



Marine Management Organisation

Board Meeting Minutes: 05 November 2024 (Public)

Location: Mary Ward House, London

MMO Board

Hilary Florek (HF), Chair
Belinda Howell (BH)
David Lyall (DL)
Peter Judge (PJ), PIC Chair
Tony Delahunty (TD)
William Roberts (WR), ARAC Chair
Rob Wilson (RW), RemCom Chair
Mark Ripley (MR)
Judith Petts (JP)

MMO Executive Leadership Team

Michelle Willis (MW) – Acting CEO and Accounting Officer
Jenny Stewart (JS) – Director of Planning and Change
Paul Errington (PE) – Acting Director of Finance and Resources
Pete Clark (PC) – Director of Operations
Trudi Wakelin (TW) – Director of Marine Development (Domestic and International)
Michael Coyle (MC) – Acting Director of Digital and Analysis

Additional Attendees, by invitation

Mike Rowe (MRo) – Defra Director of Marine and Fisheries
Henrik L. Pedersen (HP), Chair, UK Major Ports Group (UKMPG) and Chief Executive, Associated British Ports (ABP)
Geraint Evans (GE), Chief Executive, UK Major Ports Group (UKMPG)
Alex Pepper (AP), Director of Policy, UK Major Ports Group (UKMPG)
Sophie Young (SY), Consents and Environment Lead, Associated British Ports (ABP)
Richard Ballantyne (RB), Chief Executive, British Ports Association (BPA)
Mark Simmonds (MS), Director of Policy and External Affairs, British Ports Association (BPA)
Mike Alcock (MA), DfT Deputy Director Ports and Shipping

Apologies

None

Board Secretariat

Julia Templeton (JT)
Gemma McKenzie (GM)

Governance and Accountability

1. Welcome and Introductory Remarks/Declaration of Interests

- 1.1 The Chair welcomed attendees to the meeting and introduced JP to her first Board Session.
- 1.2 Declarations of interest were requested, there were no new declarations in addition to those previously reported.
- 1.3 HF confirmed that this would be her final meeting as Chair, with her extended second term due to reach its end on 7 November 2024. Reflecting on her six and a half years' tenure, HF expressed pride in the organisation's progress, and conveyed confidence in its future under TD, who will serve as Interim Chair effective 8 November 2024.
- 1.4 Key outcomes from the recent Defra ALB Chair's Forum were shared. Chaired by the Permanent Secretary, the session offered an introduction to the Secretary of State (SoS) who emphasised the importance of cross-departmental collaboration aligned to government missions and SoS priorities.
- 1.5 The minutes of the 17 September 2024 Board Meeting were adopted.

2. Update from the ARAC Meeting of 18 October 2024

- 2.1 The ARAC Chair updated the Board on the October meeting which provided a readthrough of the draft Annual Report and Accounts.
- 2.2 The ARAC received a fuller update on Spending Review which signaled financial pressures in the current year, which would increase in 2025/26; planning assumptions would be adjusted accordingly requiring significant input from MMO colleagues over the next six months.
- 2.3 The Board were advised to the ARAC's ongoing concerns around slippage in the Internal Audit Programme (IAP), delivered by Government Internal Audit Agency (GIAA) which then risks operational vulnerability. The Executive committed to escalate these concerns with GIAA directly.

Strategy and Stakeholders

3. Stakeholder Presentations from Ports Representatives: UKMPG, ABP, BPA

- 3.1 MMO was pleased to welcome leaders from UK Major Ports Group (UKMPG), Associated British Ports (ABP), British Ports Association (BPA) and Department for Transport (DfT). Attendees brought a presentation to the Board to demonstrate the vital role Ports play to the UK economy and in delivering government missions surrounding economic growth, green energy and job creation.
- 3.2 Stakeholders emphasised the need to reduce "regulatory drag" to attract significant global investment opportunity, particularly in green energy. Delays in the MMO consenting process and inefficiencies across the regulatory landscape were highlighted as barriers to achieving economic progress.
- 3.3 The desire to speed up the process for review of HROs was also conveyed; DfT confirmed existing collaboration with MMO on short-, medium- and long-term solutions.
- 3.4 A collaborative commitment was made for the MMO executive to explore opportunities to streamline the consenting process in partnership with UKMPG, ABP and BPA.
- 3.5 The Chair thanked Ports and DfT attendees for their frankness and partnership.
- 3.6 The Board recognised the importance of engaging with Natural England, Policy Officials and Responsible Ministers to gain support.

4. Stakeholder Engagement

- 4.1 The Board received an update on the implementation of revisions to MMO's stakeholder engagement plan and narrative. Discussion was had to MMO's alignment to SoS priorities and government missions, the MMO narrative would be updated to reflect this.
- 4.2 Board oversight of MMO promotional materials was discussed, annual review of documents was suggested. Review should focus on outcomes over process while ensuring MMO's messaging is clear, concise and effectively demonstrates MMO's role and value.
- 4.3 The Board emphasised the need for bold action and collaborative approaches to address challenges and seize opportunities.

