



Board Meeting Minutes: 12 November 2025 [Public]

Location: Newcastle

MMO Board

Les Philpott (LP), Chair
Tony Delahunty (TD)
David Lyall (DL)
Peter Judge (PJ), PIC Chair
Rob Wilson (RW), RemCom Chair
Mark Ripley (MR), ARAC Chair
Judith Petts (JP)

MMO Executive Leadership Team

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

Additional Attendees, by invitation

Gareth Baynham-Hughes (GBH), Director of Marine and Fisheries, Defra (from item 7)
Julia Templeton (JT), Governance Lead and Advisor to Chair

Board Secretariat

[Redacted]

Apologies

None

Governance and Accountability

1. Welcome and Introductory Remarks/Declaration of Interests

- 1.1 The Chair welcomed attendees to the meeting.
- 1.2 There were two new declarations of interest; DL will assist the RPA on a temporary basis over the next four months, and PJ is soon to be appointed as Company Secretary of the National Housing Bank Limited, and has also recently taken up the role of Company Secretary of English Partnerships (LP) Limited. The Chair congratulated members and remarked how the appointments also bring wider experience and skillsets to the MMO Board.
- 1.3 There were no apologies for absence.

2. Previous Minutes and Actions

- 2.1 The minutes of the 24 September 2025 meeting were accepted as a true record, with a minor correction to be taken outside of the meeting.
- 2.2 Outstanding actions were reviewed and discussed, with particular discussion to the Brighton Marina Pre-Action Protocol (PAP) [Redacted]
- 2.3 RW and JP requested clarifications to the Action Plan where actions are “Proposed Closed” subject to the forthcoming agenda.
- 2.4 MW requested that Action 11 around Fees and Charges be closed for resolution through business planning, this was agreed. Further, the Chair offered to support by raising MMO’s income generation requirements at Departmental Meetings if needed.

Actions

MMOB-35 **Legal:** [Redacted]

MMOB-36 **Action Log:** Secretariat to clarify actions reporting to ensure it is clear where actions are “proposed closed” subject to the forthcoming agenda, ensuring actions are not formally closed before the required discussion has taken place. Clear written updates should also be provided to display progress against Board actions in between meetings.

3. Committee Briefings

Planning and Investment Committee (PIC)

- 3.1 The PIC Chair highlighted recent PIC activity to assess its assurance framework in light of the recent transition to agile programme management. PJ has initiated the work with support from inside MMO to ensure the PIC properly discharges its oversight obligations on behalf of the Board. The Board were requested to review the PIC Chair’s proposition (as detailed in an agile assurance paper) and provide comments in writing.
- 3.2 With reference PIC minutes, the Board discussed MMO’s use of its optimism bias while developing the Marine Planning and Licensing Programme (MPLP). MR suggested presenting forecast ranges rather than points to better capture variation. PE agreed to include this in future forecasts.

Audit and Risk Assurance Committee (ARAC)

- 3.3 MR summarised recent ARAC business including the ongoing resolution of the Framework Document, support to MMO’s savings and efficiencies agenda through the business planning process, and the reporting improvements required within the principal risks, spanning strategic and operational risk; PE is acting upon ARAC recommendations to focus content for the next ARAC.
- 3.4 The ARAC particularly considered the Annual Report and Accounts (ARA). MMO is working to produce a shorter, clearer narrative while maintaining transparency and usefulness.
- 3.5 MR reported that the Internal Audit Programme remains an area of concern due to challenges encountered in the delivery of the programme by GIAA.
- 3.6 LP questioned the usefulness of gaining Board support to escalate further, should the need arise. The Board agreed this would be a suitable avenue to follow.

Actions and Decisions:

MMOB-37 **PIC Agile Assurance:** Agile Assurance paper to be re-circulated to the Board and Executive Leadership

Team for comments

MMOB-13D **Change Finance Reporting:** PE to include range data when reporting on any changes to the financial profile of MMO programmes

MMOB-14D **Internal Audit Programme Delivery:** The Board agreed to continue with the existing approach to bring GIAA Internal Audit Delivery back on track. If this plan does not materialise, the Board agreed to delegate matters to LP for escalation.

