

Regional Inshore Fisheries Group Network

RIFG Chairs' Meeting Note

12th July 2022, Video Microsoft Teams – 1.30pm – 3.30pm

Attendees

Present		
Jim Watson	JW	Head of Domestic Fisheries Management, Scottish Government
Chloe Aird	CA	Inshore Fisheries Policy Manager, Scottish Government
Helen Downie	HD	Inshore Fisheries Senior Policy Manager,
Cara Duncan	CD	Access to Sea Fisheries Policy Manager, Scottish Government
Sophie Humphries	SH	Marine Planning and Strategy Manager, Scottish Government
Malcolm MacLeod	MM	Access to Sea Fisheries Team Leader, Scottish Government
John Robertson	JR	Shetland Shellfish Management Organisation (SSMO)
Simon Macdonald	SM	West Coast RIFG Chair
Duncan MacInnes	DM	Outer Hebrides RIFG Chair
Jennifer Mouat	JM	North and East Coast RIFG Chair

Apologies	
Kate Rydzkowski	Orkney Sustainable Fisheries (OSF)

1. MS Update - 1330
<p>Overview (JW)</p> <p>Now into summer recess. Officials have been working on priority projects, meanwhile both ministers have had several stakeholder meetings over the past month. Highlighted that SM met with the Minister and officials to discuss engagement and consultation regarding marine planning and aquaculture developments in particular. Outlined that there are some summer tour events taking place over the next month or two, and assured that Ministers are well briefed on the key topics, such as the marine squeeze, resilience of industry, access to labour and high fuel prices.</p> <p>Had soft launch of MFS earlier in year which will be reopening soon.</p>

Recap of priority projects:

1. Future Catching Policy and REM consultation - Officials currently reviewing and considering responses.
2. Future Fisheries Management delivery plan - This will set out timeline for delivery of key projects. Officials currently seeking final clearances and hoping to publish imminently.
3. Inshore cap – Lots of work has been completed to prepare this consultation. All assessments and supporting material are prepared. Awaiting final clearances to publish.
4. Vessel monitoring - commitment to have tracking and monitoring rolled out across entire commercial fleet by end of Parliamentary session. 90% of scallopers >10m have REM installed already, and officials have been in touch with JR to discuss roll out on smaller scallop vessels. We continue to learn from Outer Hebrides pilot and will be conducting a trial later this year to test different REM and VMS devices prior to roll out. This will consist of off-the-shelf products on 10-15 boats over a 4-5 month period to inform decisions on what device to go ahead with. Officials will be in touch with Chairs to give them further details.
5. Supporting RIFGs – Stressed the importance of this network, and that it is embodied within our strategy to continue support for our RIFG network.
6. Marine squeeze - HD involved in MPA/HPMA interactions, and Ashleigh Meikle leading on renewables interactions. HD added that HPMA colleagues are currently drafting site selection criteria and policy framework ahead of consultation after the summer, and that MPA colleagues are still in the process of refining inshore MPA and PMF management proposals following stakeholder engagement.

Actions

1. HD to check if Chairs will be invited to comment on draft HPMA documents.

2. Handline mackerel

CD has recently taken on management of this work (previously Ross Parker).

Fishery opened in May; some tonnages have already been moved around using weekly variations in vessel licences to manage catch. The purpose of this is to help to maximise marketing and return to fishers by distributing quota throughout fishing season.

JM highlighted that she and members had a helpful meeting with officials last week to understand the process and consider any room for improvements. Reported that there is a group in Rosehearty/Whitehills/Portsoy area who are selling direct to processors to increase their earnings. They considered whether there was an opportunity to increase quota to <10m vessels; fishers who primarily fish creels felt existing limit is acceptable whereas others fishing different grounds and to different harbours disagreed. Highlighted that access to the market is key, with a continual effort to balance price with demand. Need to further investigate what existing market there is so that the catch opportunity can be altered to match this need.

3. RIFG Chairs Roundtable

Outer Hebrides

Trawl prawn catches have markedly improved and are possibly better than ever, with good catch rates, quality and prices now back to pre-COVID-19 and EU Exit rates. This is a relief for the sector who have struggled the most recently with fuel costs, as identified by Seafish.

