

AIFCA Chief Officer's Report

Summary

Over the last three months, the Chief Officer has continued to coordinate the Association's national work programme and represent the collective interests of the IFCA's. This has included progressing fisheries knowledge exchange and engagement activity, supporting the Coastal Health Programme, developing arrangements for the national IFCA Training Manager, overseeing the appointment of the Association's accountants and auditors, contributing to an EU Horizon funding proposal and coordinating the collective IFCA response to the Office for Environmental Protection's review of bycatch. Alongside these specific activities, the Chief Officer has continued to engage with Defra, the MMO, Natural England and other national partners on fisheries management plans, marine protected area management, funding, data access and the future capacity of the IFCA's.

The Association submitted a response to the Department for Education consultation on the proposed GCSE Natural History subject content.

The response welcomed the development of the GCSE and supported the inclusion of marine habitats, fieldwork, human influence, fishing practice, conservation, habitat management and biodiversity records. It emphasised that marine and coastal environments should be well represented and that inshore fisheries provide practical examples of sustainable use, environmental management and local governance.

The Association's central message was that sustainable use of sea fisheries resources should be recognised as an important route to thriving coasts and seas. Well-managed inshore fisheries can support healthy ecosystems, coastal communities, local fishing businesses, food production, cultural heritage and public understanding of the marine environment.

The response recommended stronger emphasis on evidence-led governance, co-management, regulation, compliance, enforcement and stakeholder participation in managing shared natural resources. It also supported flexible fieldwork requirements, advisory species lists, and the use of applied marine datasets and case studies.

The Association offered to support future development of teaching resources and case studies based on IFCA experience across England's coast.

Fisheries Knowledge Exchange

The Association has continued to support the exchange of knowledge and good practice between IFCA's and the wider fisheries management community. This has included identifying opportunities to communicate the work and achievements of IFCA's,

supporting the development of shared communications material and improving the flow of information between the Association, its members and external partners.

The Communications and Engagement Manager, Emily Bulled, has led this work, with support from the Chief Officer. Further detail will be provided at the meeting, including opportunities for members and officers to contribute to forthcoming knowledge exchange activity.

Appointment of Accountants and Auditors

The Chief Officer has progressed the appointment of the Association's accountants and auditors in accordance with the decision of members. This included seeking and reviewing quotations and considering the scope, cost and suitability of the services offered.

PKF Francis Clark has been identified as the preferred provider. The attached schedule of services and terms of business set out the proposed arrangements, including the provision of accounting support and limited assurance work.

The appointment will help to ensure that the Association continues to maintain appropriate financial oversight and assurance as its turnover, staffing and programme of externally funded work develop.

Training Manager Appointment

Following the decision taken at the previous meeting, the Chief Officer has worked with Sussex IFCA and other members to develop the arrangements for the employment and management of the IFCA Training Manager.

The attached Memorandum of Agreement sets out the respective responsibilities of Sussex IFCA, as the employing authority, and the Association, which will provide day-to-day management and oversight of the role. The agreement also addresses funding, governance, reporting and accountability.

The new arrangement is intended to provide greater continuity and coordination for the national IFCA training programme and to support the maintenance and development of professional capability across the IFCAs.

Coastal Health

The Association has continued to contribute to the Coastal Health Programme in partnership with Cefas and other participating organisations. The Chief Officer has provided strategic oversight of the Association's involvement, supported by Emily Bulled and Tim Smith.

Work has included communicating the contribution made by IFCAs to coastal health, supporting the development and delivery of training and considering how the programme

can strengthen links between fisheries management, marine conservation, environmental monitoring and emergency preparedness.

The programme continues to provide a useful opportunity to demonstrate the practical role of IFCAs in understanding and responding to pressures affecting coastal ecosystems and communities.

EU Horizon Bid

The Chief Officer has contributed to the development of a proposed EU Horizon funding bid. This has included engagement with prospective partners, consideration of the Association's potential role and ensuring that the proposed activity reflects the practical experience, priorities and capacity of IFCAs.

Participation in the bid could provide opportunities for IFCAs to contribute to international research and knowledge exchange while securing additional resources for work of direct relevance to inshore fisheries and coastal management. The Chief Officer will continue to assess the proposal as it develops, including the likely benefits, resource requirements and any financial or contractual risks for the Association.

Office for Environmental Protection Bycatch Response

The Chief Officer has coordinated the Association's response to the Office for Environmental Protection's request for information concerning bycatch. This has included seeking evidence from the ten IFCAs and bringing the individual responses together into a single Association submission.

The response highlights the breadth of work undertaken by IFCAs, including local evidence gathering, stakeholder engagement, compliance activity and the development of proportionate management measures. It also identifies opportunities to improve outcomes through better engagement with national coordinating bodies, improved integration of datasets and more consistent access to relevant national information.

The response recognises that IFCAs operate within significant financial constraints. In particular, IFCAs have received no additional core funding from Defra since their establishment, despite increasing demands associated with marine protected areas, fisheries management plans, monitoring, evidence gathering and wider environmental responsibilities.

The individual IFCA responses will be retained in an annex so that the evidence and wording supplied by each authority are properly represented.

Shellfish Association of Great Britain's 56th Annual Conference

The Chief Officer prepared and delivered a presentation at the Shellfish Association of Great Britain's 56th Annual Conference. The presentation, entitled Fisheries in a Changing Climate, highlighted how English fisheries are changing in response to climate change and promoted the adaptive, locally led approach taken by IFCA's. The conference also provided an important opportunity to engage with the shellfish sector, communicate the work of the IFCA's and strengthen relationships with industry and other fisheries interests.

Celebrating 15 Years of the IFCA's at Alnwick Castle

The Chief Officer coordinated the Association's event at Alnwick Castle on 1 July 2026, marking 15 years since the establishment of the IFCA's. Hosted by the Duke of Northumberland, the event brought together IFCA representatives, fishers, government, industry and partner organisations to celebrate the achievements of the IFCA's and consider the future of locally led inshore fisheries management. It provided an important opportunity to showcase the work of the IFCA's, strengthen relationships with the fishing industry and promote continued collaboration between local management bodies and national partners. The Association is grateful to Northumberland IFCA, Sarah Coulthard, Newcastle University and the Fishmongers' Company for their support for the event. Special mention also to Emily Bulled for all her work to ensure the event went seamlessly.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

Background Papers

Report for AIFCA Forum 8th September 2026