



# Authority Meeting

Minutes  
20 March 2025

Version & Date	Comments
Version 0.1 28/03/2025	1st set of draft minutes from, prepared by F&AM Pepper for internal review
Version 0.2 10/04/2025	Review and amendments by Officers. Circulated to Members for review.
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## Authority Meeting 20<sup>th</sup> March 2025 Bridgwater, Somerset

### Present:

**Chair:** Prof. Mike Williams

**Vice Chair:** Dr Pamela Buchan

**Councillors:** Alistair Dewhirst (Devon County Council), Jayne Stansfield (South Gloucestershire Council)

**MMO Appointees / Statutory Members:** Dr Emma Bean, David Morgan, Mark Day, Felicity Sylvester, Wayne Thomas, Jasmine Rix (Natural England)

**Officers:** Stephen Dury (Somerset County Council), Jessica Maunder (Devon County Council Finance), Simon Bunn (North Somerset Council), Beverley Phillips (Devon County Council)

**D&S IFCA Officers:** Sarah Clark (Deputy Chief Officer – DCO), Mat Mander (Chief Officer – CO), Olga Pepper (Finance & Administration Manager – F&AM), Neil Townsend (Principal Policy Officer – PO), Dr James Stewart (Senior Environment Officer - SEO)

**Observing:** Eleanor Ward (Devon County Council Officer), James Tongue (Gloucestershire County Council Officer), Esther Collis (Gloucestershire County Council Officer)

**Public:** One Member of public present

### Welcome

The Chair formally welcomed all to the meeting and thanked them for their attendance. The Chair thanked Cllr Dewhirst for his services to the Authority.

## Action Items:

### 1. Apologies for absence

F&AM Pepper stated that the following apologies had been received: Cllr Twiss, Cllr Peart, Cllr Oakes, Cllr Patrick, Cllr White, Cllr Williams (deputised by Cllr Stansfield), Cllr Fodor, Cllr Preest, Jon Dornom, Guy Baker, David Saunders, Tom Birbeck, Neil Smith, Charlie Ziemann, Peter Lappin, Amy Booth, Kathy Derrick, Simon Excell, Tim Jones, Didi Alayli, Cllr Hughes, Simon Toms, Brian Glasson, Cllr McCarty

### 2. Declaration of Interest

The Chair invited all to bring forward any declarations of interest. There were none.

### 3. To consider and approve the Draft Minutes of the Authority Meeting held on 12<sup>th</sup> December 2024

The draft minutes from 12<sup>th</sup> December 2024 were examined page by page. No amendments were suggested.

***That the minutes from the Authority Meeting held on 12<sup>th</sup> December 2024 are a true and accurate record.***

***Proposed: Mark Day      Seconded: Emma Bean***

***In favour: 8***

***Against: 0***

***Abstain: 2***

#### **4. Matters Requiring Urgent Attention**

The Chair briefly consulted with CO Mander. There were no matters requiring urgent attention. CO Mander mentioned however that he had received points to raise from the Plymouth Elected Member Cllr McCarty shortly before the meeting and advised that these were to be mentioned as part of Agenda Item 8 – To determine key tasks for inclusion in the Annual Plan for FY 2025 – 2026.

#### **5. Questions from the Public**

The Chair briefly consulted with CO Mander. There were no questions from the Public.

#### **6. To note Budget Monitoring Report 2024 – 2025 Month 10**

Jessica Maunder introduced this Agenda Item. The budget monitoring at month ten indicates that there will be a projected underspend against budget for the year of £23,700, resulting in a net transfer to general reserves of £21,266. Employee costs are forecast an underspend due to the actual pay award being lower than budgeted, as well as the Enforcement Officer post being vacant for two months. Supplies and services are forecast an overspend as a result of replacement laptops and an increase in telephone costs. However, this has been partially offset by less enforcement costs and no Byelaw advertising for the year. A reduction in boat costs has been seen due to the expected sale of a vessel as well as an underspend in environmental research, due to no chartering fees for the year. Support services are forecast an underspend due to a reduction in court cases. An increase in income is due to favourable interest rates, as well as a further £10,000 being received from AIFCA for the Aquaculture & Recreational Sea Angling Project. The Authority has received one off grant funding from DEFRA of £130,000, rather than the original £150,000 budgeted for 2024/25. Jessica Maunder welcomed questions and comments.

