



Authority Meeting 19th March 2026

Draft Minutes

Version & Date	Comments
Version 0.1 13/04/2026	1st set of draft minutes from, prepared by F&AM Pepper for internal review
Version 0.2 21/04/2026	Review by DCO Clark, PPO Townsend and CO Mander. Additions applied. Circulated to Members for a review.
Version 0.3 19/05/2026	F&AM applied minor corrections suggested by Members. Draft minutes (0.3) published on D&S IFCA website (20 th May 2026).

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Authority Meeting 19th March 2026 Exeter Racecourse

Present:

Chair: Prof. Mike Williams

Vice Chair: Dr Pam Buchan

Councillors: Fi Hance (Bristol City Council), Sara Wilson (Devon County Council),

MMO Appointees/ Statutory Members: Sarah Holmyard, David Morgan, Wayne Thomas, Mike Spiller, Felicity Sylvester, Alistair Dewhirst, Guy Baker, Charlie Ziemann, Dr Emma Bean, Kate Sugar (Natural England), Mark Day

Marine Management Organisation: Rachel Irish

Officers: Jessica Maunder (DCC Finance), Chloe Nunn (Devon County Council)

D&S IFCA Officers: Mat Mander (Chief Officer – CO) remotely, Sarah Clark (Deputy Chief Officer – DCO), Neil Townsend (Principal Policy Officer – PPO), Olga Pepper (Finance & Administration Manager – F&AM),

Public: No Members of the public present.

Welcome

The Chair formally welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked them for their attendance. The Chair announced a resignation of a Marine Management Organisation (MMO) appointee Mark Day and thanked Mark Day for his services to the Authority. The Chair also wanted to take the opportunity for the minutes to record his thanks for Dr Simon Thomas, another long standing MMO appointee that had also had to stand down recently.

The new MMO appointee Andrew Bell was not in attendance, and his membership had not been confirmed by the MMO. Chloe Nunn was in attendance as maternity cover for Beverly Phillips, the Officer from Devon County Council that normally attends the meetings.

The Chair provided an update regarding the Authority's funding issues. Since 2022 there has been an ongoing review of the funding structure involving Defra and the D&S IFCA's funding Local Authorities. The progress has been slow. Recently the Chair was informed that a precursor submission has been received by the Minister. Defra will discuss this with the Minister as the submission needs to be completed before the Minister can engage in the process. Defra is engaging with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and will update the Chair on any developments.

The Chair shared with the Members some findings of the recently completed periodic conduct of operations report of the IFCAs. The report has been presented to the Parliament and raised some concerns regarding the IFCA Members' declarations of interest. D&S IFCA has a robust policy which requires the Members to regularly submit their declarations and to declare pecuniary interest prior to any relevant meetings. The AIFCA is currently drafting a template for Declarations of Interest. Another matter raised via the conduct of operations was the misunderstanding surrounding the MMO Appointees' role. These Members are appointed to the Authority to provide knowledge of their sector by applying their expertise to the decision making. Their role is not to be guardians of that specific sector's interest. All Members are required to take a broad view in terms of the matters discussed by the Authority to balance the socio-economic benefits of the sea fisheries resources exploitation against the protection of the environment. Once a decision has been made, all the Members are bound by that decision. The Chair reminded everyone that it is the Authority's voting Members, and not the Officers who make the decisions. The Officers should not be criticised for carrying out the tasks which were approved by the Authority. If any Members wished to discuss the above matters, the Chair invited

them to contact the Byelaw and Permitting Sub-Committee's Chair, Dr Emma Bean for any enquiries to do with the work of that Sub-Committee. For any matters relating the decision making of the Main Authority, the contact is the Chair – Prof. Mike Williams. The Officers are also available to provide advice. The Chair encouraged the Members to raise any questions prior to the meetings so that relevant information can be prepared to form part of discussions in the next meeting.

Action Items:

1. Apologies for absence

F&AM Pepper stated that the following apologies had been received:

Jon Dornom, Cllr Horwood, Cllr Wainwright, Didi Alayli, Simon Toms, Simon Excell, Cllr Stansfield, Simon Bunn, Brian Glasson, Cllr Rowsell.

