**BACKGROUND PAPERS FOR MEETING 1 NOV 2019**

ITEM 3

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

ITEM 4

Charlie Main, Project Officer, Outer Hebrides MarPAMM, will present a short paper on her project. She is still awaiting to finalise the paper and once available a copy will be circulated in advance of the meeting

ITEM 5

Roddy McMinn, SNH, provided the coordinates of the proposed Shiant East Bank and those were circulated to skippers that fished in closed proximity to the site. Once those where entered into their plotters it was clear that significant trawling occurred within the site boundaries. Based on the number of days twin rig vessels have been operating within the site boundary they independently indicated that their annual returns from within the site was approximately £30,000. In all an estimated 20 vessels from Stornoway, Barra, Skye, Kyle, Mallaig and Ullapool fish within the site boundaries with an estimated £600,000 being taken from within the proposed site.

Skippers have provided an alternative site boundary for amending the site to reflect a proportionate position that would reduce the economic impact on vessels and still protect the features for which the site is being designated. All vessels operating within will be fitted with monitoring systems as part of the Inshore Fleet Modernisation Programme and can be monitored to ensure that they do not stray within the amended site boundary.

Alasdair MacLeod, Chair FJCC, CNES and Duncan had met with both Mairi Gougeon, Environment Minister, and Michael MacLeod in Edinburgh when concerns had been raised about the economic impact assessment quoted in the consultation and whether Marine Scotland could consider amending the boundary to reflect commercial fishing activities. Michael had indicated that it would be possible to consider amending boundaries once detailed proposals were available from the fishing industry.

Charlie Main, Project Officer, has indicated that the role of MarPAMM could include looking in more detail at the proposed boundary amendments and could facility meeting with stakeholders involved.

The Management of the Sound of Barra SAC has been discussed and its expected that existing proposals to close the area to all scallop dredging with appear shortly for the management of that site. There has been considerable previous discussions with Marine Scotland with regards to the economic impact assessment that they have published for the SOB which differs considerably from those estimated by the vessels that fish the area and land their scallops into both Barratlantic Ltd and Kallin Shellfish,

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with both processors having calculated the landings based on the value of bags landed into their factories on the days they fished in the SOB.

The original difference being that landings were 10 times what had been included in the economic impact assessments.

At a previous meeting at Kallin Shellfish, arranged by Alasdair Allan, MSP, attended by Mairi Gougeon, Environment Minister, and Michael Macleod, Marine Scotland, where the possible impact of future restrictions on scallop dredge activity on the business was discussed. Directors at Kallin Shellfish had clearly stated that they would make employees redundant if the Sound of Barra was closed to scallop dredging and that would result in employees that have worked there for 12 years losing their jobs.

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

* Continuation of the current seasonal opening 1 May until 23 August
* All vessels fitted with Anchor Lab or similar winch monitoring systems
* Marine Scotland identify lat/long of area features to be avoided
* More detailed assessment made of sediment dispersal

* Summer opening coincides with slackest tides and least sediment dispersal
* 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 not be introduced without full consideration of any adverse economic impact on community following the Islands (Scotland) Bill

Charlie has indicated that her role with MarPAMM could include facilitating meeting with stakeholders involved in the Sound of Barra and ascertain whether there could be any opportunity of creating proportionate management measures for the site other than the proposed total closure of any area which still has the features despite seasonal scallop dredging having occurred there since 1984 and full year scallop dredging in the 20 odd years preceding that period.

Members are asked to consider the above proposals and whether supportive of MarPAMM engaging further with local stakeholders with regards to the Shiant East Bank ,MPA and the future management of fisheries within the Sound of Barra, SAC.

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ITEM 6

The list of under 10 metre vessels which has been included in the Outer Hebrides Pot Pilot Limitation Scheme has been amended to reflect anomalies which had been included in the FISH 1 Forms submitted by vessels operating in the area. That list will require to be amended further to reflect vessels that have recently been purchased by owners operating in the area and removal of vessels that will no longer fish within the control area.

A further list of over 10 metre vessels which have and could be eligible to operate pots in the area is being considered and will be finalised shortly.

After discussions at the WIFA, Annual General Meeting, with skippers operating in the pilot area the following proposals for the maximum number of pots per fleet were proposed:

Over 12 metre prawn vessels 125 pots

All other prawn vessels 100 pots

Over 10 metre crab vessels 60 pots

All other crab vessels 50 pots

A risk based approach has been identified for all vessels based in the area

Vessels will have to be identified with piloting the technology that will be used for the different sized vessels operating in the pilot area.

Marine Scotland to consider procedure and timetable for licence condition that will be attached to vessels that will be permitted to operate in the pilot area during the 2 year pilot period.