Aquaculture – RIFG meeting last Friday included representatives from Scottish Salmon. It has become apparent that aquaculture sector is beginning to move further offshore where there are better tides and water flow rates. Scottish Salmon have a site currently undergoing scoping and screening with the local planning authority, and covers ground which is used extensively by dredge, trawl and creel for both crab and nephrops. This overlap appears to have come about from Scottish Salmon using Scotmap fisheries data which is not current, resulting in them identifying the site as "least importance" to fishing industry. Fishers made it clear at the meeting that this site is extensively used and have provided plotter tracks to demonstrate this. DM felt that aquaculture sites in sea lochs tend to have significant impact on the local shellfish population which he said rapidly declines. Highlighted that they are considering significant areas and that fishers from Mallaig and NW were opposed to the site, preferring consideration of ones between North Gravir and Stornoway. SG advised that aquaculture colleagues are working on a paper to improve engagement process between aquaculture and fishing industry.

ScotWind – Starting to see progress with sites that are closer to shore. These are going to be fixed platforms on static gear grounds (particularly important for crab and lobster fishing). Felt that brown crab may be less impacted as they are reasonably mobile species, but outlined concern for lobster fishers who may suffer as a result of the development, as lobsters are less mobile. Considering undertaking lobster stock enhancement measures in the area (e.g. V notching of berried hens or release of farmed juvenile lobsters). Had discussions with Scottish Whitefish regarding sites further offshore e.g. North Rona, where floating turbines in the area are likely to be more problematic for fishers.

Hobby fishers – Highlighted that landing of undersize lobsters from hobby fishers is becoming an issue. Hobby fishers are unlimited in their number of creels and often only haul once a week. The only rule in place is that they cannot retain more than one lobster aboard, but feels that the chances of this being enforced are limited. Feels this restricts effort on commercial fishers who must adhere to a number of requirements (e.g. from MCA). Outlined that the FO is preparing a leaflet outlining landing sizes that will be distributed to establishments who may be unknowingly purchasing undersize lobsters.

Blue Fin Tuna – DM felt that we need a precautionary approach from a Scottish perspective regarding management of this fishery and should therefore continue on a catch and release basis.

OH Fisheries pilot - Doing an update on all vessel tracking systems for pilot. Meeting Kay Barclay, from SG's Marine Analytical Unit, and St Andrews University on Tuesday at Benbecula.

Shetland

Funding - Biggest challenge recently has been securing funding from the council. This has now been granted and the council will review how SSMO are funded for the coming year. Shetland Fishermen's Association have been having lunch sessions with councillors including one focussed on shellfish/inshore fisheries which provided strong backing for SSMO.

MSC accreditation & vessel tracking - Flagged that the scallop dredge fishery has been under scrutiny of eNGOs, who have been seeking clarity from Waitrose regarding the footprint of the catching fleet. Agreed that installation of tracking on all vessels will alleviate this challenge, though recognised that much of the fleet is <10m so will be later in the installation plan. SG outlined support and willingness to support discussions with Waitrose re. MSC status.

Voluntary closures - Looking to bring in some voluntary closures to protect maerl; recognise that fishers will likely be displeased by these measures, but SSMO keen to do implement protection at an early stage.

Survey - Scientists from UHI Shetland have been doing scallop surveys over the past month. This will feed into advice as to whether SSMO have a new licensing round next year.

Creels & lobster measures - Poor weather has made it hard for fishers to haul creels; they report that there are not many velvet crabs and lots of starfish. SSMO bringing in a voluntary ban on landing berried lobsters from 01 August while they await SG lawyers coming back on more permanent measures.

North & East Coast

Renewables - Attended a meeting of joint Firth of Forth and Moray Firth about offshore windfarms following distribution of paper from SWFPA and SFF proposing engagement with developers. An issue for mobile gear with both floating and fixed windfarms. Issue too with creel fishing, displacement and people moving their gear to enable installation. Discussions have been pretty open so far.

Aid to navigation project - Now have transponders for this project. These are being used, and JM will write a monthly report for SG outlining the ongoing effectiveness of this method to reduce gear conflict.

