NILA | National Independent Lifeboat Association

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

A year of progress, representation and growth

National Independent Lifeboat Association

UKSAR	IMRF	MEMBERS
Full operator-group membership	International membership	Continued growth and support

Neil Dalton | Chairman

A productive year for NILA

The past year has been both busy and productive for NILA, with significant progress made for the benefit of our members.

A seat at the national table

Perhaps our most important achievement has been securing full membership of the UK Search and Rescue Operators Group. HM Coastguard sponsored NILA's application and played a vital role throughout the process, meeting with the trustees on several occasions to ensure that we met the necessary requirements. I would like to extend our sincere thanks to everyone involved in helping us achieve this important milestone.

International Maritime Rescue Federation

NILA has also become a member of the International Maritime Rescue Federation. Membership provides access to information about rescue organisations and facilities around the world, as well as a range of online training resources.

Area leadership and member support

Peter Brown has been appointed as our new Southern Area Lead and is already making his presence felt, liaising with teams across the South Coast and supporting the development of the new Southampton team.

New organisations continue to join NILA, while trustees have provided advice and support to several existing members experiencing difficulties.

Representation and recognition

Political engagement

The Secretary and I met representatives of the Scottish Government to explore the possibility of establishing parliamentary advocacy for NILA in Scotland, similar to the support provided at Westminster by Paul Holmes MP. I also met Alex Cole-Hamilton, leader of the Scottish Liberal Democrats, who expressed an interest in helping to progress this. These discussions build upon the Westminster parliamentary debate on independent lifeboats held last year.

Patronage

Unfortunately, our approaches to the Princess of Wales and the Princess Royal regarding patronage were unsuccessful. The search for a suitable patron continues, and suggestions from members would be welcomed.

A voice across the sector

NILA trustees continue to hold seats on regional water safety forums and the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Voluntary Search and Rescue.

Practical benefits for members

Preferential insurance arrangement

Following discussions involving the Secretary, the Chairman and insurance broker Hayes Parsons, a webinar was held on 18 March to introduce a preferential insurance arrangement for NILA members. Although attendance was limited, the offer remains available through Trafalgar Insurance to both new and existing customers.

I would encourage every member organisation to request a quotation when its insurance becomes due for renewal. The current preferential arrangement is initially available for 12 months, with its continuation likely to depend upon the level of uptake. Those members that have already arranged insurance through the scheme have reported significant savings.

Blue-light driving

New legislation concerning blue-light driving is also being developed, and further information will be shared as it becomes available. It is expected that the use of blue lights will require teams to belong to a recognised umbrella organisation such as NILA.

Shaping the Rescue Boat Code

Trustees met Lawrence Ramsay and Rob Taylor from HM Coastguard to discuss members' feedback on the draft revised Rescue Boat Code. Based on the responses received, the trustees considered the draft unacceptable in its existing form. In particular, its repeated cross-referencing to the Workboat Code created confusion rather than clarity. We argued that independent lifeboats require a clear and comprehensive code written specifically for rescue boat operations.

HM Coastguard responded positively and agreed to produce a further draft. The third draft of the revised Code was received in late August and distributed to member teams for comment, with responses requested by 14 September. Unfortunately, only a limited number of members responded to our requests for feedback. These consultations directly affect the future operation of member teams, and greater participation would strengthen NILA's ability to represent the sector effectively.

Listening to our members

Three members' meetings were held at the end of February. Each included a report from the trustees followed by an open forum in which teams could raise concerns and make suggestions. The matters discussed helped the trustees better understand the priorities of NILA's member organisations.

The priorities raised by teams

Attendance was disappointing, but several common concerns emerged:

- Greater recognition of independent lifeboats.
- The difficulty of fundraising beneath the shadow of the RNLI.
- Increasing training requirements and their financial impact.
- The possible use of professional support to promote the independent lifeboat sector.
- The need to keep members better informed.

Better information, stronger representation

Annual operational statistics

I would urge every member organisation to provide its annual operational statistics to the Secretary promptly. Accurate and up-to-date information is essential when NILA represents the sector in discussions with HM Coastguard, government ministers and other national bodies.

Area Leads and local communication

Closer liaison between teams and their Area Leads would also help us keep members informed, identify emerging trends and understand future requirements. I encourage teams to keep their local communities aware of their work, including by sharing suitable material from NILA's quarterly magazine.

Many teams will now be entering their busiest period of the year. Nevertheless, I hope you will find a moment to keep Tony informed of your activities so that they can be included in the next edition of the magazine.

Looking ahead

Overall, a great deal has been achieved during the past year for the benefit of NILA's member teams. Greater engagement from members would help the trustees identify and prioritise the issues that matter most, while enabling NILA to provide timely information, advice and support where it is needed.

The National Independent Lifeboat Association looks forward to another year of growth, greater recognition of the vital services provided by our members and continued improvement in the benefits of NILA membership.

Neil Dalton

Chairman

Opening Balance as of 1st Jan 2025	£34,125.81	
Membership	£2,899.01	Shows
Donations	£647.09	Promotional Items
Gift aid	£72.96	Expenditure
		Expenses
Total Income	£3,619.06	Total Expenditure
		Closing Balance as of 31st December 2025

£13,689.02
£1,754.17
£1,662.75
£1,857.51
£18,963.45
£18,781.42