

Outer Hebrides Regional IFG Executive Committee Meeting

1030 – 1330 1 November 2019

Committee Room 2, CNES, Stornoway

Draft Minutes

Present

Donald Nicholson	Chairman
Duncan MacInnes	Admin Support
Angus Campbell	WIFA
Angie Campbell	WIFA
Finlay MacDonald	WIFA
Elaine Whyte	Clyde Fishermen's Association Tel/c
E Whyte	Clyde Fishermen's Association Tel/c
Fiona Matheson	Orkney Fisheries Association v/c
Femke de Boer	Scottish White Fish Producers Tel/c
Pete Middleton	Comhairle Nan Eilean Siar
Anne McLay	Marine Scotland Science v/c
Lynda Blackadder	Marine Scotland Science v/c
Donald Morrison	Marine Scotland Compliance
Jo Holbrook	Marine Scotland Compliance v/c
Roddy MacMinn	Scottish Natural Heritage
Charlie Main	Scottish Natural Heritage
Claire Pescod	MacDuff Shellfish

Apologies

Iain Gatt	Scottish Pelagic Fishermen's
Iain MacLeod	MacDuff Shellfish
Andrew Brown	MacDuff Shellfish
Ali MacNeil	WIFA
Ronnie MacNeil	WIFA

1. Welcome and Introductions

Donald Nicolson welcomed everyone to the meeting and gave special welcome to Claire who was attending her first meeting in her new role as Head of Sustainability & Science at MacDuff Shellfish.

2. Minutes of meeting 28 June 2019 and matters arising

The minutes of the Executive Committee of 28 June 2019 were approved by Donald Morrison and seconded by Pete Middleton

Sheigra continued to submit daily data returns in relation to spurdog by-catch in nephrops trawl, with Marine Scotland not accepting any additional vessels to join the avoidance scheme. It was expected that the Sheigra would be allocated a maximum 2 tonne a month allocation after submitting 6 months returns.

Large quantities of spurdog had been reported by trawlers off East Harris in June, with large quantities of females reported by anglers off Butt of Lewis from May – Sept.

Concern had been raised by many skippers over the long term impact of increasing spurdog stocks predation on other inshore species, with many questioning any linkage between increasing abundance of species and decline in lobster fisheries. Orkney fishermen had concerns over impact that large quantities of cod in inshore grounds were having on local shellfish stocks.

It was suggested that fishermen record spurdog catches in the discards columns of their electronic logsheets so that scientists had some indication of seasonality and volumes on grounds.

Action:

- **Industry to notify members to record spurdog discards on their electronic logsheets**

The vessel track analysis systems trialled through the SIFIDS project was being considered for geographical installation aboard some static gear vessels operating within the pilot pot limitation project.

Marine Scotland were analyzing the significant responses received to the discussion paper on the future of fisheries management in Scotland. It was anticipated that FQA system would be maintained, whilst some form of zonal attachment could be considered for any additional quota gained to consider sustaining coastal communities. Marine Scotland would be issuing a further public consultation paper in early 2020.

Marine Scotland had not supported the local FLAG for a small scale seasonal selective white fish jigging project from a skipper who had replaced his old trawler with an under 10 metre static gear vessel. EU guidelines considered the project to be increasing fishing effort and not eligible for grant assistance. The local FLAG had been supportive of the project as being an example of how a discard free local fishery could be developed within inshore waters to target species for which the vessel already had an allocated quota as per his fishing licence. Skipper had pursued project without grant assistance, however, the delay in a decision being reached on the project meant the skipper was unable to commence the project during the seasonal period expected to target inshore white fish species.

Alasdair MacLeod had highlighted opportunities for more Community Empowerment with the requirement for future legislation to take into consideration the requirement for an Islands Economic Impact Assessment to ensure that the Islands did not suffer adversely from any new legislation. He considered that future marine designations should all have to take due consideration of the requirements of the Islands Bill before any final decision was reached on implementation of any further new designations.

