**PAPERS FOR MEETING 1 FEBRUARY 2019**

ITEM 2

The Sheigra and Northern Star provided daily returns on spurdog catches during September and November. Due to poor fishing the Northern Star owners made the decision to arrange for the EU crew to return home until after New Year and no further returns were made after October. The Sheigra went to the East Coast for repairs in October and seemed to cease making any further returns following his return.

Most of the other local fleet had either diversified to scallops or left to fish from Eyemouth so the spurdog avoidance scheme did not achieve expected outcomes and there was no release of quota for participating vessels due to lack of full returns during days vessels where at sea.

The skipper of the Sheigra has been hospitalised since New Year and will not return to sea for another several weeks. The owner of the Northern Star has indicated that they will resume daily returns once the crew return to sea following their recent break.

This spurdog avoidance scheme has not progressed as planned due to vessels not fulfilling their requirements to complete returns of spurdog for each day fished. Clearly, for the project to succeed skippers must be fully committed to completing daily returns from September until at least March. Skippers that can provide that guarantee should be identified on the West Coast and their names passed onto relevant POs that can consider participating in the project in 2019.

Meeting has been held in Harris to discuss cockle harvesting, with SNH having been in contact with gatherers in Barra. Further correspondence has been received by Marine Scotland from Barra interests.

8 of the 10 vessels have been issued with tags for the brown crab tagging project.

The Onward, Lewis, has been prawn creeling and will be issued with tags once the vessel shifts to brown crab, whilst the other Barra boat will commence tagging once the new building is delivered in March 2019.

The Carlsbay, Valhalla, Intrepid have been issued tags for Lewis and Harris with the White Heather, Sapphire, Jesper and Restless Wave 11, In the Uists with Sunseeker and new build participating in Barra.

Some tagged crabs have been logged and that information will be sent to Marcus Coleman who is the over project Coordinator.

Chairman has written to Marine Scotland with regards to the use of large meshed monofilament nets within 6 miles. The response from Marine Scotland has been circulated to members.

1.

Blue Fin Tuna tagging was discussed at the last FLAG meeting. However, an applicant would have to be identified for submitting an application for funding for the 2019 fishery.

FLAG funding is now virtually fully committed after the last round of applications so additional external funding would have to be identified.

Blue Fin tuna have been sighted recently in the North Minch and it’s important that all sightings along with any photos one may have of them are sent to the website at **thunnusuk.org.** This is the site which is being used to gather information for the UK Government as part of the current tagging programme being undertaken in the South West. Blue Fin Tuna are so migratory that those tagged in the South West of England could easily be shoaling in Scottish waters the following year and can be tracked if the satellite tag remains attached for the 12 month period.

Members should ensure that they tell all vessels to report any sightings of BFT onto the above website.

Chairman attended a fisheries meeting in Harris when piloting long lining on inshore grounds was discussed and based on the feedback from fishermen who had been previously engaging in that fishery a decision was made at the meeting that it would be best to consider the funding to be made available for jigging machines.

Correspondence between MS Science and Clive Fox has taken place with regards to camera being fitted to dredge in use in Broad Bay for electro fishing and Ronnie MacNeil can update members on current position aboard his own vessel.

Members who attended the Inshore Fisheries Conference can provide feedback from the

Conference.

The Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee ruled against the proposed mechanical dredging method for kelp extracting.

Industry had arranged local meetings with the developers, however, meetings had to be cancelled due to adverse weather except for the Benebcula meeting where there was no support for such dredging operations amongst existing fishing operations.

ITEM 3

Chairman will give a verbal update on his activities since the last meeting.

ITEM 4

The pilot pot limitation scheme must now be progressed and was discussed with skippers

at local meetings throughout the Western Isles. Some skippers did note that they would require tags that could be shifted between pots rather than ones that could only be removed from pots by cutting.

2.

Some skippers on the maximum allocation will be taking in some brown crab pots to be replaced by prawns pots depending on season and would require tags that can be removed from pots. The type of tags to be purchased must be transferrable between pots, so samples from other areas like Northumberland, Isle of Man or Shetland can be viewed prior to final decision on which would be lost suitable for the pilot area.

The agreed northern boundary for the area will be Lat 58 N running East to join the West Coast RIFG boundary, to coincide with ICES Block as per logsheet returns.

