

Regional  
Inshore  
Fisheries  
Group  
Network

# Scotland's Regional Inshore Fisheries Group Network

Operational Plan 2024

April 2024

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# RIFG NETWORK PLAN 2024

## Executive Summary

Scotland's Regional Inshore Fisheries Network comprises six groups (see Figure 1) that are each working in their local area to deliver an environmentally and economically sustainable fishing industry.

These RIFGs, although funded via the Scottish Government's Marine Directorate, remain independent and provide an important bridge between the inshore industry and Government.

Their work is clustered around four main subject areas:

- Communications

The RIFG network provide an accessible communication channel for inshore fishers. At its most informal pierhead discussions take place on a continual basis and drop-in sessions are arranged. At a more formal level each RIFG holds three meetings per annum, providing a forum for discussion and a safe space for fishers to air views and concerns.

- Management Measures

Pilot projects such as the Outer Hebrides Creel Limitation Project provide important information on the impact of measures introduced to reduce effort and preserve stocks whilst maintaining an economically viable fishery. It is hoped that further projects will be developed to build on the outputs of this pilot.

- Trialing New Technology

The RIFG network have been instrumental in piloting the introduction of new technology. These pilot projects provide lessons that could facilitate the rollouts of larger scale change.

- Education

Several the RIFG's are engaged with young people and educational establishments, to increase access for young people to information about the fishing industry and promote access to vocational courses and training opportunities that could lead to careers in the industry.

The network, which has been operating since 2013, continues to play a role in driving changes in line with the Policy of the Scottish Government.

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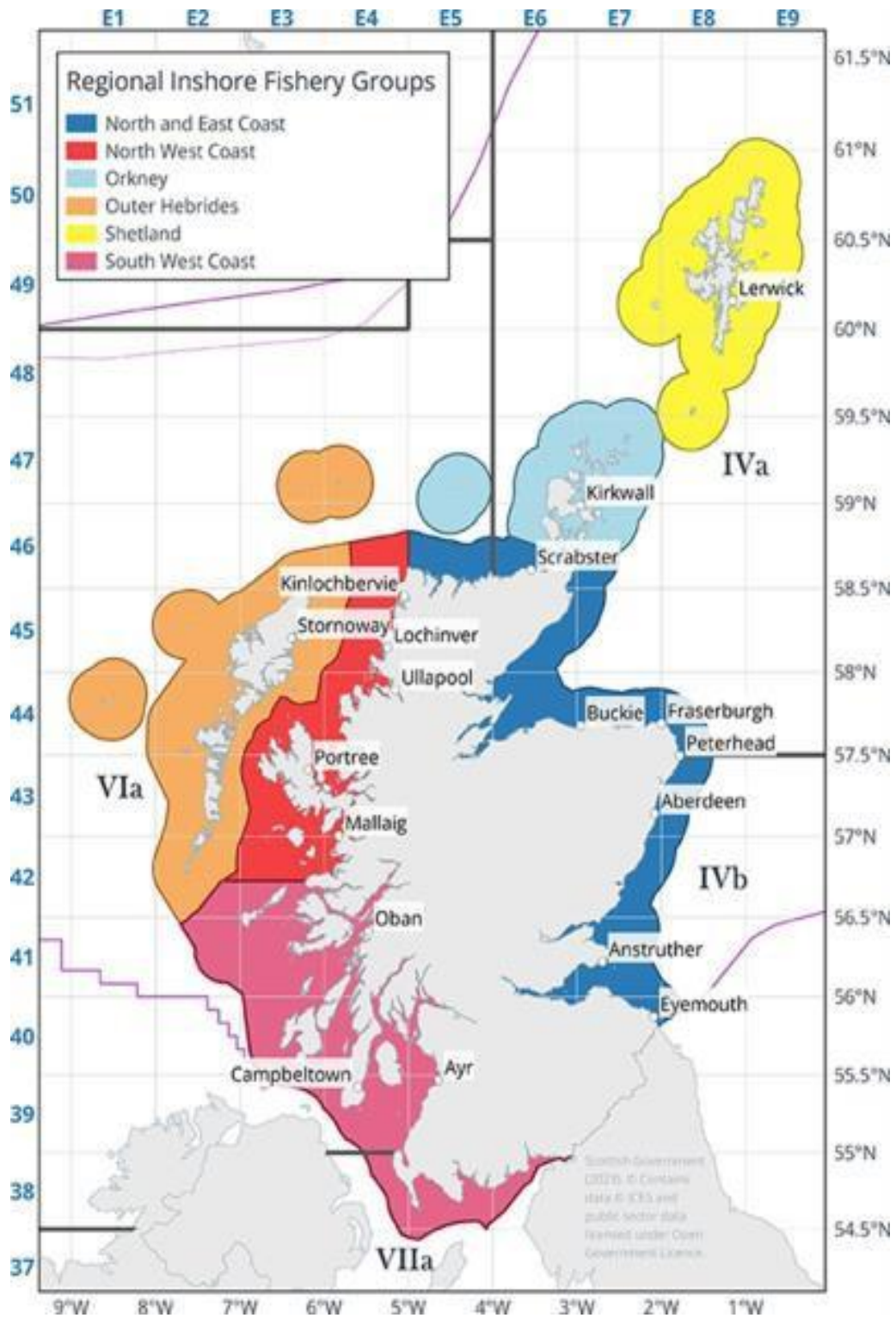


