



DRAFT Minutes of a General Meeting held on Tuesday 28 April 2026

Present:

In person:

Phil Bennett (Chair), Christine Rosie (Orkney Fish Producers), Kate Rydzkowski (Orkney Crab), Alistair Buchan (Orkney Fisheries Association), Ian Spense (fisherman), Neil Matheson (fisherman), Martin Foulis (fisherman), Eoin Sinclair (fisherman), Tam Marcus (fisherman).

Via Microsoft Teams:

Nick Nourse (fisherman), Mel Thompson (fishing family representative and OIC Councillor), Inamul Bhuiyan, (MCA Surveyor), Stuart Bell (Marine Directorate), Nina Valentine (Scottish Fisheries Federation), Tommy Tullock (fisherman)

Susan Taylor, minute.

1. Welcome and introduction.

Phil welcomed the members of the Group and introduced Stewart Bell (Marine Directorate), Inamul Bhuiyan (MCA surveyor) and Susan Taylor (minutes).

2. Apologies

Apologies had been received from Kevin McDonnell.

3. Minutes of the meeting held on 3rd February 2026.

Action points:

- There had been no contact with the Skipper of the Scallop Dredger.
- There had only been one further expression of interest in the crab tagging project which was not enough to take the matter forward.
- Phil obtained an update from Marine Directorate last week who reported contractual negotiations, for supply of vessel tracking equipment, were still ongoing with providers, regarding vessel tracking.

Correction: Item 9 – Creel Limitation Survey

A skipper advised that the request for a financial hurdle to be put in place to prevent hobby fisherman participating in the survey was incorrect and that only name details had been requested for the Creel Survey. Phil advised that this would be corrected but that recording names did not guarantee that participants were not hobby fishermen.

The Minutes were approved as an accurate record, subject to the above correction and would be posted on the RIFG website.

4. Matters Arising (Not on the agenda)

None

5. Marine Directorate IFMI Update

Stuart Bell gave an update on the purpose and progress of the Inshore Fisheries Management Improvement (IMFI) Programme. He advised the Group that, in line with the current Programme for Government, a framework for IFMI would be consulted on in 2026.

He advised the group that the IMFI scope was to provide a future-proof framework to ensure inshore fisheries management was fit for purpose and captured regional variations. Following the 2024 use of interim measures, the RIFG review and the 2025 Call for Evidence, the next step is development of a framework which will allow regional variation and improve the way in which local expertise is embedded in decision-making. This will include exploring options for the evolution or replacement of the RIFG network.

Discussion

Launch of the consultation will be subject to input from incoming Ministers but there is a belief that this matter would remain a priority.

Stakeholder engagement will take place in spring 2026 with the results used to shape the forthcoming consultation.

Stuart welcomed input from the Group and asked that any further questions should be directed through Phil.

In response to a question from Kate, Stuart advised that the strategy included all species within the 12NM range but that where fisheries management measures were already in place, the IFMI Programme would take a pragmatic approach and not seek to duplicate effort.

After a further question from Kate, Stuart advised that the Marine Directorate were keen to make best use of all resources, including appropriate use of external academia.

After a question, Stuart advised that the development and management of Marine Protected Areas was not within the remit of the IMFI. He suggested that if members of the group were interested in an update on MPA work, he could request it from colleagues.

After a comment from Mel, Stuart agreed the importance of ensuring that any future policy development is simple for stakeholders to interpret and does not overcomplicate things. Mel commented that it would be important for the new Minister to make a visit to Orkney to capture a picture of current conditions and concerns.

Stuart suggested that Orkney provides a good example of unique regional conditions. Alistair asked if the unique distinction of Orkney would remain and after a question from fisherman, Stuart agreed to visit Orkney when possible.

There was discussion around desire in Orkney to access fisheries diversification opportunities, including herring, and how accessing these opportunities could better facilitated under the IFMI framework.

After a question from Alistair, Stuart advised the Group that there was genuine intention for stakeholders' opinions to be built into IFMI and that the Directorate were open to all suggestions.

6. MCA Update

Inamul Bhuiyan gave an update on current MCA changes: After feedback from users, the proposed withdrawal of paper charts has been suspended until 2030 but that electronic charts were also available.

He advised that the Aberdeen Office had a heavy workload and that any requests for surveys should be made well in advance of the required date. He also asked that any suitably qualified individuals interested in becoming a surveyor should contact the Aberdeen Office directly.

