

AIFCA MEMBERS FORUM MINUTES

1st October 2020 @ 10:30 AM

MSTeam Videoconference



Members Present

Dr Tom Hooper
Cllr John Lamb
Dr Will Wright
Julian Gregory
Dr Stephen Axford
Les Weller (vice Chair)
Dr Stephen Atkins
Cllr Paul Williams
Tony Tomlinson MBE (Chair)
Sam Davis
Prof Mike Williams
Mat Mander
Prof John Humphreys
Ian Jones
Stewart Harper

Officers

Robert Clark

Apologies for absence

Tim Dapling
Mike Hardy
Cllr Andy Guy

1) Election of Chairman

Tony Tomlinson was nominated by Les Weller and following a vote duly elected as Chairman. Les Weller was nominated for vice chairman by Tony Tomlinson and following a vote duly elected. There were no other nominations for either position.

2) Declarations of Interest

None

3) Minutes of Previous Meeting

Proposed by Les Weller and Seconded by John Lamb. The minutes were agreed as a true record. All were in favour. Thanks were recorded to Sam Davis for production of the minutes. The actions from the minutes appear in the item updates in the agenda.

4) Progress Reports

a) Progress against the 3KQ report

Members received a verbal report from the AIFCA Management Group Chairman. The Chairman briefly outlined the process to date noting thanks to the 3KQ consultants. The Chairman welcomed and thanked Devon and Severn for re-joining the AIFCA; noting the importance AIFCA members placed on their return. Looking forward the AIFCA role and aims will be revisited now the organisation has made changes to the officers. The new Chief Officer

has also been asked to bring forward updated and refreshed policies and procedures. Prof. Humphreys was thanked for his work in this regard.

The roles of the Management Group were described and it was highlighted that this would be ratified at the Directors meeting. The action to review the structure of the limited company will commence and seek to conclude in 18 months. The Chairman thanked all the members who had played such an active part in the review. In particular the review group were thanked. Mat Mander, Les Weller, Sam Davis, Julian Gregory and Paul Williams. The work of Paul Williams in the preparation of the accounts was highlighted.

Prof. Humphreys expressed his thanks to the group and to the Chairman on behalf of the Members. He felt that the very positive and optimistic about the work undertaken and the role of the AIFCA. The Members resolved to formally record their thanks to Tony Tomlinson and the review group for the work in reviewing the AIFCA.

Members NOTED the UPDATE

b) Appointment of Chief Officer

Members received a verbal update from the Chairman on the appointment of the AIFCA Chief Officer. Members heard how there had been a strong list of candidates for the role of Chief Officer. Following the interview process Robert Clark had been appointed, from the 1st of September. The Chairman thanked the Chief Officer for his work in the interim period prior to appointment.

Members NOTED the UPDATE

c) IFCA members appointment

Members received a verbal report from the AIFCA Vice-chairman. Les Weller described the process to date, and how very recently, and following a rather delayed process, the MMO had finally written to the IFCA members who were due to expire at the end of their 10 year term advising them of whether an extension to their appointment was to be granted. Julian Gregory enquired as to whether the letters had gone to both the successful and unsuccessful candidates. It was confirmed that in the first instance the letters had been sent to the successful candidates with letters to the other members to be sent shortly. Les Weller further described his discussions with the MMO on behalf of the AIFCA on the proposed national recruitment campaign for new members. The campaign timelines had already slipped. The advertising is likely to commence in November and run until January with a 3-week sifting process with interviews in March.

Prof Williams described how he had had extensive discussions with the MMO regarding the loss of experience as a result of the 10-year expiration policy. The issue of local elections was highlighted by Cllr Lamb whereby local elections have been rolled over to May. The IFCAs faced the issue of losing experience from their Council appointees. Julian Gregory agreed that this supported the case for retention of General Members. Cllr Williams advised that he had written to the MMO requesting a meeting but had received no reply and Dr Atkins advised members that he had submitted requests for extensions for two members, but the correspondence had apparently been lost. Les Weller described how he had minutes and correspondence going back over two years, trying to get action on the matter. Les described his frustration with the entire process.

Stewart Harper described how he had sought and been granted the extension of 5 members; the members appointment will now however all expire in April 2022 and consequently no staggering of appointments has been built into the extension process. The Chairman described how he had written endlessly to the MMO on the matter and it had been raised with Defra. The MMO Chief Executive had previously promised a root and branch review of the

process of members appointments. It was agreed that the process was very unsatisfactory to date and the General Members have not been given the support their hard work and dedication deserves.

