Marine Management Organisation

Board Meeting Minutes: 15 May 2025 (Public)
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MMO Board
Tony Delahunty (TD), Interim Chair Belinda Howell (BH) David Lyall (DL) Peter Judge (PJ), PIC 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), Lead Director, Hancock and Corry Reviews (substantively Director of Planning and Change) Paul Errington (PE), Acting Director of Finance and Resources Pete Clark (PC), Director of Operations Michael Coyle (MC), Acting Director of Digital and Analysis Paul Gilliland (PG), Deputy Director (Marine Development) & Strategic Adviser (Integrated Management) Pete Redfern (PR), Acting Director of Planning and Change
Additional Attendees, by invitation
Mike Rowe (MRo), Director of Marine and Fisheries Katie Hamilton (KH), MMO Head of People and Culture (People Item Only) **Observers (for the purposes of the MMO Board Effectiveness Review)** Katie Dillon (KD), Director, KPMG Gareth Campbell, Manager, KPMG
Apologies
Trudi Wakelin (TW), Director of Marine Development (Domestic and International)
Board Secretariat Julia Templeton (JT), Governance Lead and Advisor to Chair Board Secretariat: Holly Protopapa (HP)

Governance and Accountability

1. Welcome and Introductory Remarks/Declaration of Interests

1.1 The Chair welcomed attendees to the meeting,

1.2 Declarations of interest were requested; PJ declared his appointment to Cambridge Growth Company where he will serve as Company Secretary.

1.3 The minutes of the 11 February 2025 meeting were reviewed and approved.

1.4 Outstanding actions were reviewed and discussed, with specific updates given across MMO's digital and data strategies, workforce planning and use of artificial intelligence (AI) to generate efficiencies.

2. Audit and Risk Assurance Committee (ARAC) Briefing: 19 March Meeting

2.1 The ARAC Chair provided a briefing outlining the Committee's recent focus on strategic finance in support of the Executive's business planning activity. It was noted that difficult choices will be needed due to budget shortfalls, necessitating prioritisation of the MMO's business activities.

2.2 ARAC provided initial consideration of the MMO Framework Document, which will be submitted to the Board at an appropriate time for input and approval.

2.3 With regard to the Internal Environment, in-depth analysis was conducted covering Data Governance and Security Risk, where positive progress was noted. MMO Digital colleagues will take forward a clear action plan to ensure that the MMO's Data and Digital Strategy continues to advance. The ARAC undertook further consideration of Principal Risk, using "Regulation and Legislation" risk to pilot improved reporting and integration across performance, assurance, and the external environment. Through this work, the ARAC is enhancing organisational focus on the management of risks. Plans to roll out this approach to other principal risks are underway, meaning the products submitted to the Board will evolve over the next quarter.

2.4 The ARAC provided further consideration to the Internal Audit Programme, with positive feedback given regarding the increased capacity GIAA has allocated to the MMO Programme, ensuring assurances can be provided in-year during 2025/26; the programme for the year has now been broadly agreed. Updates in respect of the external audit programme were also positive.

3. Planning and Investment Committee (PIC) Briefing: 22 April Meeting

3.1 The PIC Chair expressed gratitude to MMO Senior Responsible Officers (SROs) for the significant progress made on projects and programmes.

3.2 PJ highlighted the need for the PIC to adapt in order to provide more effective project assurance within the current agile project management environment. He committed to collaborating with the organisation to develop a tailored approach to gain the assurances the MMO Board requires, recognising that the mechanisms presently in use are better suited to the waterfall model.

3.3 PJ recalled the Board's request for the PIC to report back approximately one year after its inauguration and advised that he would bring forward a proposed revised approach to PIC assurance at a future meeting, ensuring alignment with the Board's requirements.

Executive Update

4. CEO Update

4.1 MW reported that the Ports Sandbox initiative which MMO are delivering in partnership with UK Major Ports Group (UKMPG) is progressing well. Terms of Reference have been agreed, confirming the intention to transition the project into business-as-usual operations. Improvements to the marine licensing consultation process are underway, supporting stakeholder engagement ambitions. The British Ports Association (BPA) have also expressed interest in the project.

4.2 Positive progress was noted on key Harbour Revision Orders. However, the current fees do not cover MMO costs, with a funding gap estimated at £1 million per annum. The Board requested that the Chair and CEO seek Ministerial support to engage DfT, who are responsible to determine the charges levied.

4.3 MW advised the Board that the Port of London Authority (PLA) public inquiry has concluded, with the final report expected shortly. The Board will be updated on key recommendations.

4.4 MMO received the Government Geography Award for its impactful communications during Stages One and Two of

the MPA Programme. Products will be shared with the Board.

4.5 MW announced that the licence condition requiring I-VMS for the under-12metre fleet is now in effect, with over 80% of vessels fitted with devices. The Board were reminded that the condition pertains to the English fleet only, the European Fleet will come online when the Statutory Instrument (SI) is laid, policy coordination continues with Devolved Administrations and the EU.

4.6 The Board commended the result of the I-VMS licence condition. PJ noted that a high level of voluntary industry compliance is demonstrated through the data presented. JP questioned how I-VMS data could be paired with catch recording and discard data to create a more informed picture which would support Fisheries Management Plans (FMPs) and marine spatial prioritisation (MSPri) discussion.

4.7 A further briefing was given on the Fish Export Service (FES) which has secured funding from Defra Investment Committee for IUU 2026, the Board and PIC will remain updated.