2. Declarations 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 11th December 2025

The draft minutes from 11th December 2025 were examined page by page. No corrections were suggested.

That the minutes from the Authority Meeting held on 11th of December 2025 are a true and accurate record.

Proposed: Alistair Dewhirst Seconded: Mark Day

In favour: 13

Against: 0

Abstain: 3

Alistair Dewhirst enquired about the £7,000 expenditure in reference to the purchase and installation of the IVMS Rewire devices on board of the relevant Mobile Fishing vessels. The draft Minutes quoted a possibility of external funding begin available to cover for this cost. Alistair Dewhirst asked if this funding been secured. CO Mander responded that no, despite the Officers' application there has not been any external funding secured so far, but CO Mander will update the Members should there be any development.

4. Matters Requiring Urgent Attention

The Chair briefly consulted with CO Mander. There were no matters requiring urgent attention.

5. Questions from the Public

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

6. To consider the appointment of the Treasurer.

CO Mander introduced this Agenda Item. Devon County Council provided a notice of upcoming retirement of Angie Sinclair – the Council's Section 151 Officer, and the current Treasurer of D&S IFCA. CO Mander wished to note personal thanks to Angie Sinclair for her support. The Authority needs to appoint a new Treasurer, as per the relevant regulations, which require that the person should be a Section 151 Officer from Devon County Council. Mat Thorpe, the current Financial Director at the Devon County Council, had agreed to represent the Council in the Treasurer capacity. CO Mander invited questions and comments.

Alistair Dewhirst wished to declare that he had worked with Mat Thorpe on matters regarding the Devon County Councils' budget. It was Alistair Dewhirst's opinion that Mat Thorpe would be an outstanding Treasurer for the Authority.

The Chair wished to record a note of appreciation to Mat Thorpe, as well as Angie Sinclair.

That Members agree that Mat Thorpe is appointed as Treasurer to the Devon and Severn IFCA commencing 1st April 2026.

Proposed: Alistair Dewhirst Seconded: Rachel Irish

In favour: 16

Against: 0

Abstain: 0

7. To note Budget Monitoring 2025 - 2026 – Month 10

Jessica Maunder introduced the Agenda Item. In December 2024, the Authority agreed to the use of general reserves of £118,042 to balance the budget for year 2025/26. At Month 10, the overall expected transfer from general reserve has significantly reduced to £2,442. This is primarily due to the additional one-off £80,000 grant funding already received and £52,300 due to be received from Defra.

The remaining variances are mainly driven by an additional enforcement cost and a reduced income from fees and charges, partially offset by underspends in environmental research. Jessica Maunder invited questions and comments.

Guy Baker enquired about the underspend in the research budget and the effect of it on the funding of that department in the following finance year. CO Mander provided a response – the funds from the 2025/26 research budget have been allocated towards the Exe Project. CO Mander had been in discussions with the MMO's funding team and received positive news that the project should be progressed in year 2026/27. It was CO Mander's intention to utilise the current savings to support that important survey work. The ringfencing of the Authority's budget lines has been enquired about previously by Members and CO Mander reminded everyone that this would not be in line with the budgeting processes as it has been explained in past meetings by Jessica Maunder. CO Mander was confident that the Research Budget would be used in year 2026/27.

There were no further questions.

8. To note the Eleventh Month Progress Report (Annex A) for FY 2025 – 2026.

CO Mander introduced this Agenda Item. The Officers hoped that the Report would be helpful in terms of moving forward to Authority's 2026/27 Annual Plan; the Report also provided an opportunity to reflect on the work already delivered by the Officers and Members, especially Members of the Byelaw and Permitting Sub-Committee. The scope of the work undertaken is significant considering the small size of the D&S IFCA's Team. The Report details the work which is expected to be achieved by the end of the year 2025/26 but mainly it talks about what has been achieved so far this year. The Report will feed into the 2025/26 Annual Report which will be submitted to Defra once it has been finalised. CO Mander wished to highlight a few matters for the Members' benefit.