CO Mander provided an update on the sale on the Fisheries RIB “Enforcer” – that there has been notable interest in the boat in the last month. In reference to the legal cost CO Mander provided context – there is currently a significant case that will be heard in the Crown Court which is likely to incur a large cost. This case, albeit handled jointly with Cornwall IFCA, is treated independently in terms of expenditure. Although the Authority endeavours to recover part of the court costs from the defendants, CO Mander would not at this stage advise to reduce the legal fees budget as next year the fees are forecast to increase considerably.

Cllr Dewhirst noticed that there was no increase in the office rent cost in the current Financial Year and recommended this was considered in terms of future budgeting. CO Mander reassured that the Officers managed to negotiate favourable rates at the upcoming office lease renewal and any potential increases will be budgeted for as part of annual budget reviews.

Pamela Buchan noted an underspend in the research budget and enquired about an update on the topic discussed previously in one of the Authority meetings – whether any unused funds could be added to the following year's budget within the same expenditure code. Jessica Maunder provided a comment – it has been agreed by CO Mander and the Devon County Council Finance Team that the way the accounts are laid down currently should be kept as it ensures a good representation of the actual annual budgets. Any underspend is transferred to the General Reserve account as well as any future overspend will be managed from the Reserve. The Chair wished to stress that the underspend in the research budget should be perceived as an issue rather than a saving. The environment team is under resourced because of the Authority's financial issues and there is limited potential to perform activities and utilise the current budget. The Chair provided a brief update on the conversations with Defra regarding the Authority's funding – the report summarising Defra's consultation with the Local Authorities has not been published yet and further delays are to be expected due to the upcoming elections. Defra is aware of the issues regarding the Authority's funding formula, as well as the current financial issues and is working with the relevant funding Local Authorities, which are now expecting Defra's advice on any next steps. Any changes in the funding formula or structure of the Devon and Severn IFCA would require a consultation on the Devon and Severn IFCA's Order. The Authority's budget is problematic with not only the distribution of levies creating a potential issue but also the current total of contributions being too low to provide the necessary resources. This concern was shared by David Morgan. The Chair reassured the Members that the Minister is aware of the above issues and that any information in this matter is public. The Chair encouraged the Members to contribute by getting involved in the conversation where possible.

Felicity Sylvester wished to explore a possibility of separating the Devon and Severn IFCA into two separate IFCA's – one for the Devon County and one for the Severn area. The Chair was aware of this concept, and it was his understanding that it is a solution which would be welcomed by some, however other Local Authorities were not in favour of that approach. The Chair reminded the Members that it is not up to the Devon and Severn IFCA to be making recommendations in this matter. It is the Local Authorities who may wish to pursue this via direct conversations with Defra which the Officers do not receive feedback from. Should a report be released concluding these conversations, it would be confidential.

Cllr Dewhirst warned against the division which in his opinion could potentially result in there being two underfunded IFCA's rather than just the one. Cllr Dewhirst shared feedback from the conversation with Defra that he, as a Devon County Council's Councillor attended – he was left under the impression that the process was a diversion from the fact that Devon and Severn IFCA's budget is lower than that of the other IFCA's. Cllr Dewhirst wished for an appropriate level of funding to be made available first, before a potential division of the Authority is discussed. Cllr Dewhirst recommended it was vital to concentrate on the fact that Devon and Severn IFCA is underfunded by the central government; the Chair seconded this.

The Chair noted that Defra received, as part of the papers prepared for a meeting between the Local Authorities and Defra back in 2022, information about all the IFCA's levels of funding. Defra had also been made aware through communications from CO Mander and the Chair that Devon and Severn IFCA is not meeting its statutory duties due to the financial issues.

There were no further questions.

## **7. To note the Eleventh Month Progress Report for FY 2024 – 2025.**

CO Mander introduced this Agenda Item. As per the report provided by the Officers, the Members were able to see that some tasks remained incomplete, some would be finalised by the end of the current financial year, and there were some tasks which relied on other organisations to be completed. CO Mander invited questions and comments.

Cllr Dewhirst praised the Officers who worked on the completion of the tasks, although highlighted that the report set out what could not be achieved. Cllr Dewhirst reflected on Task 033 - Exe Estuary and Teign Estuary Bivalve Mollusc Stock Assessments which is of significant interest to the relevant constituents who pointed out the lack of the engagement. Cllr Dewhirst also talked about Task 043 and highlighted the importance of Familiarisation & Training for Members, taking into consideration the upcoming elections

which may result in an influx of new Members. Pamela Buchan seconded this and suggested online sessions, which the Chair agreed to, although there was an expectation that in person meetings will also be considered. The Chair recommended that a training mechanism is needed. CO Mander provided a comment – the Officers are working on obtaining a good understanding of the Member's needs in terms of training. The surveys will feed into the training management framework.

