

**NOTES** of a Technical Panel meeting of the **KENT & ESSEX INSHORE FISHERIES AND CONSERVATION AUTHORITY** held at Inn on the Lake, Shorne, Kent on 3 November 2023 at 10am

**Present:** Cllr J Lamb (Southend BC), Mr J Nichols (MMO), Cllr D Crow-Brown (KCC), Mr R Turner (MMO), Mr E Hannam (MMO)

**In Attendance:** Ms L Tricker (Clerk), Ms A Melvin (KCC) Dr W Wright (CIFCO), Mr D Bailey (ACIFCO), Mrs K Woods (Admin Assistant), Mr C O’Laoi (Skipper, KEIFCA)

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The Technical Panel met to discuss and make recommendations on the following matters:

- Whether to start a new vessel build tender process in order to utilise UK Government funds for a new cabin RIB;
- The strategic approach the Authority should take to renewal reserves contributions and fleet management; and
- Should insurance premiums be increased to cover full cost replacement of any vessel in the event of a Total Loss.

**Declaration of Interests:**

Mr Turner declared a personal interest as a member of ROFF

**Key Points considered by the meeting**

BACKGROUND

The Panel received a presentation from the Chief Fishery Officer. In this he acknowledged that it was always difficult to predict future needs. Leaving the EU and COVID had changed materially how a lot of the fisheries worked. Under the EU, the IFCA had the ability to access grant funds that would pay for or contribute towards enforcement capabilities.

A strategic objective of the government is to move to a state where just UK boats would be working in the six to twelve nautical miles. Under the UK/EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement there is the potential for the UK to negotiate the exclusion of EU fishing vessels from the 6-12nm in the future, and as a result it is possible that IFCA might be tasked with patrolling out past the 6-mile boundary. KEIFCA had one of the bigger districts and further out to sea you work, the more robust your boats needed to be.

Nationally, there was now a much better idea of the regulatory landscape with FMPs being developed and there still an ongoing clear need for at sea enforcement. Vessel monitoring (VMS, IVMS) and onboard Remote Electronic Monitoring systems (REM) were on the horizon and likely to become a greater enforcement tool. A combination of vessel monitoring and intelligence-led enforcement could lead to more focused future compliance regime with more targeted sea based enforcement.

The Panel were informed that officers had looked at the sea-going assets currently held and what assets were needed in the future. Access to funding was under a new scheme which linked in with the National Vessel Replacement Strategy. Other IFCA's had begun to access these funds and it had been established that it was important to follow a tendering process when deciding which boatyard to use.

In response to a question from the Chairman as to how likely it was that the Government would ask the IFCA's to go out to 12nm, the CFO suggested that this could be tied into the next round of fisheries negotiations under the Trade and Cooperation Agreement.

The Chairman informed the Panel that in their District the MMO went out to 12nm and they did ask to use our vessels to carry out their patrols. In his opinion any vessel built should be capable of going out to at least 12nm. The Vice Chairman agreed with this comment.

#### NEW VESSEL BUILD TENDER PROCESS

The ACFO provided the Panel with a presentation on the vessels that the SFC/IFCA had owned. The vessels currently owned by the IFCA were Nerissa a 17m catamaran with a daughter 5.4m RIB, which was a custom built, unique hull configuration, based in Ramsgate purchased at a price of about £1.2 million in 2017 with a current replacement estimate of in excess of £2 million. Tamesis, bought in 2011, was a 12m catamaran mainly used for survey work, but also did gear hauling and general fisheries observation. Vigilant, the newest of the vessels, was a 7.8m RIB with twin 150hp Suzuki petrol outboards which the IFCA had purchased in 2020.

The Panel were advised that the fuel burn differences between these boats was notable. Nerissa in the last quarter had used 15,000 litres of diesel, Vigilant and Tamesis less than half that amount. The ACFO stated that Nerissa was a very capable boat, coded to work out far outside the 6nm and 12nm limits and could be used for both survey and enforcement work. At 17m she had a slightly deeper draft to Tamesis and couldn't operate in as shallow waters and was more expensive to run.