3. Chairman's Report

Chairman had attended event in Glasgow on discussions on future of fisheries management in Scotland with positive discussions on opportunities within the inshore sector to support coastal communities.

The Regional IFG Chairs had met on 23 October with discussions on Management Plans, more involvement of RIFGs in coordinating industry engagement in future more local meetings following the recent Edinburgh workshop where concerns had been highlighted at lack of time to read papers with many attending of the opinion that a similar consultation process to that adopted in the first tranche of MPAs. Concern over mis-match between economic impact assessment and feedback values from industry. Benefits from modernization of the fleet should reduce size of future area closures.

Attended FLAG meeting which had supported local fisheries projects, fish traps, BFT, mussels sector, cockles surveys, port infrastructure, small vessel repair and construction.

4. MarPAMM Update

Charlie Main explained that MarPAMM project was a 3.5 year EU-Interreg funded project dedicated to improve the management and monitoring of Marine Protected Areas in Scotland, Ireland and Northern Ireland. The project was supported by Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, Marine Scotland, Scottish Natural Heritage and the University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI). Charlie outlined some opportunities relating to the MarPAMM – Seas of the Outer Hebrides (SEASOH) project on how the IFG would like to see discussions progressed on management measures in MPAs, regional MPA management planning and engagement with the wider community.

They were seeking agreement on:

- How the SEASOH project can best work with and understand the views of the IFG and wider fishing community on the vision and scope of MPAs management in the OH.
- How the SEASOH project can best work with and understand the views of the IFG and wider fishing community on proposed management measures for MPAs and Priority Marine Features in the OH.

- How the SEASOH project can best target seabed survey work in 2020 relating to MPAs in the OH.

During 2019, SEASOH community engagement had included:

- Raising awareness of the project both in the Outer Hebrides marine region and further afield.
- Identifying stakeholders and building relationships with important community stakeholders such as Outer Hebrides IFG, educational providers and local groups.
- Listening to community views on anything marine related, with a focus on Marine Protected Areas.
- Gathering levels of interest in possible formats for planned engagement events.
- A presence at drop-in events during summer 2019.
- Other opportunistic engagement e.g. workshops, school events, pop-up stand at existing community events.
- Piloting a creative approach to community engagement at the Hebridean International Film Festival.

Industry members highlighted their concerns relating to the first tranche of MPAs when the interests of local industry had been totally ignored when final ambitious management measures had been introduced. Examples of those had been zoning deeper grounds in the Wester Ross MPA to permit dredging in deeper waters and zoning the Mingulay Reefs to permit continued use of nephrops potting on muddy sediment where no coral existed.

Industry members that had been attended the October 2020 Workshop in Edinburgh had expressed their disappointed that further MPA/PMFF proposals as tabled would have devastating consequences on fragile coastal communities on the West Coast and Outer Hebrides and if implemented as proposed would result in further loss of vessels in the Outer Hebrides.

Whilst members welcomed the opportunity of more community engagement in future discussions through involvement with MarPAMM. However, meaningful consideration was necessary to ensure that current commercial fishing activities had co-existed in harmony with the current state of features within proposed sites, whilst all future management measures within all sites were proposing prohibitions on future trawling and dredging activities.

Industry stressed that the most important engagement in the community was real time engagement with the fishing industry actively engaged in existing fisheries within previous and proposed sites, rather than engaging with others in the community who had no involvement in commercial marine activities. That route had already been unsuccessful during earlier consideration for management in the Sound of Barra.

Members agreed that a Sub Group of the OHRIFG be set up to establish engagement between fishing industry and MarPAMM to consider how progress could be made to design a more community approach to future management of marine designations. In addition, it was agreed that Donald Morrison, MS Compliance, should be involved as a Marine Scotland representative to ensure that accurate local fishing information was available to the local representatives of MarPAMM.

