (Annual Plenary report)

** Data collected under work packages 1 and 2 will align with agreed standards, therefore ensuring that data may be used to support fishery management decisions irrespective of the data provider.*

How will this be achieved?

- Development of shared systems and processes that are agile and widely accessible (recognising confidentiality requirements) to support decision making, including:
 - Tech-based solutions (e.g. databases, data collection apps)
 - Policy focused solutions (e.g. research standards, peer review working groups)
- Collaboration across key stakeholders, including Defra, MMO, Cefas, Devolved Administrations, AIFCA, industry, and Seafish (e.g. through Steering Board membership or direct engagement).

What are the benefits?

- A structured, responsive, and cost-efficient approach to fisheries evidence provisioning.
- Access to robust and appropriate evidence to support effective, evidence-based Fisheries Management and delivery of all Fisheries Act 2020 objectives.
- Increased collaboration and transparency to improve stakeholder buy in to evidence-based Fisheries Management.

Where we are in process?

- We are currently within the design phase, focusing on:
 - Developing the project proposal
 - Establishing the SEFF Steering Board
 - Internal government engagement (with wider stakeholder engagement to follow)
 - Scoping out and securing commitment for resource and funding requirements

Levelling Up - a report assessing the need for levelling up in coastal communities

The AIFCA contributed to a report assessing the need for levelling up in coastal communities, Communities on the Edge, as commissioned by the Coastal Communities Alliance and partners. The report can be found by following this [link](#).

The Coastal Communities Alliance, Coastal Partners, Coastal Partnerships Network, East Riding of Yorkshire Council, Essex County Council, Greater Lincolnshire LEP, LGA Coastal SIG, Lincolnshire County Council, National Coastal Tourism Academy, North East Lincolnshire Council, South Tyneside Council and Torbay Council to research and report on the scale of the coastal Levelling Up challenge, and the opportunities for growth in coastal communities.

Environmental Improvement Plan 2023

The [Governments Environmental Improvement Plan 2023](#) was published at the end of January. It is described as a delivery plan for the environment, building a greener, more prosperous country.

The 25 Year Environment Plan (25YEP) was published 5 years ago. It set out the Governments vision for "a quarter-of-a-century of action to help the natural world regain and retain good health." The Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP) 2023 for England is Governments first revision of the 25YEP. It builds on the 25YEP vision with "a new plan setting out how we will work with landowners, communities and businesses to deliver each of our goals for improving the environment, matched with interim targets to measure progress. Taking these actions will help us restore nature, reduce environmental pollution, and increase the prosperity of our country." Alongside the plan Government has published the Outcome Indicator Framework which describes environmental change that relates to the 10 goals in the 25 Year Environment Plan. The AIFCA provided a review of the report and highlighted the key indicators for fisheries and the marine as it relates to the role of IFCAs.

Resilient fishing fleets and communities

Natural England are in the process of examining how English fishing fleets and their associated communities embody resilience and how this in turn is a vital piece of the puzzle to secure ecological outcomes. As part of this work a Natural England led team will be digging into the different forms resilience can take, which criteria drives decision making processes, what are the barriers preventing constructive arrangements being evoked and what can the government (and associated organisations) do to help facilitate this.

Alongside representatives from other IFCAs, the AIFCA represented the IFCAs at an initial workshop. The workshop examined the following questions.

1. What do we understand by resilience (and how can it be both a constructive and destructive arrangement)?
2. What underpins a social and economically resilient fishing community where people live well and can withstand shocks when necessary?
3. What do you see as internal and external barriers to fishing communities being able to embody and enact resilience?
4. What are the thresholds or trigger points (drivers of change) which can be expected to facilitate a move from constructive acts of resilience to a negative coping strategies?
5. People are faced with hard choices all the time. What can government and management do to empower these communities to be resilient when necessary, within the landscape of what is achievable?
6. Why it matters? What are the risks of not considering resilience when designing policy both in terms of direct risks to the communities but also on our ability to achieve sustainable fisheries.

Prof Tim Gray produced a very helpful summary of the concepts associated with Resilience in fisheries, please contact me if you would like a copy of this paper. I will ensure that the outputs from the project are available to members when they are prepared.

Commercial Fishing Social Survey

CCRI and Fishing into the Future have been commissioned by Defra to co-design a Commercial Fishing Social Survey with fisheries stakeholders to provide social sustainability data that will be used by both policy makers and the fishing industry. The survey will regularly (annual or two-yearly) collect social data not currently collected as part of the Fleet Survey administered by Seafish.