Figure 1: Map showing RIFG areas and boundaries.

# RIFG NETWORK PLAN 2024

## Introduction

The Scottish Government's Marine Directorate has promoted and operated a Regional Inshore Fisheries Network since 2013.

The network is a non-statutory advisory group which operates through six regional Groups, each with its own Chair. The initial aim of the network was to provide a space for fishers to meet and discuss matters of mutual concern. The network has however evolved in response to the changing backdrop of legislative, economic and environmental requirements facing the industry. As well as providing space for fishers to voice their concerns, it now provides important two-way communication between the Marine Directorate and inshore fishers.

Due to time spent at sea, fishers are a challenging constituency with which to communicate. They spend long periods out of reach of internet and mobile phone coverage. The network provides an accessible route to the views of fishers to the Marine Directorate.

For fishers, the network provides readily accessible understanding and interpretation of the impact of policy and legislative changes, usually delivered at the most local level.

In late 2022 the structure of the network was significantly changed to provide a more focused and localised service. This included dividing the West Coast RIFG into the Northwest Coast and Southwest Coast, reflecting the difference in character between the fleets in each area.

Independent Chairs were also appointed for Orkney and Shetland. With five of the six Chairs replaced in the first quarter of 2023 the network only became fully operational again in May 2023.

The positive impacts of this reorganisation are only starting to become visible.

## Vision and Values

The Regional Inshore Fisheries Groups Network (RIFGs) is an independent and politically impartial Network which aims to improve the management of inshore fisheries in the 0-12 nautical mile zone of Scottish waters in line with the strategic direction described by the Scottish Government.

They aim to give commercial inshore fishermen a strong voice in wider marine management developments.

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Our vision is of a Network that:

- Earns respect and trust
- Promotes the regional interests of commercial inshore fishermen
- Is open and in touch
- Works together
- Works with and learns from others
- Makes best use of resources
- Values people

Our values are:

- Integrity
- Objectivity
- Political impartiality
- Fairness
- Diversity

## Policy and Legislative Backdrop for 2024

2024 promises to be a year of further change for the inshore industry. Direct changes that are likely to affect the inshore industry include:

- Implementation of the Marine Directorate's Future Catching Policy.
- The deployment of Vessel Monitoring Systems within the under 12m fleet.
- (This is subject to formal consultation at the time of writing)
- The deployment of remote electronic monitoring to the pelagic and dredge fleet.
- The joint development of possible inshore management measures followed by a formal consultation.
- Other measures designed to protect the stock of crab and lobster which may include measures to reduce fishing effort.
- Development of proposals to move from national to more focused regional responses to fisheries management.

There are also some diversification opportunities arising in the Fishery:

- Additional Quota availability following Brexit provides an opportunity for diversification (at the time of writing this is subject to a consultation).
- The successful trial of commercial tuna fishing in the Outer Hebrides in 2023 may pave the way to the development of a new fishery.
- A joint survey of the Solway cockle stock which will be available in 2024.

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## Strategic Objectives of the Regional Inshore Fisheries Network 2024

The strategic objectives for the Network are:

- Progressing towards and helping achieve sustainable management of inshore fisheries.
- Responding to planning decisions that affect the industry.
- Understanding and representing the views of fishers in meetings with Government Officials, Ministers, the Fisheries Management and Conservation (FMAC) Group, the Inshore Working Group, and relevant Scottish Marine Planning Partnerships.
- Engaging regularly with fishers at the coast within the RIFG area.

