

Scotland's Regional Inshore Fisheries Network

Operational Plan 2024

Interim Progress Report 30th June 2024

Summary

This report contains summarised data about the activities of Scotland's RIFG Network during the period from 1st January 2024 to 30th June 2024. The requirement for these activities is laid out in the Network's Operational Plan 2024.

The data records the volume of activity carried out in pursuit of the joint aims of:

representing the interests of fishers with regard to policy and legislative matters

and

promoting the development of a sustainable fishing industry in line with the Scottish Government's Sustainable Fishing Strategy.

It shows a balanced scorecard of actions and outcomes that, if continued for the second half of the year will lead to the Network fully achieving the objectives laid out in the Plan.

Background:

Scotland's Regional Inshore Fisheries Network comprises six Regional Groups whose objectives are:

To represent the interests of fishers with regard to policy and legislative matters:

and

To promote the development of a sustainable fishing industry in line with the Scottish government's Sustainable Fishing Strategy.

The Network went through substantial change in 2023 and, to assist the delivery of a cohesive operation, is operating within the bounds of an Operational Plan for 2024. This report requires to be considered in tandem with the Operational Plan 2024.

This short document reports progress against that Plan during the period January 1st to June 30th 2024. Its purpose is to allow management consideration of that progress towards achieving planned objectives and, if necessary, in-year interventions should these be necessary.

One accepted shortcoming of this report is that it is very much focused on activities undertaken as opposed to contribution towards the above objectives.

The reason for this is that it is unreasonable to try to chart progress towards such a long term goal as a sustainable fishing industry when assessing such a short period of operations.

Report:

Contained in Appendix 1 is the data of activities carried out during the reporting period.

Following an analysis of this data the following can be reported:

Number of RIFG Meetings Held

Annual Target Set: 18 Achieved by 30th June: 20. (110%)

The Network, by 30th June, has already surpassed the annual target for hosting formal meetings. That target was taken directly from the contracts of RIFG Chairs. The reasons for this overshoot include:

- The consultation on Crab and Lobster Interim Measures was never foreseen when drafting the Plan in September 2023. MD formally asked the Network to establish the views of fishers and, in response, this has involved a number of local RIFG meetings.
- It is likely that there is a seasonal bias with fewer RIFG meetings taking place over the summer months when fishers are less available:
- The reformed network that has emerged in 2023 may have a deeper local engagement with fishers resulting in more frequent meetings.
- Due to the geographic dispersion of ports and harbours throughout each RIFG Region numerous 'mini' but formal RIFG meetings have been held addressing specific regional or sector concerns at a very low level. These have not reported as full RIFG meetings. To that end the actual number of formal meetings is likely to be much higher than reported.

It is likely that, in future plans, consideration of the emerging workload will result in it being set at a higher level.

Attendance at RIFG Meetings

Annual Target Set: None. Attendance in person 152; online 29

Regional Chairs, in their induction sessions, had their expectation of attendance moderated. Ten years prior experience of operating the network led MD staff to express low expectations.

The average attendance at RIFG meetings is nine attendees. Within this figure there are significant variances from the median. One Region reports 58 attendees at their various meetings during the period and another 13.

These figures reflect the different political landscapes from Region to Region. Particularly it reflects

- the activities of other representatives to fully represent fishers
and
- the relevance of the agenda for any particular meeting
and
- the remoteness of the locations

Engagement with Fishers Outside Formal Meetings

Annual Target Set: 250: Achieved by 30th June: 283 (113%)

A key output from the Network is to reach unrepresented fishers. It is acknowledged that there exists a reluctance amongst a high proportion of fishers to attend meetings. The reasons for this vary, with not all fishers sharing the government's aspirations for co-management of the fisheries. Therefore, informal or pierhead meetings play an important role in keeping them and their views engaged with policy and legislation.

At the time of drafting the Plan there was little data of past engagements on which to base the Plan target. Halfway through the year, however, 113% of the targeted meetings have undertaken. It is likely that in the second half of the year this may slow as the effect of the longer summer days makes fishers more difficult to reach as they are at sea.

The Network has already surpassed this target in the first half of the Plan year.

Contact with other Public Sector Bodies

Annual Target Set: None Number of contacts: 85

The purpose of recording this data is to provide an indication as to the degree that the Network is accepted as a part of the ongoing governance arrangements for the industry and playing a full part in consulting and being consulted by a range of other public sector bodies.

