



## **Minutes of a General Meeting held on Tuesday 03 February 2026**

### **Present**

Phil Bennett (Chair), Nick Nourse (Fisherman), Martin Foulis (Fisherman), Chris Rosie (Orkney Fish Producers Org), Kate Rydzkowski (Orkney Crab), Mel Thompson (Fishing Family representative / OIC Councillor), Danny Morris (OIC Marine Planning), Eoin (Fisherman), Thomas Harcus (Fisherman).

Andy Braunston, minutes

### **1: Welcome and Introductions**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting

### **2: Apologies**

Apologies had been received from Neil Matthison, Alistair Buchan, Kevin McDonnell, Nina Valentine, Kristine Cerbule, and the Marine & Coastguard Authority. The Chair enquired if any other apologies had been given but no further apologies were noted.

### **3: Minutes of the Meeting held on 28th October 2025**

The Chair explained these were a bullet point summary of the last meeting, generated by AI, as the minute taker had not been available for that meeting. These were accepted as an accurate record the meeting held on 28th October 2025 and will be posted on the RFIG website.

#### **4: Matters arising not otherwise on the agenda**

The Chair noted that, despite a general feeling the consultation sessions for the Marine and Coastal Restoration Plan had not been adequately promoted, the plan was published in December 2025.

It was decided that a dedicated session on creel limits was no longer needed and The Chair would give a brief summary of the survey later in this meeting.

The Chair has received no update from the MCA on the safety training requirement for new entrants which is still being developed

There were no other matters arising.

#### **5: Chair's Update**

##### Association of Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities

The Chair had attended a meeting between the RIFG chairs and the Association of Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities (AIFCA) three weeks ago. The objective of the meeting was to share information about the respective organisations, look at the models of working used, similarities and differences between the organisations, with a view of working towards greater cross boundary understanding and cooperation.

The AIFCA is headed up by Rob Clarke (Chief Officer) who The Chair thought was very well informed on the pertinent issues. Mark Southern and Mark Taylor, from the two Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities bordering Scottish waters were also present.

Even though this was the first meeting of its kind, discussions were very free flowing and The Chair felt there was a reasonable degree of trust in the meeting.

##### Marine and Coastguard Agency (MCA)

The Chair noted he had met with Thomas Willacy the MCA's Assistant Director (North) UK Technical Maritime Services. Unfortunately, Fraser Heasley, the Director, had been called to a meeting with the DfT. This was a useful meeting which reflected the MCA's efforts to improve communications and relationships with the fishing industry. Various subjects were discussed including the inconsistency of surveys, costs, poor communication. Alistair Buchan, OFA, was also present at this meeting.

##### Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands

The Chair had attended a meeting with Mairi Gougeon, Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands. After a brief introduction, discussions included: the push for regional management, the need for creel limits and the survey being run by the RIFG chairs, spatial squeeze, succession and recruitment, and inshore fisheries development (new opportunities). Past, present and planned

projects, being led by the RIFGs, were also shared. The Chair felt they were well received but it is not known who will be in post after the Scottish elections as Ms Gourgeon is not running for re-election as an MSP.

#### Elected Representatives.

The Chair has also met with Liam McArthur MSP, Alastair Carmichael MP and Ariane Burgess MSP all of which had been productive.

#### Marine Directorate

The Chair and his fellow RIFG Chairs had met with Joe Triscott, Aquaculture Consenting Delivery Lead, to discuss the implications of a consultation on the proposals to extend marine planning zones. The Town and Country Planning (Marine Fish Farming) (Scotland) Order 2007 only covers out to 3nm, meaning that there is no designated planning authority to which a developer may submit an application for a fishfarm located between 3-12nm. With changes to technology, aquaculture could move into the 3-12nm. Whilst in broad agreement, The Chair had expressed the need for Local Authorities to be adequately resourced to undertake these extra responsibilities.

The Chair also meets with the marine Directorate's Inshore Fisheries team on a 6-weekly basis

#### Orkney Fisheries Association.

The Chair noted he had also had very productive meetings with Alastair Buchan, since his appointment as head of OFA, and these will be ongoing

#### Planning Applications and consultations.

The Chair had replied to planning applications for the Logistics Base Development at Hatston Harbour and Harbour Construction at Scapa Harbour. He had also responded to the consultation into the regulation of aquaculture deposits and there was some discussion on whether this information had been shared with fishermen.

## **6: Orkney Islands Marine Plan**

Danny Morris from the OIC's Marine Planning team addressed the meeting. He outlined that in 2020 the Council were given the powers to develop a Regional Marine Plan; this was the first time that the Scottish government had delegated this power, alongside Shetland and Clyde. The policy areas will cover a range of general policies that apply to all developments (e.g. nature, historic environment, marine litter) and sector specific policies (e.g. commercial fishing and key industries like aquaculture and marine renewable energy). The plan was drafted and consulted on in 2024 with a wide engagement particularly from Kirkwall, Stromness, and Westray. The plan was then amended in light of feedback, was endorsed by the Council before Christmas and is now with the Scottish Ministers. Technically it will be a Scottish Government plan even though the work had been devolved. The plan has been allowed to be more specific than national policy in terms of representing the fishing industry by, for example, requiring developers to

take into account the seasonality of fishing, avoiding displacement and the use of fuel by fishing vessels. Danny hopes the plan will be approved in the coming week. Once approved the next step will be implementation and a monitoring and implementation plan will then be developed. The Chair noted the Council were rather more forward thinking and reaching than the Scottish Government had anticipated. Throughout the development of the Regional Marine Plan, OIC Marine Planners pushed for the Plan to be as specific to local issues as possible. The policy should be online as soon as it's approved.