A great deal of work had been delivered in reference to illegal netting in the District's estuaries with a significant effort dedicated to dealing with court cases relating to that issue. CO Mander praised the Enforcement Team for their hard work and was confident that it resulted in the decrease in the illegal netting activities to the level which has not been seen in a long time. There have been a number of investigations that the Enforcement Officers dealt with this year as well as a Freedom of Information Request relating to enforcement activity and investigation outcomes (received by all the IFCAs). This was a useful exercise for the Officers as it asked for information going back to year 2022 and it demonstrated the amount of enforcement work undertaken over this time.

The Senior Officers worked on improvements to professional development plans for their teams with the new job specifications resulting in more coherent Officer appraisals.

The Eleventh Month Report emphasises unplanned activities, which have been undertaken but have delayed the delivery of other planned tasks. CO Mander quoted as an example the installation of IVMS Rewire devices on those mobile gear vessels affected by Succorfish's decision to stop transmitting data to the UK VMS hub. This resulted in the cost to the Authority in terms of funds to purchase and install the devices as well as the Officers' time, but this investment was vital and very good value and meant that the Officers were able to continue to monitor the mobile fishing fleet. The Enforcement Officers also invested their time in the operations involving the drone which can be used to improve remote surveillance and Officers are hoping to demonstrate this in one of the upcoming Authority Meetings.

In terms of Governance, a milestone has been reached when the new Mobile Fishing Byelaw 2022 was approved by Defra. This means that the Authority can consider mandating the use of REM system on board mobile gear vessels as a permit condition in the future. External funding to cover the REM related cost may be achievable. Another positive outcome was the fact that Defra recognised how long it took to remake the Byelaw and is planning to review the relevant national processes.

The Report also highlights the work that the Environment Team delivered this year and helps to inform their planned work for 2026/27. Pressure must be considered regarding marine spaces, to secure and maintain the balance for all the users of these spaces. Officers believe that Measures of Equal Environmental Benefit should be explored to maximise the benefits and that a flexible approach to the fisheries management is optimal.

CO Mander invited questions and comments.

The Chair added that the new Mobile Fishing Byelaw 2022 with a provision for REM is a major milestone for fisheries management in the District. The Chair also provided a quick summary of the issues between the Marine Management Organisation (MMO) and the IVMS provider Succorfish which resulted in the Officers not being able to monitor the Mobile Fishing fleet until the Authority made a decision to purchase and install Rewire IVMS devices on any vessels involved.

Alistair Dewhirst agreed with the Chair in that the amount of work delivered is staggering for a team that is underfunded. Referring to the Nuclear Station Hinkley Point C on page 9, section B of the Report, Alistair Dewhirst was under the impression that it is unclear what the current situation is. Alastair Dewhirst asked if CO Mander would be able to provide an update as there is a worry that the environmental concerns in reference to fish stocks are being ignored. Alistair Dewhirst wished to know if the acoustic fish deterrent (AFD) would be installed in Hinkley.

CO Mander agreed that the national approach suggests too many environmental barriers are stopping the construction of the nuclear plant. Matters surrounding Hinkley Point C were relevant to two national reviews; the Corry Review, which recommended greater transparency and streamlining the regulatory process, and the Fingleton Nuclear Regulatory Review. The Fingleton Review discussed the amount of fish kill and fish mitigation costs at Hinkley but used the incorrect data to make these points. CO Mander congratulated Senior Environment Officer James Stewart for the response that he had prepared. CO Mander went on to explain that the Officers are always prepared to call out any incorrect data quoted in any publications. It is important that correct data and information is used to inform decisions as set out in the Corry report. D&S IFCA had pointed out the inaccurate data regarding fish mitigation measures and fish kill and alerted Defra, Ministers, and the Prime Minister's Office (amongst others) to these inaccuracies. D&S IFCA subsequently received a letter from Defra where Defra accepted that the data used in the report was inaccurate and incomplete. CO Mander has recently received confirmation that the recommendation from the Fingleton report would be implemented.

In terms of the AFD, CO Mander confirmed that EDF are now considering installing them. EDF had previously stated that AFD could not be installed due to safety concerns relating to the underwater maintenance of the equipment. There has been a change in the approach and now with the involvement of Swansea University and FishTek, it is believed that the AFDs are a practical solution. The preliminary results are positive and mean that a type of AFD which is easier to maintain is being considered.

