

Media release — Governance, internal control and value for money issues in Inland Fisheries Ireland

9 October 2025

A report of the Comptroller and Auditor General on governance, internal control and value for money issues in Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI) has been presented to the Houses of the Oireachtas today.

The examination considered in detail issues of concern regarding IFI's governance arrangements and the adequacy of its system of internal control. These had previously been raised in several disclosures made in 2022 and 2023 to the Minister for the Climate, Energy and the Environment.

Fisheries protection activity and prosecutions

IFI's core function is the protection and conservation of fisheries resources extending to inland surface waters and inshore waters within 12 miles of the shore.

In 2018 and 2019, IFI replaced its fleet of 12 rigid inflatable boats (RIBs) used to carry out its protection patrols at a total cost of €3.5 million. However, in 2019 the number of protection patrols fell sharply due to the revision of requirements for qualified coxswains to lead patrols and the retirement and departure of trained staff. Capacity to undertake patrolling was gradually restored by 2023 to around 81% of the target set by IFI through training of additional personnel.

IFI can initiate prosecutions for serious fisheries and environmental offences such as fish kills and water pollution. IFI discovered in March 2023 that formal delegated sanction from the Board for IFI officers to initiate prosecutions was not in place. This resulted in approximately 50 prosecution cases being withdrawn impacting significantly on IFI's ability to perform its protection function and exposing it to potential financial loss and legal costs. Prosecutions recommenced in June 2023 when formal delegated sanction was put in place.

Management of dormant accounts funding

Between 2019 and 2021, IFI received a total of €1.18 million from the Dormant Accounts Fund. The examination found

- in some cases, expenditure was not fully aligned with the intended purpose of the grant funding, leading to a refund by IFI of €28,000 to the Dormant Accounts Fund in 2022
- there were shortcomings in a tender competition carried out in 2019 for a novice angler activation programme with a contract value of €19,750
- significant weaknesses in IFI's governance framework, risk management and internal controls in relation to grant funding of €4,000 provided by IFI to Maugherow sea angling club in March 2021.

Management of Aasleagh Lodge and cottages

IFI owns a substantial period property called Aasleagh Lodge, built as a fishing lodge adjacent to the Erriff river in County Mayo. In addition to the Lodge, the grounds encompass two self-catering cottages and an IFI operations base. These are substantial assets held by IFI and as such the Board is obliged to ensure that the value of the assets is protected and any potential use of or economic surplus accrues to IFI and/or the State.

An internal audit review completed in January 2023 identified significant weaknesses in IFI's procurement, contract management and financial management practices in relation to Aasleagh Lodge and the associated holiday rental cottages. The deficiencies in control exposed IFI to unnecessary financial risk and may not have resulted in optimal value for money outcomes.

Other internal control issues

Over several years significant lapses in the system of controls occurred in IFI and were not detected by oversight functions such as the Board and internal audit.

There is no evidence that a proper analysis was undertaken, or a formal business case was made for the change of work location of the CEO for the period November 2021 to February 2023. Subsistence expenses claimed by the CEO relating to the change in work base totalled over €7,900 of which over €1,000 has been recouped by IFI.

In 2020, IFI had issued 53 credit cards to staff with combined spending on the cards totalling over €148,000. By the end of 2024, the number of credit cards had been reduced to 17. While this represents progress, the number of cards still appears excessive for an organisation of IFI's size and there does not appear to be a valid business justification for continuing to retain the current number of credit cards.

The scale of the vehicle fleet operated by IFI appears to have been excessive when compared to the number of staff, suggesting an inefficient use of Exchequer funds. Several issues in relation to vehicle use by IFI staff resulted in IFI agreeing a settlement of almost €296,000 with the Revenue Commissioners in relation to benefit in kind. An administrative error leading to some of IFI's vehicle fleet being uninsured for a period only came to light when one of the vehicles was involved in a road traffic accident. This lapse exposed IFI to losses totalling almost €230,000.

For several years, IFI has used agency staff on an ongoing basis resulting in IFI consistently operating above its sanctioned numbers. The cost of hiring agency staff in 2021 was €743,000 increasing to €882,000 in 2022. Statutory redundancy payments were made in 2021 totalling €11,000 to two agency staff that been employed for two years with no break in service. Separately, settlement and redundancy payments totalling almost €99,000 to 12 employees were made during 2021 and 2022.

Notes for Editors

The Comptroller and Auditor General is an independent constitutional officer with responsibility for the audit of public funds. He reports to Dáil Éireann.

The report was signed by the Comptroller and Auditor General on 24 July 2025 and sent to the Minister for Climate, Energy and the Environment on 25 July 2025. Under section 11 of the Comptroller and Auditor General (Amendment) Act 1993, the Minister is required to present the report to Dáil Éireann within three months of the date on which the report was submitted to them.

<https://www.audit.gov.ie/en/find-report/publications/2025/governance-internal-control-and-value-for-money-issues-in-inland-fisheries-ireland.pdf>

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