4.0 External Board Effectiveness Review (BER) 2024/25

4.1 The BER Task and Finish Group met for the first (and last) time on 27 October, LP summarised a positive position with the majority of recommendations resolved or planned for resolution through the forthcoming CEO appointment and strategy reset.

4.2 As the BER has delivered its key tasks, the Chair proposed that this T&FG can now disband, with the final BER and accompanying action plan to be submitted to the Defra Sponsor. The Board agreed to this.

Actions and Decisions

MMOB-15D **External BER:** The Board agreed to close the BER T&FG and submit the BER and Action Plan presented to the Defra Sponsor, supported by a covering letter led by LP. The covering letter will be amended to reference positive work toward concluding the Framework Document.

5. Service Led Organisation

5.1 MW thanked both RemCom and PIC for progressing discussions on MMO's service led organisation proposition, outlining the background and the three key recommendations received from an external supplier.

5.2 MW highlighted limitations in current government business cases for digital investment, which focus on technology and exclude funding for capacity-building elements such as skills, training and cultural change, creating challenges for broader organisational transformation.

5.3 The Board noted that MMO is implementing a complementary, phased strategy over 20–27 months, prioritising mindset shifts, capability development, and external support to manage interlinked programmes, ensuring sustainable transformation beyond system implementation.

5.4 Members discussed the practical application of the strategy, emphasising the need for clarity on costs, programme metrics, governance, and value for money. MR stressed the importance of translating cultural and philosophical goals into actionable steps, while RW highlighted the need for a strong communications plan.

5.5 Discussion also covered structural benefits, including clarifying governance, embedding multidisciplinary ways of working, closing skills gaps, and aligning delivery with policy intent. Members recognised key challenges, including resource constraints, cultural resistance, and the complexity of adopting agile, integrated approaches, endorsing a phased, test-and-learn methodology to manage these risks.

5.6 The Chair confirmed that the Board's oversight and agreement are essential, noting the importance of this work for the organisation's future success. It was agreed that the discussion would return to the Board's Strategy Workshop (January 2026) under discussion of organisational strengths and gaps.

5.7 The Board welcomed the aspirational, well-structured approach, particularly the phased, bottom-up methodology, support was provided for the transition, which will be led by the Executive, and owned by the Board, keeping the Board alive to risks, costs and challenges.

Actions and Decisions

MMOB-38 **Strategy Workshop:** Service Led organisation proposition to feature as part of the Board Strategy Workshop agenda, under the assessment of organisational strengths and gaps.

MMOB-16D **Service Led Organisation:** The Board agreed to support the MMO Transformation Programme to become a "service led" organisation. The transformation programme will be owned by the Board ensuring the Board (and committees, as appropriate) are kept alive with the risks, costs and challenges.

6. Inshore Vessel Monitoring Systems (I-VMS) Update

6.1 The Board received an oral update from the Chief Executive on the latest contractual position with I-VMS.

6.2 [Redacted]

Actions

Executive and Policy Briefings

7. CEO Briefing

- 7.1 The CEO briefed the Board on current operational matters.
- 7.2 **Brighton Marina PAP:** A recent update on the case was provided [Redacted]
- 7.3 **MPA Stage 3 Consultation:** The consultation received a high volume of responses. The Board noted that submissions will be assessed based on evidence quality, with internal workshops planned to determine the approach to analysis and response.
- 7.4 **Marine Recovery Fund:** MMO continues its work with Defra to support the development of a strategic compensation scheme for offshore wind, while managing capacity and resource considerations. Early engagement with stakeholders is being undertaken to support implementation.
- 7.5 **Marine Delivery Routemap:** MMO has continued its engagement with the Crown Estate (TCE) to ensure fisheries data is integrated into offshore wind planning.
- 7.6 **Port Sandbox:** The Port Sandbox initiative, taken forward in partnership with UK Major Ports Group (UKMPG) continues to foster positive collaboration with industry, with further Board engagement planned in February 2026.
- 7.7 **Health, Safety and Wellbeing:** MMO is embedding increased mental health awareness across the organisation through training, events and improved access to support services. Efforts focus on practical awareness, team-level engagement, and maintaining momentum through regular communication and HR collaboration.