Members NOTED the UPDATE

It was further agreed that Les Weller would circulate his letter to the MMO describing the issues with the process and that the Chief Officer should highlight the issues to the Defra and seek to work with the MMO to improve the situation.

d) SR20 IFCA COG response

Members received a report from the Chair of the Chief Officer Group. The Chief Officer provided the background to the report which was circulated previously. The Chief Officer also advised that he had been engaging with the Local Government Special Interest Group on the matter. A marine fisheries and conservation group of the SIG has been established. Cllr Lamb welcomed the engagement with the SIG and advised of the significant pressures on the Local Authorities budgets, asking that Defra be made aware of the severe funding pressures that the Local Authorities and IFCA's will be under for funding.

Dr Axford welcomed the excellent report by the Chief Officers Group and enquired as to whether the indicators could be reported in the individual IFCA's annual reports. The Chief Officer advised that the AIFCA and the COG would be engaging with NIMEG and TAG as to the methodology to gather the metrics under the COG SR20 response.

Prof Williams advised that Plymouth Council had indicated that they are facing a very significant deficit as a consequence of the Covid pandemic and this compounds the more general pressures that their IFCA are under. More generally Devon and Severn IFCA wished to discuss the matter of whether the IFCA's should be funded by central government directly as opposed to the current funding model. Cllr Lamb highlighted that this issue has been raised and debated previously. He highlighted that there is also consideration of the amalgamation of Local Authorities to create combined authorities; this has a potential impact on several IFCA's. David McCandless highlighted the importance of local communities and local / regional delivery because of the IFCA model. The model of both local and central government funding was appropriate in this context, but the failure of the central government funding to increase to reflect not only inflation but also the increased demands on the service was the key issue.

Prof Williams stated that he would support central government funding with local input. Cllr Williams recognised the concerns regarding funding but noted the importance of the local decision making whereby the with local funding comes the ability to define local priorities. Prof Humphreys urged caution because of the vulnerabilities that could result from removing the local authority funding. Adding that the local authorities bring democratic accountability and legitimacy. It is necessary to weigh up the advantages and disadvantages very carefully. In his opinion the model is correct but requires greater central government funding.

Dr Ashworth raised caution over the reliance on central government funding. Adding the oversight that local councillors is very important to the committees, they provide stability and continuity and the ability for the authorities to set their agenda according to their local priorities. Prof Williams highlighted that in his experience this is because of the issues faced in the D&S Authority whereby several of the local authorities have withheld funds and do not wish to contribute to the IFCA. In his opinion the AIFCA should take a position on the issue on whether IFCA's should be centrally funded. Julian Gregory highlighted that Eastern IFCA were at the other end of the spectrum in comparison to the position outlined by Prof Williams when it comes to the local authorities; the Eastern IFCA enjoy a very productive relationship with the finance teams in their constituent authorities. He also said that he could foresee a shift to a central funding model ultimately posing a threat to the IFCA model.

Prof Humphreys supported the points made by Julian Gregory that local fisheries are important to local communities and the local communities should be able to shape the direction of management. The priorities for local communities may be very different from the priorities for central government.

Members NOTED the UPDATE

Tony Tomlinson thanked members for their constructive debate, and it was agreed that that the matter be referred for reports at the next meeting.

AGREED that the IFCA funding model be debated at the next AIFCA meeting and reports be prepared.

ITEMS FOR DECISION

6. AIFCA Accounts 2019/20

Cllr Williams provided members with a comprehensive overview of the AIFCAs financial position and the actions taken to prepare the end of year accounts. A detailed explanation of the treatment of the capital equipment grant, MPA project and £9k of earmarked reserves was provided. The legal and professional costs associated with the personnel changes were also noted. It was noted that the fixed assets had been fully written off. The Net Asset situation was described and details of the cash at bank provided.

Looking forward from the out-turn to a review of future costs the review of insurances was noted. The IT and website costs were identified and would be subject to review this year. The phone contract costs were explained and have been reviewed. There will be savings made in the venue and conference hire costs. The proposal is not to recruit an assistant immediately and payroll and assistance will be provided.

Prof Humphreys thanked Cllr Williams for his detailed explanation and was happy to propose that the Accounts be approved, before doing so he requested further details of the Science Direct costs. It was explained that the costs were offset by income from the IFCAs to the same amount, whereby the central procurement enabled savings to be made. Prof Humphreys requested that the service be reviewed because he felt the access provided by the subscription was limited. However, others who used the service, felt that it represented good value for money. Prof Humphreys will enquire with his IFCA.