Again, with no prior data to hand, it is impossible to assess what the reported activity represents. Taken with anecdotal evidence, however, it is reasonable to say that the new Network is outward facing and engaging with other statutory bodies.

Engagements with Others:

Annual Target Set: None Number of Contacts: 148

This category is a "catch-all" for all the other activities in which the regional groups become involved. Contact from academia, fishing trusts, landowners and non-governmental organisations are all within this total.

Again, with little past data to go on there is no meaningful comment to make other than to note the workload.

Engagements with Marine Directorate Officials:

Annual Target Set: 72 Achieved by 30th June: 177 (246%)

This target was set to reflect the regular monthly meetings with Marine Directorate Inshore Fisheries staff. While these meetings are contained within it, the number of communications suggest that there is a much wider engagement with Marine Directorate staff from all disciplines and at all levels.

There are a number of smaller activities that have been measured and are listed in Appendix 1 that do not merit comment within this report. The one exception is responding to consultations regarding planning applications. Responding to 132 planning applications in six months is a notable workload.

Project Work:

As a great deal of the Network's effort is consumed in project work. A summary of some of the projects is listed here:

Supporting Fishers: Fisheries Management

Nationally the Network was instrumental in making the case to bring forward the Interim Measures for the preservation of crab and lobster stocks. This work is now completed with greater regulation of the stocks in place.

In South West Scotland the RIFG is assisting in the review of the potential re-opening of the Solway Cockle industry. Indications are that Biomass is sufficient to support a new fishery. There remain issues to overcome before this can evolve into a regulated and sustainably managed fishery.

Supporting Fishers: Enabling Science

In the South West, in partnership with the Solway Static Gear Fishing Association, scientific work is underway using remote effort management to record the makeup of the lobster stock in greater detail. These details include size, sex, location and discard rate and will enrich understanding of the strength of or threats to the local stock, thereby allowing for more effective management.

In Shetland the RIFG has contributed to the Shetland Inshore Fish Survey. Working with others, principally UHI Shetland this survey records an annual index of abundance, size distribution and species composition of fish populations in near-shore waters around Shetland, particularly of populations of juvenile fish of species of commercial interest.

Supporting Fishers: Just Transition

In North West Scotland the RIFG has been acting on behalf of local nephrops fishers and has been instrumental in winning compensation payments from an oil rig decommissioning yard for disruption to fishing due to their movement of marine assets.

In the Outer Hebrides meetings with have taken place with a turbine field developer to consider shared use of marine environment to consider compensation to fishermen displaced from traditional inshore shellfish grounds.

Supporting Fishers: Education and Recruitment:

Work has been carried out by fisheries scientists at UHI Shetland based at Scalloway to estimate the age structure of fish populations and to assess the population dynamics of cod, haddock and whiting has started.

Working from a base in Shetland the RIFG has initiated a project that aims to support fishing outreach work in fishing communities around Scotland by providing high tech equipment and a fully immersive 3D experience.

This would be offered at various community settings.

It is proving increasingly difficult for schools to find funding for trips to enable young people to have experience of the fishing industry first hand and this makes the use 3d footage of marine environments from the internet and view through the VR headsets more important.

The RIFG network aims to carry out a pilot project to make specific 3D footage, filmed at sea, available to students, played through the VR headsets. This will increase their knowledge and understanding of the industry.

2024 Interim Report Data

Measure	Total Achieved	Annual Target Per Plan
<u>Formal Regional Inshore Fisheries Group Meetings</u>	20	18
Attendance:		
In person	152	
Online	29	
Total Attendance at Formal R.I.F.G. Meetings	181	None
Average Attendance at Formal R.I.F.G. Meetings	9.1	
<u>Engagement with Skippers Outside Formal Meetings</u>		
In Person	192	
Online	91	
Total Engagement with Skippers Outside Meetings	283	250
<u>Engagement with Industry Representatives</u>		
In Person	118	
Online	39	
Total Engagement with Industry Reps	157	None
<u>Engagement with Other Public Sector Bodies</u>		
In person	37	
Online	48	
Total Engagement with Other Public Sector Bodies	85	None
<u>Engagement with Others</u>		
In person	46	
Online	102	
Total Engagement with Others	148	None
<u>Engagement with MD Officials</u>		
In person	46	
Online	131	
Total Engagement with MD Officials	177	12
<u>Engagement with Ministers</u>	2	
<u>Consultation Responses</u>	5	
<u>Planning Application responses</u>	32 (100%)	100%
<u>Developing Local Projects</u>	10	6