Felicity Sylvester reminded the Members about the Authority's visit to the Hinkley Point C in 2025 and praised Senior Environment Officer's report. Felicity enquired about a possibility to have an updated report for the AGM in June as part of the meeting's Agenda.

Felicity Sylvester enquired about the enforcement work in regard to netting activities in estuaries and wondered which particular estuary was involved. CO Mander responded explaining that a number of estuaries were involved through Cornwall and Devon and into Dorset, with the focus on the South Coast. Due to the logistics, the South Coast is mainly chosen as a destination for this activity although the Officers are aware that North Coast locations should also be taken into consideration. The enforcement activities are intelligence led and that is what influences where the efforts are deployed.

Felicity Sylvester suspected that the Officers must know which estuary is involved. CO Mander agreed – the Officers are hoping the IVMS requirement for the entire fleet will assist with monitoring this activity more closely. CO Mander explained that the team has used drones to support surveillance and as infringements often happen at night. The work is challenging but CO Mander praised the dedication of the Enforcement Team.

Cllr Hance thanked the Officers for their work in regard to Hinkley Point C and posed a question about the timescale of the AFDs being installed and whether a decision in this matter has been made. CO Mander offered to provide an update at the AGM in June as currently there is not a great amount of information available publicly due to the sensitivity of the topic. CO Mander agreed with Cllr Hance that the Officers should publicise their successes more.

The Chair's understanding, based on a piece on the BBC Spotlight recently, was that the installation of the AFDs was going ahead.

The Chair wished to share an update with the Members about a newly appointed Communication and Engagement Manager at the AIFCA. The role will primarily involve working with individual IFCA's which the Chair hoped will translate into support for the IFCA's.

There were no further questions.

9. To determine the key tasks for inclusion in the Annual Plan for FY 2026 – 2027

CO Mander introduced this Agenda Item by thanking PPO Townsend, who manages the preparation of the Plan, and other Officers who contributed to the content. CO Mander hoped that the Members will appreciate the improvements to be implemented in the Plan, compared to the versions published in the previous years.

CO Mander provided a summary of the main points to be included in the Annual Plan.

The Authority's Annual Plans are driven by national success criteria. As the IFCA's conduct of operations 2018-2022 is being reviewed by Defra and AIFCA, it is appropriate that the success criteria are reviewed. The Officers deliver work as best they can within the funds and resources which are available to them. For simplicity, the focus of the Plan is on any duties listed in Sections 153 and 154 of Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 (MaCAA). The Officers' paper highlighted tasks for inclusion in the Annual Plan. There is a real need to explore the Measures of Equal Environmental Benefit as well as to focus on delivery of surveys in the Taw Torridge Estuary which is problematic due to challenges regarding access to the shellfish beds in that estuary. However, the Officers remain confident that their resourcefulness will help overcome the challenges.

The making of Netting and Potting Byelaws will not be taking place in 2026/27 as the process takes too long to complete. The process of updating the Mobile Fishing Byelaw took seven years and based on that it is

expected that the current Potting and Netting Byelaws would take at least three years to review and replace. The Officers plan to use the limited resources they have at their disposal to focus on different areas of work. The key drivers behind the delivery of the tasks that will be set out in the Plan are the resources, but also the complexity of the fisheries management including hand gathering activities taking place in the Marine Protected Areas (MPAs). CO Mander explained that should the Members agree to take the approach of postponing the review and remaking of the existing potting and netting byelaws, there is a scope to begin the development of a new byelaw – Molluscan Shellfish Hand Gathering Permit Byelaw. Regulating hand gathering alone (as opposed to including crab tiling and bait digging) simplifies the byelaw making process and after it is implemented there is scope to consider how to manage crab tiles and bait digging as separate pieces of work. The Officers will need to take into consideration the outcome of the MMO's Stage 3 Consultation on activities in MPAs as it may impact on the existing management measures.