In response to concerns about whether this plan was about fishing management, Phil clarified the plan was about future developments and is not fishing policy. The fisheries policy aims to safeguard fishing interests. The Scottish Government, through its Marine Directorate, is responsible for fisheries management within the Orkney Islands marine region. As fisheries management is taken forward through other dedicated processes, the development of new management measures falls outside the scope of this Plan.

Danny further clarified that the plan will be statutory so that any decision the Scottish Government make will have to be in accordance with the plan - subject to some appeal criteria and some mechanisms which would justify deviation. Danny felt the policy offered a higher level of protection for Orkney than for anywhere else due to the local development, consultation and feedback. In response to a question, Danny indicated that the evidence base for evaluating the policy will be kept under continual review. A member expressed doubts about the Council getting involved in marine policy, but had been reassured by how carefully the process had been followed and how wide the consultation had been.

## **7: Scallop Fisheries**

A scallop diver noted that there has been a big impact of dredging even into waters only 14m deep. This has made Scallop diving more difficult. The boats that have been fishing in Orkney over the summer have now moved down to Skye and Campbeltown. A local boat has now moved into Creel fishing. The diver noted there are between 25 and 30 or so Scallop divers who are noting the differences due to dredging. Compared to 18 months ago the Scallop diving is a shadow of what it was; the difference is the presence of two boats actively dredging. He is not sure why their pattern of dredging has changed but is aware that their situation may have changed. He is pleased, however, that younger people are coming into this form of low impact fishing. The Chair noted that efforts had been made to reach out to the dredgers for a conversation, but this had not been successful.

A heated discussion ensued between two fishermen, each expressing strong opposing views about scallop diving and scallop dredging operations. This led to the Chair intervening and noting there is no formal structure to resolve this dispute

and no specific legislation regulating where dredgers can operate. The Chair offered to speak to each of the fishermen separately outwith the meeting

## **8: Crab Tagging Project**

The Chair wants this project to run again to see if there are changes to crab migration using the last survey as a base line. He noted the data that the West of Orkney Wind Farm's cables will be something to monitor to see if the electromagnetic fields from them will change crab migration. However, the project needs expressions of interest from fishermen to take part in the survey as it involves having a surveyor on board with them as they work. Funding might be available from the National Marine Fund, which will be boosted with the Scottish allocation of money received from the Fishing and Coastal Growth Fund.

Members felt better scientific information was vital but noted the difficulties in taking observers out on boats. It was wondered if the fishermen could do the tagging themselves and be paid to do this. Members reflected that a longer-term approach to funding research projects needs to be found.

## **9: Any Other Business**

### Creel Limitation Scoping Exercise

This is a survey run by RIFG chairs to understand the needs of the fishermen. 379 responses have been received; 14 responses were duplicates based on IP addresses. When these duplicates were looked at they could be verified as they appeared to be two boats from the same household. There may be 5 responses which can't be validated. This is a tiny proportion (1.3%) of the respondents. Over 80% of respondents thought there should be creel limits in inshore waters.

A fisherman mentioned the issues of part time / hobby fishers; The Chair noted that in England part time/hobby fishers are limited to how many creels they can land. The Chair noted the percentage of fishermen who want creels to be limited is increasing; Orkney fishermen, however, seem not to be in favour as stocks are not diminished here but the number of people who responded was quite small with 13 people in favour of limits and 5 against. The fisherman thought there should be a financial hurdle to pass before completing the survey to exclude hobby fishermen. Others felt this would be a disincentive to complete the form.

Another member felt that a more local survey to ascertain local needs should be developed. There is a move towards locally set limits which take account of local circumstances as there is a strong sense that a nationally imposed limit would not be workable.

### Vessel Tracking

The Marine Directorate have indicated they have run the procurement exercise and are now working through aspects of the contract.

NatureScot Corporate Plan

The Chair noted the official launch of this is 25th February.

Floating Charging Hub Feasibility

Urban Foresight have approached The Chair about developing a floating charging point for electric boats. The Chair had asked about the need for this and mentioned the difficulties in changing a diesel to an electric boat. A fisherman noted that many boats don't have the capacity for a battery of the size needed. He also noted that insurance companies would have the right to withdraw insurance if a boat changed to lithium ion batteries due to the risk. Members agreed with The Chair about the limitations. He will pass that on to Urban Foresight.

**10: Date of Next Meeting**

This will be Tuesday 28th April 2026 and it was agreed that St Magnus Centre was still the preferred venue

**11: Close**

The Chair formerly closed the meeting, thanking everyone for attending and for their contribution

<b>Action Points</b>		<b>By Whom</b>
<b>1</b>	Further attempt to be made to engage with scallop dredgers	PB
<b>2</b>	Further discussion, outside the meeting, to be offered to fishermen with opposing views on scallop diving and dredging.	PB
<b>3</b>	Expressions of interest to be sought from fishermen to participate in the Crab Tagging Project (Fishermen interested in participating in this project should contact Phil Bennet in the first instance)	PB / Fishermen
<b>4</b>	Monitor developments relating to vessel tracking procurement and contract progress with the Marine Directorate.	PB