Action:

- **A Sub Group of the OHRIFG be formed to ensure local fisheries engagement in discussion of future management measures within marine designations**
- **Donald Morrison to be the Marine Scotland local representative on MarPAMM**

5. Marine Designations

Roddy MacMinn had provided accurate coordinates for the Shiant East Bank MPA, resulting in skippers providing plotter tracks of the fishing operations within the proposed site. Those were analysed in more detail and it was clear there was significant variation in the economic impact assessment quoted in the consultation paper and actual landings from within the proposed sites by an estimated 20 mainly twin rig trawlers from Stornoway, Barra, Skye, Kyle, Mallaig and Ullapool being an estimated £600,000.

Duncan MacInnes was due to meet with officials from Marine Scotland and SNH in Edinburgh, to discuss those findings and possibly amend the site boundary to remove the muddy sediments where the trawlers fished without interfering with the features for which the site was being designated.

Members welcomed that this meeting was scheduled and clearly highlighted the additional benefits that could be achieved from better engagement with the fishing industry at a much earlier stage in the consultation process.

The Management of the Sound of Barra SAC was been considered in the next tranche of MPA/PMFF with the management measure being to close the area to all scallop dredging. There had been similar variations in economic impact assessment published during the consultation process and the actual landings into both Kallin Shellfish and Barratlantic during the seasonal opening period, with £20,000 published in the initial consultation paper, with landings into Barratlantic and Kallin Shellfish being £250,000 during the seasonal openings.

At a meeting at Kallin Shellfish, arranged by Alasdair Allan, MSP, attended by Mairi Gougeon, Environment Minister, and Michael Macleod, Marine Scotland, directors at Kallin Shellfish had clearly stated that they would make employees redundant if the Sound of Barra was closed to scallop dredging resulting in employees that have worked there for 12 years losing their jobs. Commercial scallop dredging had been practiced in the area for over 50 years and the features for which the site was being designated still existed within the Sound of Barra.

Some of the management measures considered at the meeting were:

- Continuation of the current seasonal opening 1 May until 23 August and 1 November – last day of February
- All vessels fitted with Anchor Lab or similar winch monitoring systems
- Marine Scotland to 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

Members noted the serious negative impact that the proposed Sound of Barra measures would have on some of the most fragile communities in the Western Isles and if implemented would result in further depopulation in the area, as more people would have to leave the area to seek employment.

Chairman was hopeful that Marine Scotland would listen and engage more with communities in the forthcoming engagement meetings prior to the next public consultation process on MPA/PMFFs.

6. Pot Limitation Pilot

Diane said that they were confident that Marine Scotland had the technology that could accurately reflect pot numbers hauled aboard vessels operating in the pilot area with the technology supplied and funded as part of the fleet modernization programme.

The list of under 10 metre vessels which had been included in the Outer Hebrides Pot Pilot Limitation Scheme had been amended to reflect anomalies which had been included in the FISH 1 Forms submitted by vessels operating in the area. An amended list to reflect vessels sold and bought into the pilot area would have to be updated. A list of eligible over 10 metre vessels operating in the area would also be updated.

After discussions 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

Having a maximum number of pots per fleet would ensure that tracking pot numbers would be easier to monitor using the equipment being trialled.

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

Early adopter vessels to be identified with piloting technology used for the different sized vessels.

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

Marking of gear legislation for vessels operating inside 12 miles was expected to be laid in Parliament in Feb/March

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.

A Sub Group to take the pilot project forward consisting of Chairman, Secretariat, CNES, MS Compliance, MS Science and MS Policy would consider that the necessary procedures would be in place prior to official launch of the Pot Limitation Pilot.