The Waddeton Regulating Order was also highlighted in the Officers' paper for inclusion in the Annual Plan. CO Mander explained that the Officers are always looking for any opportunities for mariculture. If delivered correctly, it could be a real benefit. It is appropriate for the Authority to support financially the proposed project work on the River Exe, which, it is hoped, will lead to effective ways of removing pacific oysters in other estuaries including the river Dart. D&S IFCA was keen to keep mariculture alive in the Dart and Devon Avon Estuaries and has pushed back at the Duchy's stance, providing evidence of the ecosystem benefits of oyster production and that having fishermen present in these areas would aid the management of wild pacific oysters. However, the Duchy has confirmed that its position remains unchanged regarding Pacific oyster cultivation and that it wishes to see this activity phased out in its estuaries.

CO Mander went on to highlight that REM systems can now be introduced on the Mobile Fishing fleet, due to the scope of the new Mobile Fishing Byelaw. The Officers will now concentrate on securing external funding as well as encouraging the fishers to learn about the opportunities of REM. CO Mander stated that at the heart of the project is protection of the MPAs.

In terms of the Code of Conduct for fishing with cuttle pots and traps in Torbay Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ), CO Mander explained that the Environment Team has delivered great results working in cooperation with local fishers. The main cuttle fish fishery is expected to begin in April 2026 when the content of the Code of Conduct will take effect, which the Officers hope will aid protection of the designated seagrass beds and seahorses as well as allowing a viable cuttle trap fishery to continue.

CO Mander informed the Authority that Fisheries Management Plans (FMP) have always been an important part of workstreams in the Annual Plans and this year is no different.

CO Mander went on to discuss the 2026/27 Budget, and that it has been agreed that the core Revenue Budget would be achieved through an increase of the levies on Local Authorities and the use of the D&S IFCA's General Reserve Fund.

Additional funding from Defra, dedicated to the three key workstreams, will be received through the Spending Review. The Annual Plan identifies the projects which the Officers will be involved in. General Reserve Funds would be used for any shortcomings in funding, but primarily it is planned to use the Spending Review funds.

CO Mander highlighted that the octopus influx remains an issue, putting fisheries under pressure and it is driving some of the tasks planned for inclusion in the Annual Plan.

CO Mander invited questions and comments.

Pamela Buchan wished to clarify that all the workstreams listed in the Annual Plan will be delivered, plus potentially, other tasks. CO Mander explained that the delivery of any tasks is subject to any directives at a national level, but the Officers believe that what has been listed in the Officers' paper for inclusion in the Annual Plan can be delivered. Additionally, the Members are able to point out new workstreams, but this would mean that some of the tasks currently highlighted for inclusion in the Plan would need to be excluded.

Alistair Dewhirst talked about the Molluscan Hand Gathering Permit Byelaw development. Alistair Dewhirst expressed the view that it is good to see that this issue is being addressed as it is a matter that has been worrying the general public for an extended period. It is important to publicise the fact that the Officers responded to the expectations of the public, even if it took a long while.

Felicity Sylvester wished to share an observation about a possible solution to the difficulties in accessing the Taw Torridge Mussel beds. Felicity Sylvester explained that the beds are accessible on a low tide and local fishers can show the Officers how this can be done. Felicity also enquired if the Officers were aware of the Coastwise group which delivers a great deal of citizen science work.

CO Mander responded by advising that the Officers are not able to access some shellfish beds in the Taw Torridge area on foot due to health and safety concerns. In regard to citizen science, the problem is that once the Officers task an external voluntary workforce they take on the responsibility for that operation which can involve the members of the public working for the Authority in potentially dangerous circumstances. The Chair seconded this. However, CO Mander stated that the Officers welcome any data which was gathered independently by any citizen science groups. CO Mander said that it would be useful to be able to use a vessel for transportation and to stand by during the surveys, and that there is a possibility of working with the fishers in the area, which would allow for a good quality data to be collected, as it was the case with the information regarding lobster and octopus. The Officers would be keen to reach out to local fishers in North Devon on this matter.