Cllr Stansfield thanked the Officers for the briefing which was helpful as an introduction to the complex work of the Authority.

DCO Clark reported that the Authority's Environment Officers work closely with other IFCAs and are aware through attending the Technical Advisory Group (TAG) meetings, that other IFCA's are able to conduct valuable research thanks to the fact that they own research vessels and have sufficient resources to manage them. These resources are, regrettably, unavailable to the Devon and Severn IFCA's Environment team due to the financial constraints. The Devon and Severn IFCA's Officers do conduct Mollusca surveys but must limit their endeavours to what can realistically be achieved in any given year. Molluscan Surveys were conducted in 2024/2025 and reports were in the final draft stage.

CO Mander noted that the report shows how much the Authority relies on the Officers and how much the Officers deliver whilst managing the constant workload pressure. In CO Mander's view, the loss of key members of staff could cause the organisation to collapse from within; with staff retention remaining an issue due to limited funding and significant workloads. The Chair seconded this and highlighted that the Officers are encouraged to use any annual leave due to them in the relevant financial year.

There were no further questions.

## **8. To determine the key tasks for inclusion in the Annual Plan for FY 2025 - 2026**

CO Mander introduced this agenda item. CO Mander invited the Members to discuss the tasks as set out in the Officer paper, some suggested by the Officers for inclusion in the Annual Plan 2025 - 2026, and some which the Officers suggested not to include. CO Mander said that Members must determine which tasks should be included.

Pamela Buchan wished to talk about the issue of Pacific Oysters as per one of the suggested workstreams and the amount of research dedicated to this species. DCO Clark provided context – Oyster larvae can cover a great distance coming to the British waters from France and other locations. Pacific Oysters are a successful species which has been farmed since they were introduced by Defra in the 1960s in response to a decline in the native oysters' population and remains registered as invasive species in the UK where other countries describe it by now as naturalised. The species has been present in the Waddeton area for many years but is also present across the country. Farming of Pacific Oysters had been initially encouraged by Defra although now the Duchy of Cornwall is requesting a removal of this fishery from the Duchy waters in Waddeton area.

Pamela Buchan also asked a question about Crab Tiling on the Teign Estuary relating to the populations of shore crab and number of tiles. Members asked about the crab tile surveys. DCO Clark provided context – the Officers aim to conduct crab tiling surveys every four years. This involves an intensive workload considering the number of estuaries which need to be visited. In recent years drone surveys have been commissioned to aid the counting of tiles. Under the Annual Plan for FY 2025-2026, the Officers are hoping to use the drone which the Authority recently purchased aiming to perform the work inhouse rather than hiring an external drone company. This work will be undertaken in the Teign area only.

Pamela Buchan asked questions about the evidence provided on page nine of the suggested workstreams document – do the Officers provide any data and if yes, what kind and whether all the data is based on fishing activities? CO Mander provided an answer – data collection is a matter that D&S IFCA struggles with more than other IFCAs and has to rely heavily on the national data sets, which have proven to be unreliable. The Officers have little data held in house as they don't have the capacity to collect it. DCO Clark added that data also is collected via permitting database where information regarding diving, netting, potting and mobile fishing activities is collected. There is a wealth of knowledge and information the Officers themselves hold due to their extensive experience. The Officers share this information when participating in formal meetings and consultations. Pamela Buchan suggested to provide more information about the state of the data in the annual report.

Wayne Thomas enquired about any data available relating to the shore crab population as he had observed a decline in the Taw Torridge area, possibly due to the large influx of the Smooth-hound travelling up the estuary. DCO Clark responded that there is no current research conducted on the shore crab population. Fifteen years ago, there was research conducted by Plymouth University. This type of research involves a great amount of work. DCO Clark seconded the comment about the presence of the large number of Smooth-hound in various locations across the District.

Cllr Dewhirst enquired whether the Officers would be publishing on the Authority's website any data regarding crab tiling as there is a high level of interest in this matter in Cllr Dewhirst's Parish. Cllr Dewhirst also enquired about the Hand Working Byelaw, particularly cockle picking, and suggested a temporary closure of the areas where cockles are harvested, in a similar way to the mussel bed closure.