Action:

- **A Sub Group to be formed to progress the Pot Pilot**
- **MS to identify licence conditions for participating vessels**
- **Early Adopter vessels to be identified**
- **Finalise list of eligible vessels**
- **Eastern Boundary of pilot area to be identified**

7. Outer Hebrides Landings 2018

Official statistics for Stornoway for 2018 were published and illustrated the following:

- Reduction in volumes landed for all shellfish with the exception of a 25% increase in lobster
- Average reduction in volumes of all shellfish was 20% with the exception of 46% for razor fish
- Prices increased for all shellfish with the largest increase of 57% for brown crab, razor fish and velvet crab increasing by 24% and 23% respectively, lobster at 8% , nephrops and scallops at 2 % and 1%
- Despite reduction in overall landings, value down by 2% over 2017
- Far East market accounts for increases in brown crab and razor fish
- Management measures to enhance lobster stocks over several years, ranging from v-notching, increased MLS, reduced maxLS 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 reported with effort having remained at similar levels
- Reduced scallop landings due to local vessel being sold

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 demersal	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, presented an analysis on brown crab landings from ICES statistical rectangles 42E2, 43E2, 44E1, 44E2, 44E3, 45E2, 45E3, 46E2 and 46E3 for the years 2016 to 2019. This had been in response to previous concerns highlighted at previous IFG meetings on the impact that larger vessels fishing intensively had had on stocks, resulting in them having moved from the area in 2020.

In terms of total landings (for the statistical rectangles included) there had been a decrease in landings each year. NB. 2019 data were provisional as not all records entered into the database as yet.

Year	Landings (t)
2016	2391
2017	1891
2018	1414
2019	691

Monthly landings had a similar pattern and for most months landings had been lower in 2018 and in 2019 compared to 2016 and 2017. Landings in 2019 were lower for every month compared to the last few years. However, these data were provisional as all of the 2019 data may not be entered into the system as yet; especially for those vessels submitting paper copies of the FISH1 form. Landings show a fairly consistent pattern with highest landings in the summer months and then a second peak at the end of the year in the run up to the Christmas markets.

45E3 and 46E3

Monthly landings in 45E3 and 46E3 broken down by vessel length groupings (>10 and < 10 m) reveal that the under 10 m vessel fishery was seasonal with most landings from June onwards, compared with larger vessels which tend to land year round. In 2016, landings were particularly high with maximum values in the summer months in the under 10 m vessels and November 2016 for the over 10 m vessels. Landings had been considerably lower in more recent years for both vessel groups.

No. vessels fishing

	2016	2017	2018	2019
42E2	18(2)	31(2)	32(4)	22(4)
43E2	35(7)	45(10)	44(10)	38(8)
44E1	0(0)	2(1)	1(1)	2(2)
44E2	16(2)	30(2)	40(3)	31(2)
44E3	16(4)	34(7)	38(7)	31(7)
45E2	3(3)	4(2)	5(2)	4(2)
45E3	27(4)	32(3)	35(3)	37(4)
46E2	1(1)	2(2)	3(3)	2(2)
46E3	4(4)	4(4)	3(3)	6(6)
	120	184	201	173
Total	(27)	(33)	(36)	(37)

The total number of vessels reporting landings from the statistical rectangles listed above had fallen from 201 in 2018 to 173 in 2019 but there was an increase of one vessel over 10m in length. There had been a decrease in the number of vessels reporting landings from 44E2 and 44E3 in 2019 compared to 2018. There had been an increase of three >10m vessels reporting landings from statistical rectangle 46E3 in 2019.

The column for “pots hauled” was blank for approximately 14 % of the trips reported. Where data had been entered numbers ranged from 0 to 8000. Overall, the data did not appear reliable enough to calculate landings per unit effort.

The landings in the statistical rectangles around the OHRIFG appeared to have decreased in recent years. The decrease can be seen for both the over and under 10 m vessels fishing in this area. Marine Scotland do not have reliable effort data to investigate the number of creels in any statistical rectangle. Ullapool has reported the highest percentage of brown crab landings in most recent years. Data for 2019 was provisional.

Chairman thanked Lynda for her work in putting the report together with the report being useful information when future management measures for brown crab would be considered.

8. Blue Fin Tuna Tagging Project

The OHRIFG had maintained that the potential development of a rod and line BFT seasonal fishery could offer significant economic returns to the Scottish economy. Exeter University had been leading on an EMFF scientific BFT tagging programme supported by DEFRA and the Welsh Government releasing BFT in the South West and Ireland. The tagging programme consisted of a catch and release from licensed angling vessels, operating under tight licence conditions. The Irish Government had their tagging programme adopted at the 2018 ICCAT Annual Meeting for 15 angling boats to participate in the scientific programme.

