

## **AIFCA Chief Officer's Report**

### **The national Inshore and Small-Scale Fisheries (ISSF) Symposium**

The national Inshore and Small-Scale Fisheries (ISSF) Symposium, held in Newcastle and attended by 120 delegates including 50 fishermen, regulators and policymakers, focused on securing the future of England's inshore fleet. Research presented highlighted the sector's significant social, economic and cultural value, but also its acute vulnerability. Small boats (under 10m) comprise 79% of the fleet, yet one fifth were lost between 2008–2022, with decline occurring at twice the rate of larger vessels and with marked regional "hot spots". Discussions generated solutions across seven priority themes, including improving access to apprenticeships, simplifying grant and market processes, addressing inspection delays, managing fishing pressure beyond six nautical miles, and strengthening support services such as the Fishermen's Mission. Outcomes will inform further dialogue with DEFRA and partners to identify deliverable actions that sustain inshore livelihoods and national fisheries benefits.

### **The Creation of The English Small Scale Inshore Fisheries Network**

The English Small Scale Inshore Fisheries Network is a new, fisherman-led initiative aiming to unite and strengthen small-scale inshore fishing across England. It has grown out of national workshops held in 2024 and early 2025, where inshore fishers and organisations highlighted the need for greater collective capacity and a louder, more coherent voice for the sector. The network seeks to bring together small-scale fishers, coastal communities and related businesses to share knowledge, build relationships and create a harmonised platform for collaboration and advocacy.

Although still in the formation stage, with a temporary steering group and a survey shaping its structure, the network emphasises being built by fishermen for fishermen. Founding participants include regional fishing associations and community groups, supported by funding from the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation.

For Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities (IFCAs), the network's work is important because it strengthens stakeholder engagement. IFCAs rely on meaningful input from local fishers to balance ecological, social and economic objectives in marine management. A united small-scale sector can provide clearer, more representative perspectives to IFCAs on issues like local stock sustainability, byelaw development, and community impacts, enhancing co-management and decision-making in inshore waters.

### **Ministerial Briefing - Briefing for Meeting with Minister Eagle.**

The Ministerial briefing will focus on three key themes: the strategic value of IFCAs, funding sustainability, and stronger national integration. Members will highlight IFCAs' unique, locally accountable governance model, which delivers balanced, evidence-based fisheries management in England's inshore waters and is well placed to implement Fisheries Management Plans. We will raise concerns about short-term and constrained funding, emphasising the need for stable, multi-year settlements to support workforce stability and long-term planning. Finally, we will seek closer collaboration with Defra and the MMO, ensuring IFCAs are fully recognised and utilised as essential delivery partners for national fisheries policy.

### **Coastal Futures 2026**

The AIFCA sponsored, attended and presented at Coastal Futures 2026. Coastal Futures is a leading UK marine and coastal policy conference bringing together regulators, government,

industry, NGOs and researchers to address the future management of the marine environment. The event focuses on practical delivery of marine policy, sustainable fisheries, nature recovery and marine spatial planning and all within the context of increasing pressures on coastal and inshore waters.

For Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities (IFCAs), Coastal Futures provides an important platform to demonstrate how local, evidence-based management supports national marine objectives. The conference enables IFCAs to share best practice, showcase innovation in monitoring and enforcement, and strengthen partnerships with statutory bodies and stakeholders.

At Coastal Futures 2026, AIFCA's role is to highlight the statutory responsibilities, operational challenges, and successes of the IFCA network, ensuring inshore fisheries management remains central to discussions on marine governance, environmental recovery and sustainable coastal economies. The AIFCA presented at the conference, a copy of the transcript of the speech can be found [here](#); the communication and engagement manager presented on Nearshore recovery and restoration from the perspective of inshore and small-scale fisheries in England. The AIFCA also launched its new videos at the conference and presented information on the Coastal Health project.