He advised that FV codes were under review to ensure they met industry needs and were in line with technological developments and changes to regulations and legislation. A draft revision of the codes would only be issued for public consultation after views of fishing industry stakeholders had been taken into account. Once the revision had taken place, the new codes would be widely publicised well in advance of implementation deadlines.

After a question from a fisherman, Inamul agreed to investigate regulations around the use of conversion from diesel to electric motors on vessels and let Phil know the result. He asked that Group members consider what they think is needed and give feedback for Phil to pass on.

Inamul advised that for Personal Locator Beacons to be effective they needed to be registered to help HMCG locate them if activated and kept in the flotation pouch provided and they needed to be taken out of test mode to enable functionality. He added that registration was free and also assisted in MCG to establish of activation was genuine or a false alarm.

He then gave some detailed information regarding survey charges and how they may be reduced or avoided and that the MCA made every attempt to

reduce and combine charges. He advised the Group that full details of survey charges could be found on the MCA website.

7. Chair's update

Phil advised that this would be issued by email to allow time for a full discussion of the other items on the agenda to take place.

8. New Opportunities

Following a request by a fisherman, Phil asked for ideas for diversification. One of the fishermen, attending the meeting, suggested that there was potential for herring and mackerel fishing but that there was a need for investment in infrastructure.

Phil agreed and stated that accessible ice making facilities and cold storage space would be required and that there could be difficulties in attracting investment without evidence of expected sales figures.

A local skipper added that the need for transportation via lorry impacted the freshness and saleability of catches. Another fisherman suggested that online auction sales could be a better solution as catches could be sent to the purchasers' destination immediately. He also suggested that a discussion could be held with Shetland and Peterhead fishermen to evidence what infrastructure was needed and the potential success of herring and mackerel fishing in Orkney. He added that there would also need to be a grading system to ensure quality. It was also noted that in the past rotation of catches had taken place to allow year-round fishing and to ensure sustainability of supply.

Alistair advised that if the Group wished to approach OIC for funding, a comprehensive proposal would have to be presented to the appropriate officers for committee approval.

Phil advised that a meeting had taken place with Elected Members and Senior Staff of Orkney Island Council. Phil invited Aliatair, who had also been present with two fishermen, to give feedback.

Alistair reported that positive discussions had taken place however there was now need for political direction to enable a strategy for the Association to develop. A meeting with representatives from Highlands and Islands Enterprise, the Scottish Government Marine Fund was needed.

Alistair noted that Council members were particularly interested in the dispute within Scallop Fishing. Positive discussions had taken place but that there was a need for OIC to be made aware of the issues and conflicts and that a change in strategy was required as a matter of urgency.

Investment on infrastructure diversification and new opportunities were needed and that political engagement was essential, not only to direct OIC officers but to raise the profile of the industry and to help in accessing funding. Work was required to ensure that provisions of existing regulations were being

used to their maximum effectiveness and to identify gaps and areas for improvement. The negative image of the industry needed to be addressed.

Alistair and Phil agreed to meet to start the process.

9. Scallop Fisheries

A fisherman advised the Group that there was conflict between scallop divers, dredgers and community members and that he was now considering reducing his involvement.

Phil asked the fisherman if he was prepared to participate in open discussions and if not, did he know of someone who would be prepared to step in. The diver confirmed that he would continue for the present. Alistair confirmed that the 15-monthly AGM of the Association would take place soon and that he would issue invitations.

10. Any Other Business

Creel Limitation Scoping Survey Update

Phil reiterated that this needed to be looked at locally rather than nationally centred and cited the model of IFCA's (Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities) in England where they already have control of the number of creels used.

After a question, Phil confirmed that decisions would be made after the findings of the IMFI.

Ageing fleet

A skipper commented that local knowledge and experience should be used to inform decisions but that there was a reliance on aging members of fishing fleets due to difficulties in attracting young people into the industry. Phil advised that he had made a presentation to the Marine Directorate, but that mitigation was proving difficult. Alistair commented that there was a need for recognition of the crisis and that comprehensive action was required rather than separate piecemeal initiatives. Another skipper commented that there needed to be financial incentives and for income levels to be demonstrable. It was also stated that many young people did not want to commit to the long hours needed to make a living from the industry.

11. Date of Next Meeting

Phil confirmed that the next meeting would be held on 28 July 2026 in the St Magnus Centre.

12. Close

As there was no other business, Phil closed the meeting at 21.30, thanking everyone for their attendance and contribution.