COMPLAINTS POLICY

1. GENERAL

The Association of Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities (AIFCA) [The Association] aims to operate in a fair, proportionate and transparent manner and provide a professional service.

We acknowledge that, despite our best intentions, sometimes things do go wrong. When this happens, we want to the opportunity to learn and improve our service.

2. COMPLAINTS THAT DO NOT RELATE TO OUR HANDLING OF YOUR PERSONAL DATA

2.1 General

If you think we have got something wrong, then please let us know as soon as possible. Please note that unless there are good reasons to do so, we will not deal with complaints received by us after 12 months from the date the problem occurred, or you became aware of it.

We will publish details about our complaints policy on our website.

2.2 What is a complaint

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about an action or lack of action or the standard of service we, or those acting on our behalf provide, which affects an individual or group of individuals.

Examples could include situations where there has been an unreasonable delay, you have not been kept adequately informed, you have a concern about how you have been treated, we have not provided information or replied to you when we should have done, or a mistake has been made.

If you wish simply to make a request that we provide or improve a service, fix a problem or provide an explanation for an action that we have taken, or if you wish to make a general request for information, then please contact us (please see section 6: **How to Contact us**). We will not treat such requests as a complaint.

2.3 What is not covered by this policy

We will not investigate complaints:

1. about policy and law;

2. about individual IFCAs;

3. that are, or have been, subject to legal proceedings;

4. that have previously been considered under this policy; and

5. that have already been investigated or are currently being investigated by the Local Government Ombudsman

unless the complaint relates to the way in which our procedures or processes were followed.

This is not an exhaustive list, and we will look at the specific circumstances of each complaint when deciding whether to accept it.

If we decide not to accept your complaint, we will let you know why your matter is not suitable for our complaints process and inform you of your right to take that decision to the Local Government Ombudsman.

We will also keep a record of complaints we have decided not to accept, and the reason for doing so.

2.4 How to make a complaint

If you are unhappy with our service, please contact us as soon as possible (please see section 6: **How to Contact us**).

To help us deal with your complaint, please let us have as much information as possible, including:

1. your full name, address, email address and telephone number;
2. whether you would like to be contacted by telephone, letter or email;
3. whether you would like to receive our response by letter or email;
4. full details about your complaint, including the issue/event/occurrence which you wish to complain about, any relevant background, the names of any individuals involved, how it has affected you and what you want to happen to put things right; and
5. where applicable, the details of any third party that you have asked to act on your behalf and your authority for us to deal with them. To protect you, we will not deal with your complaint until we have the appropriate authorisation from you.

Our complaints process has two stages:

Stage 1

We will investigate your complaint and do our best to resolve any issues at this stage.

We will aim to acknowledge your complaint in writing within 5 working days of receiving it. If appropriate, our acknowledgment will include confirmation of our understanding of the nature of your complaint and a statement that you should contact us if you disagree with this. If anything about your complaint is unclear, we will ask you for further information.

We will then aim to provide a full response in writing within 10 working days of the complaint being acknowledged.

However, if the matter is complex and we need more time to investigate your complaint, we will write to you explaining why we need more time and when we expect to send our response.

Where a complaint is about a member of the Association, our response will confirm:

1. the complaint stage;
2. our understanding of your complaint;
3. the information reviewed in our investigation (including policy, law and guidance/good practice, where relevant);
4. where your complaint is not upheld, the reasons for our decision and that we have notified the Member’s appointing organisation of our decision not to uphold your complaint;

5. otherwise, that the matter has been referred to the Member's appointing organisation for further investigation and to determine what action, if any, should be taken and that they will be in contact with you;
6. what action, if any, we have taken or will take as a result of the complaint; and
7. how you can escalate your complaint if you are unhappy with our decision.

We will keep you informed of progress made in relation to any outstanding actions.

For other complaints, our response will confirm:

1. the complaint stage;
2. our understanding of your complaint;
3. the information reviewed in our investigation (including policy, law and guidance/good practice, where relevant);
4. whether your complaint is upheld, partially upheld or not upheld and the reasons for our decision;
5. where your complaint is upheld, if appropriate, the details of any remedies offered to try and put things right;
6. what action, if any, we have taken or will take as a result of the complaint;
7. details of any outstanding actions to resolve your complaint; and
8. how you can escalate your complaint if you are unhappy with our decision.

We will keep you informed of progress made in relation to any outstanding actions.

Stage 2

If you are not happy with all or part of our response, you can request that we escalate your complaint to stage 2. We will not normally deal with a request received after one month from the date of our stage 1 response, although we may allow more time, depending on the circumstances. We may also refuse to escalate the complaint to stage 2 for the reasons set out in section 2.3 of this policy.