CO Mander addressed the enquiries regarding crab tiling by highlighting the significant revenue involved. Evidence is needed to develop formal management. Once regulations are in place, the body introducing them must monitor any activities and respond by enforcing the rules introduced. Devon and Severn IFCA's Officers must currently focus their limited resources on other matters, for example the recent reports regarding loss of potting gear due to spatial incursions by mobile gear vessels or reports of Illegal netting activities. CO Mander continued by addressing engagement, highlighting a real struggle to achieve results by introducing the voluntary bailiff scheme. In response to Cllr Dewhirst's suggestion to involve local police force to remain informed about and help enforcing any regulation in relation to cockle gathering, CO Mander responded that the effect of any activities on stock levels would have to be assessed and this would be included in the molluscan shellfish reports that were due for publication.

DCO Clark noted that the Officers had worked closely with Friends of River Teign group and the information they provided has been reviewed within the cockle survey report for the Teign Estuary, which will be published shortly.

PPO Townsend provided a comment – the temporary mussel bed closure in the Teign and Exe was introduced using an old inherited Byelaw (Temporary Closure of Shellfish Beds). PPO Townsend said that the species included in this Byelaw did not include cockles. PPO Townsend continued by saying that a few years ago D&S IFCA began to develop a Hand Working Permit Byelaw that could have managed a greater range of species and methods of hand working; however one of the drivers for this potential Byelaw was balancing the needs of fishers via bag limits; rather than concerns about all stocks of relevant species. PPO Townsend explained that it became complicated as species taken by hand working activity includes those for personal consumption, but also for use as bait for angling. PPO Townsend said that work was suspended to prioritise on other byelaw review work. PPO Townsend said that information about the temporary closure (mussel only) is available on the D&S IFCA website, as well as the findings from stock assessments. PPO Townsend said that local media will sometimes create news that is not always accurate, in term of what can and cannot be removed from the Teign and Exe and unfortunately do not approach D&S IFCA for more

accurate information to inform their news. PPO Townsend said that Officers plan to add more information, potentially news items, to the website soon, which will help to inform stakeholders.

Jasmine Rix was interested in the measures as per page five (Measures of Equal Environmental Benefit (MEEB) regarding the test case for fisheries. Natural England (NE) would like to engage in the process at the earliest opportunity. Jasmine Rix asked for information regarding the timeline for this process. DCO Clark advised that there was no timeline at present although the Officers will share with NE any relevant information and seek advice when the package is ready for submission. Jasmine Rix enquired about any plans to bring this topic to any working groups or the Byelaw and Permitting Sub-Committee before it is submitted to Defra. CO Mander explained that it was important for Officers to understand whether Defra would deem it as a possible option and if so, it would be discussed by the Authority's Byelaw and Permitting Sub-Committee. Regarding the area referred to as the 'Corridor', this forms part of broader consideration of how to fulfil the Authority's duties of balancing the conservation and fishing. DCO Clark was interested to learn how Natural England view their role regarding submitting information to Defra on MEEB. Jasmine Rix recommended for the conversation to be continued outside of the meeting as NE is still finalising the conclusion on what their role would be.

SEO Stewart noted that Natural England's currently available MPA condition assessment review would be useful, and it would be of great value for the Authority's Officers to be able to see the NE's timetable. Jasmine Rix responded that a timetable for condition assessments would be available in the next two months.

In terms of D&S IFCA's planned review of its assessment, the Officers will look to review mobile gear activity in the Skerries Bank and Surrounds MCZ in light of Natural England's reviewed condition assessment and the outcome of the MEEB process.

Wayne Thomas observed the lack of focus on mariculture in the suggested tasks and recommended that consideration should be given to the impact on commercial fishers due to the areas where mariculture is being developed and where commercial fishing may be prohibited. CO Mander agreed that this matter presents a challenge. The Officers view the consideration of applications for new mariculture sites as Business as Usual and will be dealt with in a similar way to how they dealt with the matter of the seaweed farms being established across the District. Officers are aware that that creation of mariculture sites increases spatial squeeze and potentially means removing opportunities for the existing users. Wayne Thomas observed that the fact that the Officers are aware of this issue and dedicate their time to deal with it is not mentioned in the report. CO Mander reassured that this is an ongoing issue, and the Officers are aware of it and monitoring it.

Mark Day pointed out a task of Monitoring of Commercial Scallop Fisheries and the matter of using pots to target scallops; the pots would target more than one species by the scallop pots being baited to attract crab and lobster which is something that the Authority should keep in mind. DCO Clark reassured the Members that that the Officers were aware of this developing fishery and reports from the fishers in the District suggest that many are considering using pots to target scallops. DCO Clark is a member of the Scallop Advisory Group, therefore the Officers will be aware of any developments and the fishery will be monitored in 2025-2026.