Action

MMOB-40 **Regulatory Sandbox - Ports:** Ports stakeholders to re-engage at the February 2025 Board Meeting. UKMPG leaders to be invited.

8. Defra Policy Briefing

- 8.1 GBH briefed the Board on key policy matters. Engagement with Minister Eagle is ongoing, with near-term plans to involve the fishing industry. Discussions on fishing quotas, recreational fisheries, technical measures, and enforcement continue, alongside careful assessment of Stage 3 Marine Protected Areas, balancing socio-economic and environmental considerations.
- 8.2 The Board noted updates on the EU reset, including changes to electricity trading [Redacted]. The Board highlighted the need for coordinated oversight of large-scale infrastructure, supporting strategic planning for leasing, ports, and grid connections to enable long-term investment and growth.
- 8.3 Funding and delivery arrangements for fisheries and marine recovery programmes remain high priority, and MMO's engagement on fish export trade ahead of EU rule changes was welcomed.
- 8.4 Linked to the Hancock and Corry Reviews, opportunities to simplify and improve regulatory frameworks are being continually explored.

Strategy and Stakeholders

9. Stakeholder Map and Engagement

- 9.1 PR updated the Board on MMO's revised approach to stakeholder mapping and the timetable for developing an engagement plan to manage relationships with key stakeholders. The Board noted the approach and provided feedback.
- 9.2 The Board welcomed the proposed methodology and emphasised the need for visible progress and tangible outcomes from stakeholder engagement.
- 9.3 It was agreed that PR will develop a high-level stakeholder mapping exercise to identify and prioritise key stakeholders, keeping it aligned with current transformation priorities to support relationship management and delivery ahead of the new strategy.

Action and Decision

MMOB-41 **Stakeholder Mapping:** Priority stakeholders to be proposed at the 13 January Strategy Workshop where the proposal will be discussed.

MMOB-17D **Stakeholder Mapping:** The Board agreed the approach to stakeholder mapping requesting that the work promptly advances to the delivery stage.

10. **Hancock and Corry Review Update**

- 10.1 The Board received an update on progress since September, of the MMO's input to the Hancock and Corry Reviews, which remain at the forefront of Defra's priorities.
- 10.2 The board noted progress on the Falmouth Marine Pilot announced at the Regional Investment Summit and plans for a second pilot. SC updated the Board on positive engagement sessions led by Defra with ALBs and stakeholders, as well as deep dive workshops and meetings with CEFAS, to support cultural change and improved data models.
- 10.3 The Board welcomed the Chair's suggestion of an enhancement to future reporting so that MMO's impact and progress is made clear against the various recommendations and to help the Board in looking at any developing risks.

Action

MMOB-42 **Hancock and Corry Reports:** Future reports to include an Annex where MMO-led contributions are RAG rated to provide an indication of progress. Defra led contributions to be included alongside to provide comparison. This will allow the Board to support the work by reaching decisions on the level of risk it is willing to accept when contributing to regulatory reform and optimising delivery programmes.

11. **MMO Chair's Letter and revised Performance Metrics 2025/26**

- 11.1 The board noted the Defra-MMO Minister Delivery Assurance Board (MDAB) decision to proceed with agreed KPIs for current performance reporting, while continuing development of additional measures for implementation in 2026/27. Management information will be used for context rather than performance accountability, and joint work will continue to refine data exchange and reporting expectations.
- 11.2 GBH agreed to support MMO in gaining agreement for a consolidated set of indicators in the next reporting period.
- 11.3 The Chair thanked PR for a pragmatic approach to future reporting.