We will aim to acknowledge your request in writing within 5 working days of receiving it. In our acknowledgement, we will set out our understanding of any outstanding issues and the outcomes you are seeking. If any aspect of your complaint is unclear, we will ask you for more information.

Your complaint will be investigated by an appropriate senior member of staff, the Chair/Vice-Chair of the Association, or their nominated representative, who has not had direct involvement in the problem giving rise to the complaint and did not consider your complaint at stage 1.

We will aim to provide a final response in writing within 20 working days of the complaint being acknowledged.

However, if the matter is complex and we need more time to investigate your complaint, we will write to you explaining why we need more time and when we expect to send our response.

Where a complaint is about a member of the Assocition, our final response will confirm:

1. the complaint stage;
2. our understanding of your complaint;
3. the information reviewed in our investigation (including policy, law and guidance/good practice, where relevant);
4. where your complaint is not upheld, the reasons for our decision and that we have notified the Member's appointing organisation of our decision not to uphold your complaint;

5. otherwise, that the matter has been referred to the Member's appointing organisation for further investigation and to determine what action, if any, should be taken and that they will be in contact with you;
6. what action, if any, we have taken or will take as a result of the complaint.

We will keep you informed of progress made in relation to any outstanding actions.

For other complaints, our final response will confirm:

1. the complaint stage;
2. our understanding of your complaint;
3. the information reviewed in our investigation (including policy, law and guidance/good practice, where relevant);
4. whether your complaint is upheld, partially upheld or not upheld and the reasons for our decision;
5. where your complaint is upheld, if appropriate, the details of any remedies offered to try and put things right;
6. what action, if any, we have taken or will take as a result of the complaint;
7. details of any outstanding actions to resolve your complaint.

We will keep you informed of progress made in relation to any outstanding actions.

2.5 Unacceptable behaviour

There may be occasions when we consider that a complaint is unreasonable, inappropriate, or vexatious or that a complainant is being unreasonably persistent with their complaint. Please see our unacceptable behaviour policy for more information about how we deal with such situations.

3 DATA PROTECTION COMPLAINTS

3.1 General

If you are unhappy about how we have handled your personal information, please contact us as soon as possible (please see section 6: **How to Contact us**).

3.2 What is a complaint

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about how we have handled an individual's personal information.

Examples could include where you are unhappy about our response to your subject access request, where you have been affected by a data breach or you are unhappy about how we have used your personal information.

3.3 How to make a complaint

To help us deal with your complaint, please let us have as much information as possible, including:

1. your full name, address, email address and telephone number;
2. whether you would like to be contacted by telephone, letter or email;
3. whether you would like to receive our response by letter or email;

4. full details about your complaint, including the issue/event/occurrence which you wish to complain about, any relevant background, the names of any individuals involved and how it has affected you; and
5. where applicable, the details of any third party that you have asked to act on your behalf and your authority for us to deal with them. To protect you, we will not deal with your complaint until we have the appropriate authorisation from you.

We will acknowledge your complaint within 30 days of receiving it. If appropriate, our acknowledgment will include confirmation of our understanding of the nature of your complaint and a statement that you should contact us if you disagree with this.

We will take reasonable steps to verify the identity of the person making the complaint. This may involve requesting further information or documentation from you. If, having requested additional information, we are not in a position to identify the person making the complaint, we may be unable to deal with it.

We will take appropriate steps to investigate your complaint without undue delay. This will usually involve:

1. reviewing your complaint;
2. locating and reviewing the records we hold about you;
3. establishing the relevant facts; and
4. liaising with individuals who you may have dealt with.

We may also need to ask you for further information or documents. If so, we will ask you to provide the information within a specified period of time.

We will update you on the progress of your complaint at appropriate times.

Once our investigation is complete, we will inform you in writing of the outcome without undue delay. Our response will explain what we have done to resolve your complaint and, where appropriate, any actions we have taken as a result.

4 WITHDRAWING A COMPLAINT

You may withdraw your complaint at any time. We will confirm the withdrawal of the complaint with you by letter or email.

5 ANONYMOUS COMPLAINTS AND DATA PROTECTION

We understand that it can be difficult to make a complaint. However, we will not ordinarily consider an anonymous complaint unless there are good reasons to do so. Please note that if you make a complaint anonymously, we may not be able to investigate the complaint fully and we will not be able to contact you to confirm the outcome of your complaint.

Any personal information that we collect and hold in connection with your complaint will be handled in accordance with our privacy notice

6 HOW TO CONTACT US

The Association of Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities Ltd.
Robert.clark@association-ifca.org.uk

7 DO YOU NEED EXTRA HELP?

We will adapt this policy to meet your needs if you request a reasonable adjustment (please see section 6: **How to Contact us**).