The Panel reviewed a number of other RIBs either in operation or build with other IFCA's:

- 9.5m cabin RIB operated by Northumberland IFCA (NIFCA) which cost £220k in 2018. This vessel had seating for 3 officers, toilet facilities and hot water provision. Its engines were twin Suzuki 250hp petrol outboards. NIFCA reported that they were able to use it to carry out patrols over a number of hours. The ACFO advised the Panel that the larger size and enclosed cabin would allow for extended patrols and for officers to stay at sea for longer durations.
- 11.6m Redbay cabin RIB operated by Eastern IFCA which cost £400k in 2018. This had twin inboard diesels (440hp Yanmar's with jets) with four suspension seats and toilet facilities.
- 9m Delta cabin RIB operated by North Eastern IFCA which cost £400k in 2018. This had twin inboard Barras engines with Hamilton jets, four suspension seats and toilet facilities.
- 10.5m cabin RIB that was currently in build for Southern IFCA (SIFCA) at a cost of £300k to £350k, similar to that in service with Dorset police. This had the same benefits as the 9.5m RIB with additional and better seating provisions that could go further offshore. There would be a reduction in manoeuvrability in the small creeks found in the District.

The Panel were advised that adding a cabin RIB to the enforcement fleet allowed officers to expand the existing targeted, rapid response fleet across the District from Essex into Kent. RIBs were relatively inexpensive and effective when compared to traditional workboats and could operate with a limited crew. This provided greater efficiency in MPA work as well as intel-led fisheries enforcement work. The IFCA had significant MPA risks in the District with two specific byelaws that prohibited bottom towed fishing gear in a number of areas already in place with these areas likely to increase by the end of 2024.

A cabin RIB would fit into the existing fleet, rather than trying to get one boat that did everything. The resulting fleet would then be a number of different types of assets which would have specific roles and purposes.

The MMO worked with KEIFCA regularly in Essex utilising Vigilant and both the Eastern Marine Area PMO and the MMO Offshore Operations Manager had expressed support for a more capable asset on the Essex coast. MMO requirements were for an inshore asset that could operate out to the 12nm limit for up to 8 hours and conduct boarding inspections on UK and EU vessels operating in UK waters. The MMO had also advised that they were prepared to provide support for the business case which would accompany the funding application.

The basic tender specifications that officers felt would be required from a new build were:

- 9.5 – 11m length cabin RIB
- Petrol outboards to give 40kt sprint, 25kt cruise with option to submit alternative propulsion methods that could be feasible. We would require existing robust solutions to problems, not new unique or newly developing technology.
- Toilet facilities
- Seating for 4-6 officers
- Hot water and heating
- Consideration towards carbon reduction systems
- Minimum of category 3 coding with a preference for category 2
- Proven company ability in delivering vessels to specification.

The Panel were provided with a more detailed tender specification (appendix 2) and given a presentation by the ACFO who explained some of the technical elements and specific wording. Andrea advised that the tender specification document must be clearly worded for submissions to be judged fairly against the specification criteria. The Panel discussed the proposed specification at length and agreed in principle to the document, with final wording to be looked at jointly by the ACFO and Andrea ahead of the next Quarterly meeting.

**The Technical Panel made the following recommendations which would be put to the full Authority for approval at the November Quarterly Meeting:**

- to apply for central government funding for a new Cabin RIB, and
- to present the full tender specification package for a Cabin RIB to the full Authority for approval at the November Quarterly meeting.

**SUMMARY OF CURRENT FLEET**

The Panel were shown a Gant chart of the working life of KEIFCA's vessels and advised that in accounting terms, a vessel's life was 10 years. The ACFO gave a verbal presentation to the Panel on the history and service details for all vessels currently in the fleet. Tamesis was built and came into service in 2011. In 2021/22 she underwent a comprehensive refit including structural work carried out in the hull to reinforce the deck. It was possible that she could undergo another refit in 2032 to extend her life by another 10 years. Nerissa came into service in 2017 and would be ten years old in 2027, at which time a decision would need to be taken on whether to refit the vessel in the same way as Tamesis or to replace the vessel. Nerissa was custom built to the IFCA's operational requirements and her unique 'one-off' design meant that the potential working life of the hull was unknown. If a refit were undertaken and her working life extended, she would be 15 years old in 2032.

*FINANCES / RENEWALS RESERVE*

The Panel were advised that until 2018 the Authority had put £100k into the renewals reserves each year to be in a position to replace vessels after 10 years. The renewals fund together with EU grant funding had been sufficient to replace vessels in the past, however it was not known what funding options would be available in the future as we were no longer in the EU. The Panel was reminded that IFCA's were not permitted to borrow money so the only option was to save money.