## Collective RIFG network national outputs 2024

1. Hold eighteen formal Regional Inshore Fisheries Group meetings.
2. Record 250 direct engagements with fishers and 100 engagements with other organisations representing fishers.
3. On twelve occasions during the year meet with either Marine Directorate officials or Ministers and effectively communicate the views of fishers and their representatives.
4. In partnership with stakeholders develop six regional plans to deliver more sustainable fishing activity.
5. Respond to all appropriate government consultations after discussion with stakeholders.
6. Respond to 100% of relevant marine license planning applications taking account of fisher's comments.
7. Develop, in partnership with other industry stakeholders, six local projects and, if required, apply to the Regional Inshore Fisheries Group Projects Fund and the Marine Fund.

## Limitations of the Network

While the network has a strategic vision there is an acceptance that it cannot be solely responsible for delivering it. It therefore works in close partnership with fishers, their representatives and associations.

As a non-statutory advisory group, the Network has no statutory basis, operational authority and holds no direct budget. Each of the Chairs welcomes the review of the network that is planned for 2024 and is hopeful that these matters will be considered as a part of that process.

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## Operational Plan 2024

### Input resources

The resources available to the network are virtually all deployed to provide six regional, part-time Chairs, who are each charged with:

- engaging directly with fishers
- delivering their share of the National Targets

A small amount of budget is reserved for both travel and subsistence costs and support services, such as IT equipment and website management.

The resources invested in the network are the equivalent of three full time staff.

### Developing Projects:

Much of the work of the Regional Inshore Fisheries Groups is project based and seeks solutions to real-world issues facing the fleet. Many of these projects incubate as local pilot schemes, the lessons from which facilitate a smoother national rollout.

Examples of issues and the projects that are currently underway to resolve them are:

#### 1. Crewing and Personnel Development:

There continues to be issues around available crew to work within the inshore sector and a lack of young people entering the industry.

The Regional Inshore Fisheries Groups are:

- Actively meeting with education providers and those responsible for Developing the Young Workforce initiative, reviewing the opportunities to bring fishing and marine related opportunities to young people.
- Working with the University of the Highlands and Islands (Science, Technology, Environment and Mathematics) investigating the use of VR technology to provide fishing themed projects in schools and community settings.
- Researching obstacles to young fishers obtaining financial assistance and approvals when acquiring their first commercial fishing boat.

#### 2. Future Inshore Management Measures

There is currently a lack of knowledge around the inshore sector, however, the information that is available points to the need for early intervention to help preserve stocks and the wider environment.

The network has:

- Met with creel boat skippers to discuss the impact of recent stock assessment data.
- Discussed options for reducing effort and the economic impacts of imposing



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restrictions.

- Met with Scottish Ministers to reinforce the need for early intervention to preserve stocks of crab and lobster.
- Pursued voluntary local agreements to limit effort in the creel sector to preserve the crab and lobster stock:
- Been instrumental in trialing new technology whilst assessing the economic and social impact of the management regime.
- Participated in the Shetland Inshore Fish Survey which focuses on populations of juvenile fish in coastal waters.
- Formed a close partnership with Marine Directorate scientific staff and is pursuing the need for increased scientific activity in inshore waters.

### 3. Trialling New Technologies

Several projects have been undertaken to research the impact of new technologies and how they can be used by inshore fishers. A pilot trial has been undertaken to review the use of Bluetooth identifiers on the riser ropes from creel fleets. While results are awaited, adoption of such a system could improve the knowledge of the creel sector.

Similar projects are either underway or planned in other sectors.

### 4. Approachability and Communications

The Network conducts most of its business by engaging directly with fishers in a variety of settings.

- Each Regional Inshore Fisheries Group is committed to hosting three formal meetings per year
- Drop-in sessions are held in ports to allow a more informal setting to discuss concerns
- Pierhead discussions allow ad-hoc discussions particularly with skippers and crew who do not wish to formally attend meetings.

## Regional Plans

Each RIFG will have a Regional Operational Plans developed with input from the RIFG members and reflecting the specific demands of that area. Where available, these can be found on [www.rifg.scot](http://www.rifg.scot).

# RIFG NETWORK PLAN 2024

## Measuring Outcomes

This national plan accepts that both the direction and speed of progress towards achieving strategic objectives are beyond the direct control of this network. As a result, the outputs that can be measured are operational activity measures.

## Summary

At a time of rapid change for the industry the Regional Inshore Fishery Group Network provides an independent communication channel between Marine Directorate and Scotland's inshore fishers.

It is a progressive forum that seeks to work in partnership to help develop new fisheries policy and legislation ensuring that government are aware of the views of fishers and others who work within the industry.

Where there is increasing demand on the marine resource the Network ensures that the economic importance of the inshore fishing sector is given consideration within wider marine planning activities.

It plays a key role in the successful adoption of new practices and technologies.

It provides a point of contact for skippers and crew and eases the implementation of operational, policy and legislative change.