### **The inaugural Scotland–England Inshore Fisheries Management Meeting**

The inaugural Scotland–England Inshore Fisheries Management Meeting was held in Edinburgh on 15 January 2026, bringing together representatives from Scottish RIFGs, the Marine Directorate, AIFCA and individual IFCAs, alongside key stakeholders. The meeting was convened to strengthen cross-border dialogue, share best practice and build relationships, particularly in areas of shared waters and mutual interest.

The Marine Directorate provided an update on domestic fisheries priorities under the Fisheries Strategy (2020–2030), including Fisheries Management Plans, REM rollout, static gear effort limitation, MPA measures and ongoing work on crab, lobster and Clyde cod. The Inshore Fisheries Management Improvement (IFMI) programme was discussed, with consultation anticipated later in 2026, focusing on governance, regional alignment and resourcing.

AIFCA outlined the statutory IFCA model, highlighting its dual fisheries and conservation role, participatory governance, adaptive management and use of flexible permits where byelaws can be slow to implement.

Significant discussion centred on effort limitation and pot limits, including Scottish survey work and English experience of tagging, iVMS and enforcement. Compliance capacity, recreational effort and legislative constraints in Scotland were noted.

There was strong support for ongoing engagement, potentially through regular meetings and thematic subgroups, to improve collaboration and cross-border understanding.

### **IFCA Environment, Science and Conservation Training Course.**

In February IFCA officers from nine of the ten IFCAs have successfully completed the IFCA Environment, Science and Conservation (ESC) course, an intensive programme designed to strengthen professional judgement, technical knowledge and decision-making skills in support of sustainable inshore fisheries management.

The week-long course covered core areas including IFCA duties and governance, fisheries management planning, survey methods, stock assessment, marine protected areas, Habitats Regulations Assessment, stakeholder engagement, enforcement, compliance and environmental impacts. Training combined classroom sessions with practical exercises and applied case studies reflecting real IFCA operational contexts.

A central element of the course was a detailed group case study examining the potential development of a trial Manila clam fishery within a complex estuarine environment. Learners were required to consider ecological, biological, economic and social factors, alongside statutory assessments, governance processes, stakeholder engagement and enforcement implications. Each group produced and presented an Authority-style report and recommendation, replicating advice provided to IFCA Members.

The quality of outputs was consistently high, with well-structured, evidence-based and balanced recommendations demonstrating a clear understanding of IFCA decision-making processes. The course reinforced the value of applied, scenario-based training in building capability across the IFCA network and enhancing officers' ability to provide clear, proportionate and defensible advice to Members.

### **Fisheries Management Plan Programme Board**

The FMP Programme Board was held on 29 January 2026. The board, on which the AIFCA is a member noted continued progress across the programme. Tranche 3 FMPs have been published and Whitehall clearance has been secured to consult on Tranche 4 Defra-led FMPs [these were published in Feb 2026]. Overall delivery and resources are rated amber/green, with finance green, reflecting milestone achievement despite recruitment controls.

The programme focus is shifting from development to implementation. Key implementation activity includes publication of a two-year FMP blog, cross-Defra benthic impacts work, a draft SI on soft-shelled crab bait exemption, the Bass Authorisations Review, and prioritisation workshops with NQS and Quota teams.

The draft 2026/27 implementation workplan was reviewed, with feedback to better distinguish new activity from BAU and identify efficiencies. On R&D prioritisation, the Board agreed to group needs into Large Collaborative Projects, applying benefit-cost, sequencing and community resilience considerations before confirming deliverability.

### **Marine Protected Area Network Review**

The AIFCA is participating, to be led by the Senior Technical Officer, in the English Marine Protected Area (MPA) Network Review. The Review is assessing whether the current network of 181 MPAs, covering around 40% of English waters, is fit for the future. The review responds to increasing pressures from climate change, biodiversity loss and competing marine uses, alongside Government commitments to protect 30% of seas by 2030 and support clean power and food security.

Led by Defra and informed by ecological and management advice from JNCC, Natural England, Cefas, the Marine Management Organisation and Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities, the review will consider how effectively the network functions as a whole, which sites and features are most critical, how it supports biodiversity and climate resilience, and where management approaches could be improved.