Les Weller enquired as to the phone contract costs. These were described and it was noted that the direct debit has now been cancelled. Stewart Harper thanked Cllr Williams for report and the preparation of the accounts, he asked if the title of the accounts could be corrected to remove the capital A from and; this was agreed. The chairman asked that the Accounts be approved. The motion was proposed by Prof Williams and seconded by Prof Humphreys. All present were in favour.

The final accounts of the AIFCA for the financial year 2019 to 2020 were APPROVED

7. Training position

Members received a report from Will Wright on the appointment of a National Lead Training Officer with recommendation(s) from the Chief Officer. Dr Wright provided the background to the report. The Chief Officer provided a breakdown of the costing and benefits of the post. Cllr Lamb spoke in favour of the continuation of the position and the value of training to the IFCAs. Cllr Lamb thanked Ian Jones for his work to date in the role.

Mat Mander gave his apologies and left the meeting taking no further part in the debate.

The Chief Officer summarised the position with regards to Kent & Essex as the employer and the AIFCA providing management support. Julian Gregory enquired as to the basis for the salary. It was explained that the role had been subject to a job evaluation under the host IFCAs scheme. After a debate it was AGREED that the job specification be reviewed. The position with regards to the individual members providing subscription to the position was clarified as per section 3.1.1. of the officer's report. On the basis of the explanation Prof. Williams could support the recommendations.

Subject to the review of the Job Description, Les Weller proposed and Julian Gregory seconded **that the AIFCA;**

- 1) **AGREE to record thanks to Ian Jones (ex AIFCA NLTO) and Kent and Essex IFCA for the work of the NLTO to date.**
- 2) **NOTE the grant award under the EMFF.**
- 4) **AGREES to commence a recruitment process for an NLTO with a revised job description that links the duties, responsibilities and IFCA training programme that has been developed in the last 18 months**
- 5) **NOTES the budgetary implications of the appointment of a new NLTO and agrees in principle (subject to individual IFCA ratification) to provide ongoing support for the role.**
- 6) **RECOMMENDS that the COG revisit the membership of the national IFCA training group**

All were in favour.

At 13:15 there was a 15-minute break.

BREAK

At 13:30 the meeting reconvened

8. Budget Control

Members received a report from Paul Williams on the AIFCA Budget with the recommendation that the members approve the revised budget.

Cllr Williams described the budget assumptions, noting where variance is expected. He described the cash budget, the contents in the notes to accompany the budget and provided detail on aspects of the notes. He reported that the bottom line is that at the end of August we are £21k ahead, but with anticipated VAT yet to pay of £14k.

Sam Davis thanked Cllr Williams for his detailed explanation of the accounts. Cllr Williams said that he was very happy to support the AIFCA and the new Chief Officer

Prof Williams proposed and Les Weller seconded the recommendation that members **note the budget control statement and approve the AIFCA budget.**

Members thanked Cllr Williams.

9. The Defra IFCA Evaluation Report

Members received a report from the Chief Officer. The Chief Officer gave the background and context to the report. Prof. Williams expressed his frustration that the draft report has not been circulated to the Chairs and he was minded to complain to the Secretary of State if that were to happen again. Both the Chairman and Cllr Lamb supported such an approach.

There was a debate about the adequacy of the report's methodology and an explanation that certain of the inaccuracies in the drafting were being addressed.

It was **AGREED** that the Chief Officer should draft a response to the report in anticipation of the report's eventual publication and that the draft response be circulated for comment.

10. EU Exit

Members received a report from Will Wright of the Chief Officers Group on preparation for EU Exit and the role of IFCAs. Dr Wright's briefing described the process of coordination with partner organisations, referring to the role of JMOCC, the IFCA./MMO intel system, the Intel Cells into Defra.

Dr Wright detailed the vessel charter agreements with MMO for vessel sharing. He provided an overview of preparations ahead of the end of the transition period and the role of IFCAs.

Members debated the implications for IFCAs and thanked Dr Wright for his update and the officers involved in the preparations.

11. Dates of, and arrangements for the Next Meetings

It was agreed that the meetings of the AIFCA Members Forum, to be followed by a meeting of the AIFCA Directors, shall be held on the following dates:

8th	December	2020
9th	March	2021
8th	June	2021 (AGM)
7th	September	2021
7th	December	2021
11th	March	2022

It was agreed that for the foreseeable future that the meetings shall be held remotely using video-conferencing. Notwithstanding it is desirable to meet in person if possible and the situation will remain under review.