DCO Clark reminded the Members that the Officers did previously sample beds in Taw Torridge area but health and safety changes as well as changes to the Estuary itself made it impossible to continue. The Environment team are looking forward to assessing other beds this year, in particular those that have become difficult to access. DCO Clark went on to explain that other IFCA's have undertaken trials using multispectral drones to try and differentiate between live and dead mussels on the intertidal foreshore. The Officers have used the drones without a multispectral camera for the mussel beds assessments, but it was difficult to determine from the images which mussels were alive or dead. DCO Clark explained that Officers are talking to other agencies and having conversations with the local fishers to gain access to the mussel beds to undertake on foot surveys. DCO Clark referred to the D&S IFCA's relationship with Coastwise and informed the Authority that the Environment Team had previously delivered a presentation to the group. DCO Clark can reach out to the group and ask for any relevant information they have gathered. The Officers in the past worked with the Friends of the Teign who provided information regarding cockle stocks on the Teign Estuary.

Cllr Hance was interested to ask who would enforce the Hand Gathering Byelaw and whether it is possible to use other IFCA's knowledge and any national input. CO Mander informed Members that other IFCA's do have hand gathering present in their districts. The Sussex IFCA has introduced a hand gathering byelaw, and D&S IFCA can liaise with Sussex IFCA to share ideas and information. CO Mander explained that the enforcement of this Byelaw is a concern which the Officers have considered; it will hopefully involve joint working with other agencies who support the Byelaw, to provide a message to the public that these activities will be monitored. If REM based monitoring was introduced to the mobile fishing vessels this would give more time for the Officers to dedicate to enforcing the Hand Gathering Byelaw.

Guy Baker recommended cooperation with the South West Marine Ecosystem (SWME) groups as currently there is no presence of the fishing industry's representatives in the group's meetings. It was Guy Baker's opinion that it would be beneficial to all, including the IFCAs, if the fishers attended the meetings and shared data available to them. DCO Clark reassured the Members that D&S IFCA's Officers do attend the SWME meetings. DCO Clark herself used to prepare the information for the fisheries section of the SWME Annual Report, but it is appreciated that other stakeholders benefited from this more than the fishers. It may be useful to raise the profile in this respect amongst the fishers.

Alistair Dewhirst agreed with Cllr Hance in relation to the Exe and Teign Estuaries, which both have shellfish areas, and have towns or villages in and around each estuary. Members of the public are aware of any hand gathering activities and would report suspected illegal activity. It was Alistair's opinion the local police were also keen to get involved which could ease the burden on the D&S IFCA's Enforcement Team. DCO Clark provided a comment informing the Members that the Officers have worked in the past with the Police and relevant agencies to encourage and support voluntary bag limits, but regulation will be a stronger form of management.

Kate Sugar agreed with the suggestions in the Officers' paper for included tasks in the Annual Plan and wished to find out if the Coastal Growth fund has been considered as a way to cover the cost of REM. CO Mander responded explaining that the Officers had hoped to fund the first year of the REM roll out through existing FaSS funding, however, regrettably, as the REM project is related to monitoring and control it was not eligible for that specific funding this year. CO Mander informed Members that Officers had reached out to Defra on the morning of the Authority Meeting to find out about any other funding opportunities. Although there may not be external funding secured for this year, it may be possible to achieve this in the year 2027/28.

The Chair advised that the criteria in reference to the Coastal Growth fund are very restrictive which means that there is no certainty that this funding can be secured by the Authority in the next two to three years, although there is hope that the criteria may be widened in the future.

There were no further questions or comments.

The Chair suggested a proposal:

That the key tasks set out under Agenda Item 9 Paper are included in the Financial Year 2026/27 Annual Plan.

The Chair asked the Member for any other suggestions or comments on the above proposal. There were none.

That the key tasks set out under Agenda Item 9 Paper are included in the Financial Year 2026/27 Annual Plan.

Proposed: Alistair Dewhirst Seconded: Wayne Thomas

In favour: 16

Against: 0

Abstain: 0

10. To consider an appointment to the Byelaw & Permitting Sub-Committee.

The Chair introduced this Agenda Item. Andrew Bell has been offered a D&S IFCA appointment by the MMO and has indicated that he wished to join the Byelaw and Permitting Sub-Committee. Unfortunately, Andrew Bell's appointment has not been confirmed in time for today's meeting which in turn meant that Agenda Item 10 could not go ahead as planned and would be brought back to the next available meeting.

There were no questions or comment and no vote took place.