Update on the marking of gear legislation for vessels operating inside 12 miles

Members to consider timetable for technology being available for installing on first vessels operating within the pilot area and procedures for finalising list of vessels.

ITEM 7

The official statistics for Stornoway for 2018 were published and illustrate the following:

* Reductions in volumes landed for all shellfish with the exception of a 25% increase in lobster landings.
* The average reduction in volumes of all shellfish was 20% with the exception of razor fish which saw a reduction of 46%

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* Prices increased for all shellfish with the largest increase of 57% being brown crab, with razor fish and velvet crab increasing by 24% and 23% respectively, with lobster at 8% , with nephrops and scallops at 2 %and 1% respectively.
* Despite the considerable reduction in overall landings, value was only down by 2% over 2017 values.
* The Far East market accounts for the increases in brown crab and razor fish
* The range of management measures to enhance lobster stocks over several years, ranging from v-notching, increased MLS, reduced maximum landing sizes for females, coupled with ban on landing cripples seem to have increased catches.
* Prawn trawlers shifting to fish from Eyemouth and North Shields during late autumn accounts for the reduction in nephrops landings.
* Reduced brown crab landings reflect the reduced catch per unit effort that has been reported from that fishery with effort having remained at similar levels
* Reduced scallop landing due to one of the local vessels being sold

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|  |  |  |  |  | STORNOWAY LANDINGS 2018 |  |  |  |
|  |  |  | Tonnage | Change |  | Value |  |  | Change | Per Tonne |
|  | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 |  | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 |  |  |
| Haddock | 23 | 44 | 107 | 40 |  | 25 | 46 | 109 | 44 |  |  |
| Monfish | 38 | 32 | 51 | 23 |  | 79 | 61 | 114 | 50 |  |  |
| Skates & Rays | 43 | 25 | 25 | 26 |  | 31 | 18 | 20 | 20 |  |  |
| Other demeral | 45 | 53 | 42 | 19 |  | 438 | 1336 | 143 | 447 |  |  |
| Total demersal | 149 | 153 | 219 | 109 |  | 565 | 1462 | 385 | 561 |  |  |
| Total pelagic | 3 | 0 |  | 1 |  | 2 | 0 |  | 1 |  |  |
| Edible crabs | 777 | 1,040 | 1,066 | 888 | -17% | 879 | 1,181 | 1,778 | 2,329 | 57% | 2,622 |
| Lobsters | 100 | 117 | 128 | 160 | 25% | 1,017 | 1,279 | 1,768 | 2,392 | 8% | 1,495 |
| Nephrops | 1,440 | 1,673 | 1,406 | 1,118 | -20% | 5,682 | 6,246 | 5,337 | 4,335 | 2% | 3,877 |
| Razor fish | 59 | 59 | 61 | 35 | -46% | 286 | 308 | 367 | 262 | 24% | 7,486 |
| Scallops | 667 | 820 | 819 | 632 | -23% | 1,347 | 1,902 | 2,010 | 1,570 | 1% | 2,484 |
| Velvet Crabs | 245 | 260 | 241 | 193 | -20% | 638 | 731 | 751 | 741 | 23% | 3,839 |
| Other Shellfish | 17 | 15 | 16 | 15 |  | 108 | 30 | 71 | 29 |  |  |
| Total shellfish | 3,305 | 3,983 | 3,738 | 3,041 |  | 9,957 | 11,675 | 12,082 | 11,659 |  |  |
| Total landings | 3,457 | 4,136 | 3,956 | 3,150 | -20% | 10,523 | 13,137 | 12,467 | 12,221 | -2% |  |

Lynda Blackadder, Marine Scotland Science, will present an analysis on brown crab landings from ICES Blocks around the Outer Hebrides where larger vivier crabbers have fished previously. Those vessels usually landed into either Ullapool or Scrabster , with 2 having been sold recently and are both now fishing in the North Sea and landing mainly into EU ports.

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ITEM 8

An application was submitted to the local FLAG for funding 80 Swedish Carapax fish traps, with project evaluation to be undertaken by Aberdeen University. The project secured funding of £18,000 and due to delay in receiving final approval did not commence until late August. Twenty vessels have been issued with traps which will now be trialled in the deeper inshore waters of the Minches in the winter months prior to be used to the West of the Hebrides from May 2020 until August 2020.

An increasing good local market exists throughout the Western Isles for good quality white fish and its anticipated that most of the catch from those traps will be absorbed at high prices to cater for the increased levels of demand for the growing tourism sector which is requesting local seafood products.

The students from Aberdeen University have visited the Outer Hebrides and have met with most of the participating skippers and have provided them with forms for completing. They intend returning later in the year to assess progress with the project.

An evaluation report of the project will be prepared by Aberdeen University and will be circulated around the IFG Network after approval by the funding bodies.