The ACFO advised the Panel that KEIFCA's current renewals reserves was £698k and presented 3 scenarios for putting different sums of money in each year: £50k, £70k and £100k which would give an estimated total reserve after 10 years of £1.1m, £1.3m and £1.5m respectively. The Panel was advised that to replace Tamesis and Nerissa like for like at the same time would cost approximately £2.7m. The ACFO explained that the renewals reserves were also used to fund replacing the KEIFCA vehicles as well as IT systems e.g. the server so even in the best case scenario whereby £100k was put into renewals reserves each year, there would still not be sufficient money after 10 years to replace both vessels, or even Nerissa alone. It was therefore important to maintain both vessels to keep them operational for as long as possible. Tamesis' refit would cost approximately £100k which over the period of 10 years would save up to £900k if £100k were to be transferred into the renewals reserves.

The Panel members discussed the options put forward by the ACFO and commented that some Authority Members had challenged budgetary decisions recently. There was concern amongst the Panel that approval may not be given to put the highest figure proposed into the renewals reserves. The Chairman recognised that Local Authority Members may have questioned KEIFCA putting money into reserves when their own Local Authority was experiencing financial difficulties. However, there was a statutory duty to run the IFCA's and it was for each IFCA to decide how much money to put into their reserves.

The CFO thanked the Panel for their input and suggested that a budget plan be worked on for presentation at a full Authority Meeting for discussion by all Authority Members. The Panel agreed with the CFO's suggestion, and the following pertinent comments were made:

- in addition to the levy, other income was generated by licence fees but if we didn't have a survey vessel there wouldn't be a cockle fishery
- after Vigilant was trialled in Kent we would be in a better position to know if a 3 boat fleet for 2030s would work effectively (1 workboat, 1 cabin RIB and 1 RIB/workboat)
- proposed ringfencing income from chartering vessel to MMO to boat reserves
- needed to be mindful that industry was struggling more than ever e.g. Ramsgate fishing fleet reduced from 30 boats to 10 in very short time

- proposed contacting Council Leaders to explain rationale behind transferring £100k per year into renewals reserves

**The Technical Panel made the following recommendations which would be put to the full Authority for approval at the November Quarterly Meeting:**

- to put as much money as possible into reserves each year for fleet replacement, and
- to ask the full Authority to consider a reduction to 3 boats in the long-term management of its fleet

**Insurance of vessels**

The ACFO reminded the Panel that at the Authority meeting on 12 September, Members asked for further costings and details of increasing the vessels' insurance premiums to provide like for like replacement cover. The ACFO advised the Panel that he had contacted boatyards to obtain quotes and was confident he would be able to get an accurate price for all vessels except Nerissa, due to her unique design. However, this would cost £100 per hour for an MCA Surveyor to assess each vessel and, although it was expected that the insurance broker would accept the MCA assessment of each vessel's current valuation, the Surveyor would not be able to provide an estimated cost of like for like replacement. The Panel was told that the vessels' valuations provided at the last meeting were still indicative of the cost to buy from new:

Nerissa	£2 million
Nereus	£45,000
Tamesis	£850,000
Vigilant	£150,000

As previously reported, the premiums for all four vessels for 2023/24 were £16,445.50, for total loss cover of the value of the boat when purchased plus 10% and it would cost an additional £11,000 to provide total loss cover on a like for like basis. The Panel were reminded that the vessels' costs at purchase were:

Nerissa	£1.2 million
Nereus	£37,000
Tamesis	£500,000
Vigilant	£105,947

The ACFO reiterated to the Panel that the vessels were maintained to very high standards by the skippers and crew and they did not go to sea in rough weather so the risk of loss was minimal. Open RIBs were statistically higher risk due to their smaller and more exposed nature.

The Panel discussed the options and the Vice Chairman commented that as the vessels were very well maintained and were not put to sea in poor weather conditions, he thought that the level of insurance currently in place was sufficient.

Another Member commented that given the budgetary pressures which had been discussed previously, it would be prudent to revisit the level of cover at a later date and stick to what is currently in place now.

The Chair suggested that insurance cover for the new Cabin RIB could be looked at once she was delivered but for the existing fleet, he agreed that the current level of cover currently in place was appropriate. A Member suggested an option of 'self-insurance' whereby the premium increased of £11,000 could be put into reserves, in addition to the £100k previously discussed, and in a number of years that could be used contribute towards replacement cost of a RIB, which was the bigger risk. The CFO advised that he would need to liaise with Su Martin (KCC Financial Advisor) to investigate the viability of this option.

**The Technical Panel made the following recommendations which would be put to the full Authority for approval at the November Quarterly Meeting:**

- to consider the option of full cost replacement insurance for the new vessel at the time of bringing her into operation, and
- to continue with the level of insurance cover already in place for the existing vessels