A number of actions are required prior to the pilot pot limitation scheme commencing as follows:

* Final agreement that the Northern area will be finalised at Lat 58N
* A Sub Group from the Outer Hebrides Regional IFG Is formed at the meeting
* Marine Scotland to identify vessels with a track record of having fished pots within the pilot area
* Owners of vessels that have entered into enforceable financial commitments when the pilot commences will be permitted to fish within the pilot area
* At least 4 four local vessels are currently in the enforceable financial commitment category and there could be more with most of those vessels being replacement vessels
* An appeals procedure would have to be in place for any vessel that was in dispute over having access to the area
* A part-time post appointed to administer the project
* Funding to be identified to fund a part-time post and operating costs for the duration of the pilot
* Numbers of tags required to be ordered and supplied to all vessels
* Additional tags for non-licensed fishermen to be ordered
* Seized Gear Notice to be drafted
* Identify start date of pilot project following announcement of the gear marking legislation

Members should note the above and reach a decision on formation of Sub Group, identify funding, order tags, appoint administrator and identify grouping that could employ administrator.

ITEM 5

An additional paper is attached on taking forward the cockle fishery with members to consider whether they can identify suitable qualified personnel to undertake surveys and identify applicant that can submit funding application to the local FLAG.

Members to discuss attached paper and agree the way forward to manage the fishery.

3.

ITEM 6

Matt Coleman, Fisheries Scientist, Orkney Sustainable Fisheries, has provide the tags and those have been allocated to 10 Outer Hebrides vessels, ensuring a good geographical spread is achieved throughout the Western Isles both in the Minches during the winter months and to the West of the Hebrides during the summer months.

Some skippers have returned their sheets indicated where the first batch of brown crab have been tagged, whilst sheets are still outstanding from vessels in the South.

A number of tagged crabs have been caught and released and that information of date of capture and location has been stored but not all has been cross-referenced due to some release sheets still being outstanding.

A more detailed update will be available at the meeting once all the information has been collated and sent to Matt.

ITEM 7

There has been an increase in local gear interaction over the winter period, with those being reported at local meetings held in Uist, Harris and Lewis.

The main interaction to the East of the Uists occurring when the scallop fishery opens on 1 November. High brown crab prices has resulted in more gear being set on the grounds, with that gear being in addition to prawns pots already on the grounds. Static gear skippers are reluctant to shift their gear to allow access for scallop dredgers, this being in areas where scallops dredgers used to have seasonal access during previous years. An additional scalloper has arrived in the area and is alleged to have caused significant damage to crab gear.

There has been similar damage reported between the Lochs area in Lewis and Sound of Harris with increased scallop activity in that area due to scallopers being displaced from Summer Isles due to prohibition on scallop dredging with a large area where they used to fish. The static gear vessels in that area did notify dredgers of where their gear was set but this did not prevent the gear from being towed the following morning. Local skippers in that area are requesting that all scallopers should be fitted with an Anchor Lab sensor device so that the culprits can be identified and identified vessels should then be responsible for replacing gear and if proven to be persistent offenders then their licences should be withdrawn from fishing in those areas.

Similar incidents have been reported from Stornoway North to Tuimpean Head , with the same dredgers alleged to be causing damage in that area, an area that used to be safe from scallop dredging during that part of the year. In addition, large viviers are now moving into inshore grounds that they have never fished before and this is causing additional problems in the area to the East of the Butt of Lewis.

4.

The local static gear sector is experiencing additional effort by large vivier vessels on what has been traditional grounds that used to be fished by smaller vessels and this is increasing interaction between static gear and static gear.

The industry is supportive of a size limit being imposed on static gear vessels operating inside 6 mile and they propose that a size cap of 15 metres be imposed on static gear vessels fishing in inshore waters. Vessels larger than that were originally built to fish the more offshore grounds.

Prawn trawl activity in the North Minch in the area referred to as the Square has changed significantly over the last 2-3 years with little or no activity in that area from October until January. This is the period of the year when spurdog catches can be high in that area and vessels have been avoiding the areas, with many vessels sifting over to the Eat Coast during that period. This trend can be verified by Marine Scotland when they analyse VMS data for the prawn trawl fleet during that period. Zoning that area on a seasonal basis if it’s no longer of importance to the trawl fleet during those months could offer some static gear vessels an opportunity of fishing in an area where there gear would be safe rather than the current interaction that is being experienced in the North Lewis area.

Members are asked to note the above increase interaction in gear conflict during a period when it was alleged at a local meeting in Stornoway, that some static gear was being advertised for sale on Facebook, which if true clearly demonstrates the rogue element that exists within certain segments of the fleet.

ITEM 8

Alasdair Allan, MSP, arranged for Mairi Gougeon to visit Uist with one of the visits being to Kallin Shellfish where the impact of future restrictions on scallop dredge activity on the business was discussed. Marine Scotland intend to consult on management measures for the Sound of Barra in summer 2019. Directors at Kallin Shellfish have clearly stated that they will make employees redundant if the Sound of Barra is closed to scallop dredging and that will result in employees that have worked there for 12 years losing their jobs.