ITEM 9

The recurring reducing trend in nephrop trawling activity in the North Minch, Tolsta Square, area due to more vessels shifting to squid and nephrops trawl fisheries in the Moray Firth, Eyemouth and North Shields from October until end of January, has continued this year. An additional factor in reduced trawling activity in the area is large shoals of spurdog congregate in that area during this period resulting in trawlers avoiding the area, due to EU prohibition on landing spurdog.

This unfished area could offer an opportunity for the grounds to be zoned on a seasonal basis to enable prawn gear static gear vessels to target grounds which are no longer fished by trawlers due to the above change in circumstances.

An area Code defining the boundaries of the area that static gear could be set, as it was no longer of economic importance to prawn trawlers during certain months. This would seem to offer best sharing of fishing grounds to return maximum benefit to vessels fishing in adjacent waters and should reduce the risk of gear conflict.

The development of such a seasonal safe haven for pots could result in unintended consequences and attract unlimited vessels, with unrestricted numbers of pots.

It’s proposed that the local industry should consider seasonal zoning of this area to ensure that some managed economic return is gained from what used to be a productive area for prawn trawling vessels, when they used to be able to land spurdog during this period.

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In the first instance the OHRIFG would have to request access to collective seasonal VMS data for that area over the last 4 years to ascertain the usual mobile gear activity in that area prior to the drift of vessels to the East Coast and to ensure that current and past activity in the area has reduced to near zero levels. Once that VMS information was available then an area could be identified for seasonal zoning for static gear.

Should such a project proceed it would be recommended that all static gear vessels fishing in that area would have to be compliant with the gear restrictions for the pilot area from Harris to Barra and be fitted with similar monitoring systems.

Members are asked to consider whether the IFG should proceed with investigating the seasonal zoning of such an area in the North Minch and whether it would be suitable to apply the same restrictions on static gear vessels operating in that area to that which will be in place in the pilot area.

ITEM 10

The provisional landings from Jan – Sept 2019 into the Western Isles for brown crab and scallops are attached.

The downward trend for brown crab continues with a further estimated 30% reduction in volumes landed in addition to the reductions in 2018. The number of vessels participating in the fishery has remained constant so it can only be assumed that the catch per unit effort has continued to decline.

Scallop landings into the Western Isles during that 9 month period are showing an estimated 20% reduction, this could be due one of the locally based Uist scallopers having been sold several months prior to delivery of the replacement vessel.

ITEM 11

The Outer Hebrides Fisheries Trust tender for nearly £19,000 for undertaking cockle surveys at beaches currently being harvested was successful in securing FLAG funding.

**Aims**

To assess the potential of cockle grounds in the intertidal areas around North Ford in North Uist and South Ford in South Uist , Luskentyre in Harris and Traigh Mhor, Barra with a view to supporting, a sustainable, local, cockle fishery.

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**Objectives**

* To conduct stock assessments of cockle grounds at 4 previously visited sites in North Uist, South Uist, Harris and Barra.
* To collect data on abundance and age (of cockles) with calculated variance and standard error included.
* To collect data on biomass of cockles by age group and for all ages.
* To collect data that will allow estimates of biomass at mm size intervals from 20-35mm and 35>.
* To produce a report for OHRIFG that will present estimates for abundance, and biomass by age group and by length. The report will contain estimates for each of the 4 survey site locations.

The surveys are due to commence at the next spring tides with a report expected to be presented to the OHRIFG by the end of January 2020.

Good market demand exists for hand gathered cockles and it’s anticipated that a well -managed, sustainable cockle fishery could provide good returns to local communities, in close proximity, to the above beaches.

The OHRIFG has discussed future management of the local hand gathered cockle fishery and depending on the results of the forthcoming survey has suggested the following management measures.

* Harvest ration of 20% of cockles larger than 30mm
* Cockle harvesting to be prohibited between 1800 Friday and 0600 Monday
* Cockle harvesting to be prohibited each day on all beaches between 1800 and 0600
* IT systems in Marine Scotland to be enhanced to allow entry for cockle landings
* Investigate how above management measures can be accommodated within legislation, as current cockle legislation prohibits the use of mechanical harvesting and introduced a MLS of 30mm for cockles harvested from beaches in the Outer Hebrides

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The results will be shared with members of the Cockle Sub Group in the first instance and with interested parties in Barra, Uist and Harris. It should be noted that interest from a previous commercial mechanical operator attended the Cockle meeting in Benbecula, when he suggested that some form of a trial mechanical harvesting project should be considered.

Members are asked to note the above in relation to survey and future management proposals.

ITEM 12

Pete Middleton, CNES, will provide an updated report on projects which have been approved by the local FLAG.

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