The Members took a comfort break at 14:10 and returned at 14:30

11. To note the report of the Byelaw & Permitting Sub-Committee.

CO Mander introduced this Agenda Item by highlighting that PPO Townsend delivers a great deal of work and support to the B&PSC. CO Mander proceeded to outline the main points of the report.

Voluntary code for cuttle traps use has been developed in cooperation with fishers.

Octopus influx remains present in the Officers' work.

During the last B&PSC meeting, changes in terms of several matters relating to netting were considered, especially for the non-powered vessels (NPV). As a result, a proposal has been made to use the existing Netting Byelaw to address the NPV related issues rather than to wait for a remake of the current Byelaw. This could be achieved by an update in the Netting Permit Conditions. The appropriate measures could be introduced in six months, following a consultation.

Management of Mobile Fishing: The B&PSC discussed mariculture sites, and a proposal to prohibit access of mobile gear vessels to support sustainable development and reduce risks of potential damage to these sites. After a wait of many years the Authority has a new Mobile Fishing Permit Byelaw in place that has additional scope for the use of REM as permit conditions subject to consulting on changes to permit conditions.

The Chair invited CO Mander to provide more information about non-powered vessels (NPVs), for the benefit of those Members who do not attend the B&PSC meetings. CO Mander explained that commercially fishing from NPVs became popular during Covid to supplement income. NPVs do not require a General Fishing Licence or Certificate of Registry which means that they are not subject to the restrictions and management that is applied to powered, licenced fishing vessels. CO Mander provided an example to illustrate the risks that NPVs pose. Commercial licensed fishing vessels can only use fixed nets to target bass, provided they have a relevant authorisation (from the MMO); however, NPV's are not restricted in the same way and so fishing from an NPV using nets or claiming to have fished the nets from a NPV can circumvent the management that is used to support recovery and sustainability of the stock. Cornwall IFCA's Officers have the same concerns regarding NPVs which have been raised with Defra, whose Officials put options for the Minister to consider but no timeline for a decision was available.

CO Mander invited questions and comments.

The Chair praised the Officers and Members, including the B&PSC's Chair Dr Emma Bean for their hard work.

There were no further questions or comments.

12. To note the Octopus update provided to the B&PSC on 26th February 2026

DCO Clark introduced this Agenda Item providing a summary for those Members who do not attend the B&PSC's meetings. Work done since October 2025 included a paper sent to Defra, Caroline Voeden MP, Alistair Carmichael MP and Dame Angela Eagle MP. DCO Clark analysed eighteen vessels fishing in the areas off Dartmouth, Salcombe and Plymouth. DCO Clark highlighted the IPA chart and explained that there is no demersal gear in the areas pointed out by DCO Clark and that potting activity takes place in these areas. DCO explained that there is a Gentleman's Agreement between the potting fishers and that each potter has a set area where they work and that the fishing gear does not get moved around. The landings data for potting suggests that almost all vessels were impacted in terms of the crab and lobster catch with an average of 71% decrease for 2025, compared to 2023, with many fishers experiencing a greater decline in crab stocks. Some vessels suffered an 80% decrease in lobster catch. The octopus influx has impacted the important stocks of crab and lobster in Devon translating into uncertainty and concern for the fishers involved. The Officers looked at the value of the landings which suggested that whilst some fishers benefited from the octopus catch, others did not and these were the most severely impacted. Due to unknown reasons, octopus have not covered the ground equally which means there are large differences in catches between fishers who work in close proximity to each other.

DCO Clark stated that pots have now been set up for the new season and the fishers are not sure if they would catch any crab, lobster or octopus, as the latter seemed to have disappeared in July 2025 after spawning. The fishers observed a devastating decrease in the crab and lobster stock levels, as was reported in the recent ITV piece. DCO Clark raised the difficult questions facing the potters which include how to maintain their crew, how to afford vessel refits and how to continue to be viable. DCO Clark will continue to analyse the available data. D&S IFCA has received funds from Defra for the Fisheries Management Plans (FMPs) so it is planned to look at those vessels who have been impacted and invite them to work with the Officers to gather and share data on catches of crab, lobster and octopus, for which the fishers will be funded. DCO Clark went on to explain that fishers have been asking for support from the MMO, who have recently conducted a survey of fishers to obtain financial information. FMPs work will need to assess how long the octopus influx will last and ask what will happen when or if it disappears, especially in relation to those stocks decimated by the octopus. It is suspected that octopus will remain in the District but there is no certainty. The Officers will continue to gather data and liaise with MBA about their research.