An Inter-reg funding application was successful in providing funding for 3.5 years for a project officer to engage with community interests in putting forward locally developed management plans for future marine designations in oth the Western Isles and Argyll. The officer has now been appointed and there was clear support at the meeting that no management measures should be introduced in the Western Isles until community engagement has commenced at a local level to explore fair and balanced management measures. Whilst Marine Scotland indicate that community engagement did take place with regards to the Sound of Barra which was led by CAB&V, this project did not engage with industry stakeholders, with the FJCC and none of those organisations have ever seen the report that was submitted by this local grouping.

5.

Some of the management measures considered at the meeting were as follows:

* Continuation of the current seasonal opening 1 May until 23 August
* Only under 15 metre vessels should be permitted in the SOB
* All vessels to be fitted with Anchor Lab or similar winch monitoring systems
* Marine Scotland to identify the lat/long of area features to be avoided
* Seasonal opening 1 Nov – last day of Feb not of great economic importance
* More detailed assessment made of sediment dispersal in SOB
* A summer opening coincides with slackest tides and least sediment dispersal
* Storms, strong tides and nature create more sediment dispersal than fishing activity, scallops did not return to the are North of Stornoway for several years followed the severe storm of 2005
* The Beast from the East demonstrated the huge destruction that Nature inflicts on the seabed, evident this year with large volumes of seaweed in the SOB when area opened on 1 May
* Anchor Lab systems retain exact tracks of contact with seabed. any vessel operating within closed zone should have licence permanently withdrawn for area
* An additional weekend ban be introduced for the area
* New measures should be introduced by Government without full consideration of adverse economic impact on community following the Islands (Scotland) Bill

Members are asked to consider whether Marine Scotland should proceed to consult on management measures for the Sound of Barra SAC, without community engagement using the new regime which has been set up for more community engagement in future management.

ITEM 9

Following the decision to withdrawn the proposal to pilot long lining in the Butt of Lewis area, due to problems reported by fishermen that had previously worked on an auto-liner, the decision was made instead to support other selective methods which would suit small inshore vessels.

A local skipper is now applying for funding from the local FLAG to fund a commercial operation for white fish jigging in the inshore waters off the Butt of Lewis where good catches of high-quality white fish are caught by sea anglers.

The application has been considered as an expression of interest and has now been progressed to a full application and if approved the skipper would be ready for fishing in early summer. Jigging machines for targeting white fish is being used successfully in many other countries and this highly selective methods if successful could become an attractive alternative seasonal fishery to take effort away from shellfish in inshore waters.

Members should note that this selective method of fishing is likely to be approved by the FLAG at their next meeting in later February and if successful could be an ideal inshore fishery that could be developed in other inshore waters around Scotland.

6.

ITEM 10

An update on the local wrasse fishery has been discussed throughout the Western Isles. Participating vessels are in regular dialogue with their buyers and all have increased the minimum landing size for wrasse. The number of vessels targeting the fishery on a seasonal basis has remained constant with most vessels reporting steady returns whilst others are reporting reduced catches.

At the moment it would be prudent for the Outer Hebrides Regional IFG to write to all the buyers that they should not increase the number of vessels from which they are buying the in the Western Isles.

The development of the wrasse fishery has taken effort away from some of the traditional stocks and has provided good returns to about 10 vessels over the last 4 years.

Members are asked to consider whether any additional management measures should be introduced for this local fishery.

ITEM 11

Marine Scotland will be meeting industry shortly to discuss the way forward for vessel monitoring systems being extended to all vessels.

Current vessel monitoring systems aboard vessels indicates the position of a vessel with pings being sent every 2 hours, however, the system does not give any indication of whether a vessel is fishing or not. The Anchor Lab system that was trialled aboard the Wanderer, a 15 metre scalloper, in the North Minch and aboard the 10 metre Azalea, to the West of Benbecula showing clearly when the Wanderer was towing and hauling and similarly when the Azalea was hauling pots

Anchor Lab or other similar systems fitted to the winch of a vessel indicates when the tension comes on the winch when the gear is being towed on the bottom. Anchor Lab or similar systems could and should be used to manage access within any highly sensitive areas for protecting marine features or areas of high gear conflict. Penalties for being in breach of any management measures within such areas must be agreed in advance so that any vessel in breach of conditions will be expelled from having access to those areas in future.

Members are asked to consider how new VMS technology can be used in the Outer Hebrides to best manage specific areas of marine designations and areas of high incidents of gear conflict.

7.

ITEM 12

Donald Nicholson, Chairman, has had communication with regards to MSC Accreditation for West Coast Scallops and West Coast Nephrops.

The Action Plans and Pre-Assessment stages are attached for information.

Members are asked to consider what future role if any there is for the IFG Network in this accreditation process.

ITEM 13

CNES will provide an update on the Outer Hebrides FLAG with regards to various projects approved and budget still available for spend. Funding has been allocated for cockle survey providing an applicant is identified to submit the funding application.