A Sub Group meeting of the OHRIFG on 7 June attended by Diane Buchanan and Stuart Bell met with Harris Development and following that meeting Diane managed to progress the granting of a derogation which permitted the Harmony SY 212 to catch and release up to a maximum 5 blue fin tuna for scientific tagging purposes between 14 Sept 2019 and 1 Dec 2019

The Outer Hebrides FLAG had approved an application for nearly £48,000 for the scientific tagging of a further 5 BFT in 2019, with scientific input from Herriot Watt University and SAMS. In addition, Grant Fulton, Development Officer with Harris Development, would attend an approved DEFRA course to be approved to tag large fish like BFT. Exeter University were awaiting delivery of the satellite tags and once delivered the vessel was expected to participate in the tagging programme in early Nov.

Further scientific research was expected to be undertaken in 2020, to strengthen the case for the granting of a TAC which would permit the development of a seasonal rod and line fishery for BFT. A detailed report would be circulated on completion of the current scientific tagging programme.

Members supported the project which could have significant economic returns to Scotland if a TAC was allocated when the UK left the EU.

9. Fish Trap Trials

An application was approved by 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. Only 40 traps were available at the start of the project with the further load excepted later in the year, resulting in most of the participating vessels taking their gear ashore from the West where they had intended to target white fish.

The students from Aberdeen University had visited the Outer Hebrides and had met with most of the participating skippers and had provided them with logsheet style forms for completing. They intended returning later in the year to assess progress with the project, which would be weather dependent.

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.

10. Seasonal Zoning of Tolsta Square Area

Nephrop trawling activity in the North Minch, Tolsta Square, had reduced significantly from October to end of January as vessels had shifted to squid and nephrops trawl fisheries in the Moray Firth, Eyemouth and North Shields. An additional factor in reduced trawling activity in the area was large shoals of spurdog congregating in that area during this period resulting in trawlers avoiding the area, due to EU prohibition on landing spurdog.

That 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. The development of such a safe haven could result in unintended consequences and attract unlimited vessels to that area 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.

Members considered it worthwhile to investigate whether there could be potential to consider some form of area zoning for pots if the area was no longer being fished, so that some economic return could be gained by the community. In addition, any zoning being considered would have to result in creel vessels having to be compliant with pot numbers used in the pilot pot limitation area.

11. Provisional Landings – Jan – Sept 2019

The provisional landings from Jan – Sept 2019 into the Western Isles for brown crab and scallops were tabled

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

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

Members noted the continued worrying downward trend in brown crab landings already reflected in Lynda's report and consideration could be given to have a much closer look at the reductions in landings in that fishery.

12. Cockle Survey

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.

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

The OHRIFG had discussed future management of the local hand gathered cockle fishery and depending on the results of the forthcoming survey had 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 could be accommodated within legislation, as current cockle legislation only prohibits the use of mechanical harvesting and introduced a MLS of 30mm for cockles harvested from beaches in the Outer Hebrides

Survey report would be presented to the Outer Hebrides Regional IFG , followed by public meetings in Harris, Benbecula and Barra when the findings of the stock surveys would be shared with the community for their future consideration. Members would have to note the interest from a previous commercial mechanical operator who had attended a meeting in Benbecula suggesting that a trial mechanical harvesting project should be considered within a specified area.

Members had been supportive of developing sustainable hand gathered cockle fisheries throughout the Outer Hebrides and would consider the way forward for each different location depending on stock survey reports.

13. Outer Hebrides FLAG Update

Pete gave an update on spend to date of FLAG budget of £528K with projects valued at £360K having been approved. Further applications of Expression of Interest had been approved valued at £160K leaving an estimated £20K remaining if all EOI applications were finally approved.

14. Date of Next Meeting

Chairman thanked everyone for their attendance and noted the next meeting would be in early 2020 and closed meeting at 1330.