Policy Briefing

5. Defra View from Bridge

5.1 The Board was briefed on forthcoming policy consultations and legislative developments, including the Planning and Infrastructure Bill.

5.2 MRo provided an internal update on ongoing spending review discussions. He commended the collaborative work between MMO and Defra in developing credible funding bids.

5.3 The MMO Chair's Letter has now been issued, setting out a wide range of requirements across MMO's statutory responsibilities, policy priorities, and recommendations from the Hancock and Corry Reviews. TD requested departmental support in establishing MMO's Ministerial Delivery Meetings.

5.4 The Board were advised that Defra has completed its voluntary early severance programme. Resource realignment will be required, and Defra leadership acknowledged the uncertainty this creates, committing to ongoing open communication with MMO.

Strategy

6. Lead Regulator Pilot

6.1 JS updated the Board on MMO's response to the Hancock and Corry Reviews. The update focused on the Lead Regulator Pilot stemming from the Corry Review.

6.2 Three pilot projects have been identified, along with a completed project for desk-based testing. Ministers are committed to launching the pilot(s) from June, and work is progressing at pace.

6.3 MMO has strongly backed the recommendations, with some progress already made. MW stressed that implementation must be funded from existing resources, with no additional funding to support the organisation in responding.

6.4 The Board discussed its role in supporting the response and agreed a Board Member would act as a critical friend, offering external input.

6.5 PJ reflected on the customer experience and advocated for service design approaches to improve delivery and explore quick wins.

6.6 JP emphasised the importance of stakeholder interaction to the lead regulator work, a further discussion was had to the introduction of the Departmental Infrastructure Board.

6.7 JP proposed that the Lead Regulator Project Board Chair speak to the MMO Board at a future date once the work has progressed.

6.8 TD requested that the Board remain updated on MMO's response to Hancock and Corry reviews, with formal programme assurance to fall to the PIC.

7. Chair's Letter and Business Planning 2025/26

7.1 MW informed the Board that the Chair's Letter was received on 14 May. As Accounting Officer, she requested Board support in assuring that MMO has sufficient capacity and capability to meet the expectations set out.

7.2 PE outlined work with PR and the MMO Directorate Leadership Team (DLT) to guide the organisation through prioritisation. He reported a forecast shortfall against MMO's core and operating budgets.

7.3 PE mapped MMO business activity against the Chair's priorities, identifying where current work aligns and where

activities could be stopped, slowed, or scaled back to deliver the required savings.

7.4 PE shared plans to return to the Board with options for prioritisation. The Board reviewed and validated the guiding principles and priority areas.

7.5 The Board stressed the importance of involving the wider workforce in decision-making on prioritisation.

7.6 JP referenced the SoS expectation (per the Chair's Letter) for Defra officials to work with ALBs on a unified Defra Group Risk Framework, with Boards reviewing this quarterly. The Board requested further detail from Defra.

8. MMO Vision for Control

8.1 PC led a discussion into MMO assets for effective regulatory assurance, the current model in place and possibilities for the future.

Delivery Assurance

9. Quarter Four 2024/25 – Finance, Risk, Assurance and Commercial

9.1 PE reported the end of year financial position, highlighting that MMO have ended the year with a £200thousand pressure against the core budget, a significantly improved position from the forecast £4million pressure at the start of the financial year.

9.2 The pressure has been accepted by the Department throughout MMO forecasts, The Board commended the significantly reduced pressure the organisation had achieved.

9.3 A short commercial update was given across major contracts including OPVs and VMS Hub.

9.4 The ongoing work to develop Principal Risk reporting to the Board was discussed. PE noted that MMO's organisational prioritisation work will necessitate further consideration of MMO's risk tolerance and appetite.

9.5 MMO gross income was discussed with direction given to report net income in future reports.

9.6 The presented paper was praised for its clarity and quality.

10. Quarter Four 2024/25 – Performance and Change

10.1 PR reported that overall performance against KPIs during 2024/25 has been positive, with some exceptions such as Marine Licensing, where underperformance is noted.

10.2 PR highlighted the Executive intent to explore an outcome-based view of performance which the Board will be asked to support over the coming months. This will allow the Board an opportunity to test whether the current measures of success adequately reflect the organisation's achievements.

Stakeholders

11. Strategic Narrative and Stakeholder Engagement Approach

11.1 MW provided background to MMO's strategic stakeholder engagement and external engagement with a communications and PR supplier.

11.2 TD recognised that MMO's stakeholder landscape has expanded significantly; MMO are now doing more with an increasingly diverse network of stakeholders bringing a need to tailor organisational communications accordingly.

11.3 The Board expressed interest in being updated with progress reports. Measures will also be developed to verify the continued impact of MMO's stakeholder outreach.

People

12. People Survey and Health, Safety and Wellbeing

12.1 KH presented the key findings and recommendations of MMO's People Survey to the Board.

12.2 Directorate-led action plans are undergoing development to address survey recommendations with performance metrics assigned to measure success.

12.3 Business activity will be tracked formally by the RemCom.

Closing Matters

13. Meeting Closure and AoB

13.1 There were no further business items for discussion.

13.2 The Chair celebrated BH's contribution to the Board over her seven years of service, noting this would be her final Board meeting.

13.3 The Chair requested that attendees submit feedback on the effectiveness of the meeting and prior stakeholder engagement to the secretariat.

13.4 The meeting was formally adjourned.