Policy

5. Defra View from Bridge

- 5.1 MRO updated the Board on the new Defra appointment of Sally Randall Director General (DG) for Environment.
- 5.2 An update on Ministerial activity was given highlighting that a number of policy decisions await consideration, this includes proposals for Marine Protected Areas (MPAs).
- 5.3 MRO confirmed Defra's current focus on progressing MPAs and Fisheries Management Plans (FMPs).
- 5.4 It was reported that annual fisheries negotiations are expected to conclude within the next month.

Delivery Assurance

6. Quarter 2 2024/25 – Finance, Risk and Assurance

- 6.1 PE briefed the board on MMO's financial position drawing attention the persistent challenges in balancing budgets, ongoing under-recovery of income on MMO's statutory function to deliver Harbour Revision Orders were discussed.
- 6.2 The need to maintain operational capacity while responding to financial pressures was considered, previous cross government funding which supported Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs) will not be forthcoming in future settlements, it was noted that MMO has limited opportunity to absorb these pressures.
- 6.3 The Board received an update on MMO's work to enhance internal controls by adopting an integrated approach to Risk Management. PE advised that a Risk Appetite statement will be drafted to guide future decision making.
- 6.4 With regard to the Internal Audit Programme, current areas of focus include expediting the delivery of remaining 2024/25 audits, led by GIAA, and forward planning for 2025/26.
- 6.5 Increased HRO volumes were flagged as an operational pressure, the Board were keen to remain sighted on the resource implications and potential efficiencies.

7. Quarter 2 2024/25 – Performance and Change

- 7.1 JS briefed the board MMO performance against Ministerial Priorities, confirming that MMO awaits updated requirements from the new Ministerial team.
- 7.2 Positive progress was reported in relation FMPs, with tranche three measures successfully completed, tranche four consultations are being scoped and developed with support from industry. JS noted the challenges of overseeing multiple, dynamic FMPs which are subject to continuous update.
- 7.3 The Board received an update on the Inshore Vessel Monitoring Systems (I-VMS) project. MMO are exploring opportunities for a "soft launch" to ensure readiness ahead of the SI.
- 7.4 The Fish Export Service (FES) Project was discussed; Public Digital have been contracted to support the project ensuring that key deliverables remain on track. The EU have now confirmed requirements for UK Catch Certificates which will be prioritised alongside trip dates. The MMO Planning and Investment Committee will continue to oversee the project on behalf of the Board.
- 7.5 The MMO's proposal for the Marine Planning and Licensing Programme (MPLP) was celebrated having received positive feedback after Defra (Red Team) review, programme funding is requested as part of the Spending Review.
- 7.6 Performance indicators were discussed, JS introduced draft High Level Delivery Indicators requesting Board comments ahead of adoption.

Executive Update

8. CEO Update

- 8.1 The CEO provided briefed the Board on current themes;
Spending Review (SR)
- 8.2 MW confirmed that the Departmental settlement will exceed expectations, primarily as a result of capital investment. While this is encouraging, resource allocation is less than anticipated, leaving some Departmental pressures unfunded. Business planning is underway, with revisions starting mid-November and extending into spring, this will require a significant amount of capacity for MMO over the next six months.
- 8.3 With the Autumn Statement, the Chancellor made clear that the new government have inherited a difficult economic situation, the extent of Treasury constraint has now been made clear with the decision not to support new initiatives.
- 8.4 To respond to financial pressures, MMO will pause recruitment on new vacancies allowing only backfilling for

departures, with CEO approval to be given ahead of appointment.

Landings Data

- 8.5 Data quality concerns were discussed highlighting the statistical quality notice MMO published on 24 July 2024, followed by unscheduled corrections published on 8 October. MW confirmed that following consultation with the Department, MMO will voluntarily seek a suspension of its OSR accreditation while a statistics development programme is implemented to review and assure the process to re-attain accreditation in 2025. MW confirmed that the issues identified remain within tolerance, MMO have taken proactive steps to ensure accountability for the issues at hand and will work closely with the Department and Devolved Governments while these are resolved.

Office for Environmental Protection (OEP) Rapid Advice to SoS on Government Review and Updates to the Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP)

- 8.6 MW briefed the Board on OEP recommendations to the SoS of relevance to MMO, these include advice to maximise the contribution of protected sites for nature, speed up action in the marine environment and set out clear mechanisms for reconciling competing demands for the use of the sea.

Seaweed Aquaculture

- 8.7 A further briefing on Seaweed Aquaculture was given noting MMO's receipt of contentious marine license applications in the South West. A discussion to the consenting process and planned follow up action with local MPs was had.

Closing Matters

9. Meeting Closure and AoB

- 9.1 HF concluded her final meeting as Chair, thanking the Board and Executive for their contributions, notably the inclusion of insightful stakeholder contributions to the meeting. On behalf of the Board, PJ commended HF's leadership of MMO, having steered MMO through the major challenges of EU Exit and Coronavirus, fostering collaboration and innovation throughout. Attendees echoed these sentiments thanking HF for her transformational leadership as Chair.
- 9.2 It was confirmed that the Board would convene on 11 December in Newcastle for a Strategy Workshop.
- 9.3 The meeting closed.