The project will involve identifying and drafting survey questions and social indicators that will be used in the new survey – this will be undertaken through a series of workshops with fisheries stakeholders in the spring. To help guide the project and ensure that we include appropriate stakeholders in the co-design process, the project team are establishing a stakeholder Survey Steering Group (SSG). The role of the SSG will be to advise the research team on where to conduct the workshops, who to invite and to comment on survey question drafts prior to the workshops, and to comment on a final draft of the survey. The initial workshop was held on the 3rd of February 2023 and it is anticipated that there will be a further online workshop with the research team and a small amount of correspondence by email.

The AIFCA has accepted an invitation to sit on the steering group. At the initial meeting the AIFCA commented on the draft purpose and emphasised the importance of allowing any such survey to inform policy development. I also took the opportunity write to Defra, who commissioned the survey, to suggest that the survey could be facilitated by the IFCAs.

Sustainable Development and Resilience of UK Coastal Communities project (ROCC)

The AIFCA participated in ROCC project. The project aims to build knowledge to enhance the resilience of UK marine resource-users to future change (including climate change, storm or other environmental events, and industrial, legislative, and social changes), while enhancing peoples' wellbeing and ensuring future environmental sustainability. ROCC is a three-year research project (2021-2024) funded by the UK government's Sustainable Management of UK Marine Resources (SMMR) programme, which aims to address gaps in marine research in the UK. I participated in a review of decision-making processes and tools currently used in UK marine policy, planning and implementation, and how they assess and make trade-offs between policy objectives, sectors, stakeholder groups and ecosystem services. Towards this aim, the researchers are interviewing UK marine practitioners responsible for marine and coastal policy and management decision-making.

The research will;

- Create an inventory of decision-making tools and approaches used in marine policies, management actions or interventions in the UK.
- Analyse their evidence needs, strengths and weaknesses, and how they account for elements of resilience, wellbeing, and environmental sustainability.
- Analyse how trade-offs and synergies between policy objectives are assessed or considered in decision-making processes, and their associated tools
- Analyse perceptions of the equity/fairness of these decision-making processes

I will keep members updated on the projects outputs, and also for more information on the project please contact Dr Matt Fortnam, Senior Research Fellow, Environment and Sustainability Institute (ESI), University Exeter, Penryn, Cornwall m.fortnam@exeter.ac.uk

UK Vessels of the Future

The UK Government's Build Back Greener Strategy sets out policies and proposals for decarbonising all sectors of the UK economy to meet net zero target by 2050.

The UK Fisheries Act 2020 requires the sector to minimise the impact of capture fishing and aquaculture on the climate, and also to ensure that they adapt to climate change. Seafish has convened a working group with the aim to facilitate engagement, discussion, and initiatives to support the fishing fleet (including aquaculture service vessels) transition to net zero. The AIFCA has accepted a seat on the working group and will report to members on the project.

UK Seafood Fund Skills and Training Scheme

the UK Seafood Fund Skills and Training scheme's second funding round opened for applications on 10th February. Further details and summaries of the successful Round 1 projects can be found on the scheme's [webpage](#).

In Round 2, between £50,000 to £3 million of grant funding is available to update, equip or build fixed or mobile training facilities. The Skills and Training Scheme is not funding ongoing course delivery. You can find the opportunity on Atamis, Defra's e-Tendering system, available at this [link](#). The Invitation to Apply and Terms and Conditions can be accessed via Atamis. Any questions you may have are welcomed through the messaging function in Atamis.

[A multi-million-pound Zero Emission Vessels and Infrastructure \(ZEVl\) competition launched to help decarbonise the UK's maritime sector.](#)

DfT and Innovate UK, part of UK Research and Innovation, have announced £77 million in Government funding to help decarbonise the UK's maritime sector. The Zero Emission Vessels and Infrastructure (ZEVl) competition is investing in innovation projects to develop, deploy and operate clean maritime solutions.

The aim of this competition is to fund:

- 100% battery electric vessels
- alternative fuel vessels
- vessel energy efficiency technology, such as wind assistance
- vessel charging infrastructure
- shore power and corresponding vessel technology
- alternative fuel refuelling infrastructure for vessels

Your project's total costs must be between £3 million and £40 million. The total grant cannot exceed £20 million. You must have claimed all funding by 31 March 2025.

If you are applying to the UK Seafood Fund: Fleet Modernisation Round for a new electric or hybrid engine, please consider whether DfT's competition might also be useful to supply onshore Infrastructure.

Please see the links below for more information about how to apply to the ZEVl competition.

[Major milestone in UK's race to net zero maritime with £77 million boost - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

[Competition overview - ZEVl: Battery electric vessels and charging infrastructure - Innovation Funding Service \(apply-for-innovation-funding.service.gov.uk\)](#)