DCO Clark invited questions and comments.

The Chair enquired about the presence of the octopus in North Devon. DCO Clark responded that, following an email that the Officers sent to the relevant permit holders asking for help gathering information about octopus sightings in North Devon, two octopus have been reported.

Sarah Holmyard was interested to know if the Officers received much information from scallop divers about octopus. DCO Clark responded that no, there was no information received from the diving permit holders which could be due to the areas which they cover. IPA fishers saw many empty scallop shells but the full

impact of the octopus on the scallop stocks is yet unknown. DCO Clark said it is possible to send a request for information to the diving permit holders.

Wayne Thomas enquired about the impact of the octopus on the wider marine ecosystem, for instance the fish migration. DCO Clark stated that the Officers don't have this kind of information. The octopus are an apex predator with a wide range of prey, mainly excluding spider crab. It may be possible to use the underwater ROV to inspect the relevant areas, but these areas are not easy to access. Other options could be placing cameras in pots. All the above solutions would require substantial funds and Officer time to conduct.

Sarah Holmyard said that Offshore Shellfish use underwater cameras/ROVs in their sites and it might be possible to get information from this work, and it was possible to enquire about using it. DCO Clark was interested to explore this.

Mark Day provided information obtained via a large Vivier potting vessel which suggested that the octopus is returning to the District. DCO Clark was aware of the catches of octopus in the deep water in the Western Channel.

Cllr Hance asked a question about how the current octopus influx compares to that observed in the 1950s and where do the octopus come from. DCO Clark stated that MBA has undertaken research into the influencing factors, in particular water temperature, and that changes in the temperature are a significant driver for the octopus presence. It is believed that naturally octopus do not make large migrations but the octopus larvae do travel in the water column. Previously, the octopus blooms lasted two to three years. The current influx has been present for one year in Devon. In France an octopus fishery has been developed and now the octopus level catches are relatively low.

David Morgan explained that the French fishery is highly controlled and was managed from the outset, including a closed season. David Morgan went on to say that the future of the octopus fishery is uncertain and the local fleet in areas of France had previously concentrated their efforts on scallops, although a survey conducted after the octopus appeared has shown almost zero scallops remaining.

Felicity Sylvester appreciated the efforts of the Officers and other organisations to conduct surveys and gather data but asked what is being done about the threat to the fishers' businesses. The octopus influx causes a fundamental problem not only to the traditional fishing industries but also to tourism. Felicity Sylvester went on to ask if it possible for funds from local councils to be made available to support the affected communities. DCO Clark reported that Devon County Council and Plymouth City Council had helped fund the MBA research. DCO Clark also stated that the South Devon and Channel Shellfishermen have lobbied Caroline Voaden and Alistair Carmichael and taken evidence to the Minister. DCO Clark expressed the view that funding would be welcome, highlighting the forthcoming Fishing and Coastal communities funding and that the MMO is looking into ways that they can help the fleet. DCO Clark has attended various meeting and heard first hand reports of the devastation.

The Chair asked Rachael Irish of the MMO for any update on this matter. Rachel Irish could not provide an update at that time.

It was the Chair's suggestion that the socio-economic effect of the octopus influx can be compared to the collapse of the mining industry in the South Wales. The damage done to the communities affected cannot be underestimated but is beyond the scope of D&S IFCA's resources to resolve.

Mark Day agreed that assistance from the government is needed, especially since the small operators have been affected by the recent increase in the fuel prices.

Rachel Irish suggested that any concerns regarding fuel cost should be passed to the local MMO team who is able to input this into their system and share directly with Defra.

The Chair asked the Members to pass any relevant information to the MMO.

There were no further questions.

Agenda Items for Information:

13. AIFCA Chief Officer's Report

The Members were advised that the latest AIFCA's Report is available.

14. Date of the next Authority meeting (AGM)

18th June 2026

End.