The Chair mentioned that he had become aware that a fishing method is being used, similar to the method of attracting scallops by light, but is attracting cuttlefish by the use of green lights. The Chair was interested to find out if the Officers are exploring the effect of the light on the cuttlefish stocks. DCO Clark provided a comment – the Officers are not aware of the new method of targeting cuttlefish although the cuttlefish fishery review is conducted annually especially in the Torbay MCZ area. Regarding the gear used, DCO Clark noted that pots designed to target crustaceans and cuttle are different. The Officers are able to assess the impact on the stock and action via the Authority's permit conditions if required. Mark Day believed that due



to recent poor inshore cuttle seasons, fishers would be reluctant to invest more money into the fishery currently.

The Chair was interested to explore a possibility of re-making the Diving Permit Byelaw, which is not included in the Annual Plan for 2025-2026.

In relation to the Potting Permit Byelaw and its permit conditions, the Chair informed Members that the D&S IFCA Byelaw Technical Working Group had determined that a potential prohibition of potting vessels (with a specified integral tank volume) could be delivered through the Potting Permit conditions, rather than a need to amend the Potting Permit Byelaw. The Chair said that prohibiting potting vessels (with integral vivier tanks of specified size) from operating in the District as Permit Conditions, could result in a new Byelaw not being required, and would in turn allow the B&PSC and the Byelaw Technical Working Group to review the Diving Permit Byelaw instead. CO Mander recommended that focusing on the review of the Potting Permit Byelaw would be a better use of the B&PSC and Officers' time as there are a range of amendments to the Potting Permit Byelaw that would be beneficial.

The Chair enquired about any training available to the Members. CO Mander explained that there is a training booklet available which was in the past supported by virtual training sessions offered to the Members. However, the Officers will revert to the option of the booklet.

PPO Townsend reassured all by confirming that any new Members will receive an induction pack, although time constraints don't currently allow any targeted training, such as the Byelaw Review training offered in 2024-2025.

Pamela Buchan enquired about the science and research behind MPAs (Marine Protected Areas), particularly regarding any merit in advertising a priority list of data and recommended that the Officers take on a more proactive approach by inviting other organisations to get involved and collaborate. DCO Clark provided context – the Officers do get involved in a variety of projects in a role of advisors and as Masters' Degree Supervisors which requires the Officers' time. There is a potential to advertise the cooperation opportunity although once in place, management of such cooperation and any data obtained is required which is difficult considering the Authority's limited resources. DCO Clark asserted that despite this, the Officers have recently managed to collaborate with the Swansea University on a project relating to herring in the Severn Estuary and with Bangor University on a FMP, FISP project which involved working closely with the local fishermen to gather data and evidence to inform the Crab and Lobster FMP management measures to be implemented. Officers have also been involved in the aquaculture "Ropes to Reef" project with Plymouth University. Without the resources, for example a dedicated Officer managing the projects, it is difficult.

SEO Stewart pointed out the research recommendations set out by Officers in the Fisheries Research and Management Plan (FRMP) for Skates & Rays in the north of D&S IFCA's District had encouraged a tagging exercise for these species in the Severn Estuary/Bristol Channel by Natural England. SEO Stewart also noted the large amount of work that went into generating these recommendations, which was delivered partly through a separately employed FRMP Officer.

There were no further questions.

***That Members consider the Officers' paper and to determine the tasks to be set out in the Annual Plan for FY 2025/2026.***

**Proposed:** Wayne Thomas      **Seconded:** Cllr Dewhirst

**In favour:** 10

**Against:** 0

**Abstain:** 0

## **9. To note the Report of the Byelaw & Permitting Sub-Committee**

CO Mander introduced this Agenda Item. The report in the Officer paper is for the Member's information and is an indication of the current workload.

There were no questions.

## **Agenda Items for Information:**

### **10. Presentation - "D&S IFCA's Environment Work in Relation to Hinkley Point C" by Senior Environment Officer, Dr James Stewart.**

The Members watched the presentation and had an opportunity to share comments and ask questions.

Upon request of Felicity Sylvester, a link to the presentation has been included below.

[PowerPoint Presentation](#)

### **11. AIFCA CO Report.**

### **12. Date of next meeting – 19<sup>th</sup> June 2025**

**End.**