12. **Business Planning and Savings and Efficiencies**

- 12.1 The Board noted savings achieved through MMO's recruitment freeze contributing strongly to meeting overall savings and efficiency targets. PE forecast further financial pressures expected in 2027/28, highlighting the need to plan for skills gaps and future workloads.
- 12.2 The agreed transformation workstreams are underway, including data optimisation, service design initiatives, and a "pioneer" team focusing on long-term investment and regulatory assurance. Key risks include the need for investment during transformation, addressing skills gaps, and uncertainty around future work and funding.
- 12.3 The Board emphasised the importance of clear communication with the Department on delivering efficiencies without adding complexity and noted ongoing consideration of Permanent Secretary perspectives on these challenges.

Actions:

MMOB-43 **Savings and Efficiencies:** PE to refine and circulate the savings and efficiencies action plan for the next Board paper in February, to reflect up to date transformation priorities and prepare a forward strategy for 2027/28, including risk mitigation and stakeholder engagement.

MMOB-44 **Permanent Secretary Visit:** MW to debrief the Board on the Permanent Secretary visit to Newcastle (13 November 2025) with short bullet points provided over email

Delivery Assurance

13. **Quarter 2 2025/26 Finance, Risk, Assurance and Commercial**

- 13.1 PE provided the Board with an update on the Q2 position. The budget for Q1 remained on track for a balanced position, and Q2 has indicated slight headroom due to headcount controls and additional budget for fees and charges pressures. Savings of £6.8m and transfers of £10m have been achieved, resulting in a net increase of £3.2m,

though some budget pressures are anticipated in 2027/28. Expenditure is expected to peak in the second half of the year for peer awards, data transformation, and evidence programmes, consistent with historical patterns.

- 13.2 The available headroom will be used to progress service transformation initiatives and next-phase establishment work. Risk and assurance activities remain a priority, with a deep dive on key risks scheduled for the next ARAC meeting and internal audit delivery challenges being escalated for remedial action. Recruitment controls remain unchanged, with no major adjustments proposed at this stage.
- 13.3 The Board noted the report, acknowledging the progress and key points outlined.

14. Quarter 2 2025/26 Ministerial Priorities and Change

- 14.1 PR provided a quarterly update to the Board, summarising that service KPIs are broadly on track, with no significant issues to escalate for Board attention. Across major change programmes, some projects have experienced delays linked to their uncertain long term funding arrangements (including the Marine Planning and Licensing Programme, MPLP).
- 14.2 In response to the September Board meeting, PR introduced a MMO organisational health indicator, the Board received this positively, adopting the indicator for future reports. Broadly, across organisational KPIs, work is underway to shift focus from activity based measures to outcome driven reports, allowing the organisation to take a risk based approach to prioritise resource deployment to the areas of greatest impact.
- 14.3 PC provided a deep dive into the MMO's High Level Delivery Indicator on regulatory assurance, outlining a move to campaign-based interventions which combine enforcement activity, communications and education to improve compliance.
- 14.4 The Board welcomed the reports and agreed on the importance of capturing initial lessons from current workstreams to inform new ways of working, including implications for processes, capacity, capability and cost structures.
- 14.4 The Chair thanked PR for the updated paper and prompt response to the Board's September requests; the HLDI reports significantly enhanced the Board's ability to assess organisational impact.
- 14.5 There was a further discussion to the importance of long-term analysis of fish stock changes under different climate change scenarios. MMO's Chief Scientific Advisor (CSA), working with Cefas and Defra Group CSAs, will lead annual monitoring and research programmes to inform future indicators and strategic planning.

MMOB-18D **KPIs:** The Board agreed to adopt the MMO's internal indicator on organisational health, and provided support for ongoing work with Defra to form future KPIs

Closing Matters

15. Meeting Closure and AoB

- 15.1 No substantive items of other business were raised by members.
- 15.2 The Chair thanked attendees for their contributions to a positive meeting.
- 15.3 The Board will reconvene on 13 January for the Strategy Workshop in London.
- 15.4 The meeting was formally adjourned.