Mackerel – As outlined earlier, mackerel season is now open and JM had a good meeting with officials and members. JM has also had contact from a number of non-sector vessels about potential opportunities in this fishery.

Undersize lobsters – Understands there is an issue in Arbroath regarding landing of undersize lobsters. Although only a small number of fishers are involved, it is understood that they are catching a large number of undersize lobsters. MS Compliance have increased presence in the area.

Creel limits - Arbroath fishers wishing to look at creel limits and creel management so JM considering papers produced in previous years as a starting point with a view to trying to establish a new voluntary agreement.

West Coast

Clyde FA - Drafting a paper outlining a future vision for the Clyde, largely supported by local fishers. Industry have outlined wish to have protected fishing areas to secure food resources, though recognised that these could be challenging to define since fish are mobile.

House of Commons APPG group – Now sits on expert panel for fisheries All-Party Parliamentary Group. SG glad he's on the group to provide balance. SM raised concern that a paper produced by this group seems to flag greater use of spatial separation to manage different marine interests. SG noted that this is not in keeping with SG aspirations regarding use of our shared marine space and highlighted that we have a fisheries strategy in place here in Scotland, and that responsibility for fisheries management is devolved.

Fuel – Highlighted recent issue with some vessels being stranded at sea because they are taking insufficient fuel, and therefore getting caught out by changes in weather conditions (for example). Reported that fishing businesses are laying off staff to afford fuel, and markets are dwindling because buyers expect consistency which is not possible in current climate.

Shellfish spat – Members from Mull are providing scallop spat to an Orkney hatchery, and Orkney are providing lobster spat to Mull to see if fisheries can be mutually improved. Feels this could tie in with a project on creel numbers and scallop fishery in the Clyde.

Voluntary closure – Currently developing a voluntary project covering entire Firth of Clyde. This would bring in a few different measures for creel and scallop fisheries:

- to bring in a closure to scallop dredgers from 01 April to 01 October each year. Scallop dredgers report that there is a lot of weed in these months and so are broadly in agreement, although further engagement is required with Manx fishers.
- Voluntary restriction from 8 to 6 dredges aside.
- Implementation of a voluntary night time curfew for scallop dredge vessels

- Limit number of creelers to similar numbers as currently involved in the OH inshore fisheries pilot.

In the process of drafting a paper for consideration by MS which will be shared in the next couple of weeks.

Renewables – Highlighted some concern with Innovation and Targeted Oil and Gas (INTOG) Decarbonisation plans, as this will affect some of the WC whitefish vessels even though it doesn't sit within the west coast region.

Finfish aquaculture - Agreed with DM that industry appear to be moving offshore as increased flow is beneficial for farms, and agreed that Lochs seem often to have very poor shellfish catch once an aquaculture site is established in a sea loch. Highlighted that members have had an ongoing issue and recent public meeting regarding the Little Colonsay near Ulva which affects many fishers. Alternative areas suggested by fishers have not been considered suitable. The proposing company is currently consulting with SEPA.

Seaweed aquaculture – Attended a recent meeting about a seaweed farm proposal on west side of Bute. Fishers are strongly opposed to the proposal due to its scale (1000 x 800m), and highlighted that the market for this product is unclear and that there has been a lack of consultation with industry to date.

Met recently with Cab Sec to request that fishing industry be a statutory consultee for aquaculture developments. Upon discussion identified a possible way forward but not as statutory consultee, as this would not necessarily give the industry any additional weighting. Outlined that we must work to raise awareness and profile of RIFGs so that all planners are aware to the network and consult with them appropriately.

Actions

1. MS to ensure RIFG Chairs are given opportunity to comment on aquaculture engagement paper ahead of publication.

4. Marine Planning Partnerships (MPPs)

SH introduced herself and invited Chairs to describe their experiences and challenges associated with engaging with the different MPPs.

SM highlighted that he felt there is a lot of overlap between the Clyde Marine Planning Partnership and Clyde 2020. He highlighted that they have a number of stakeholders on the steering group including eNGOs and questioned whether it is appropriate for them to steer fisheries management via this mechanism. Although KW is not present, his previous discussions with her suggest that similar issues exist with Orkney MPP.

SH recognised tensions in Clyde in particular over the years. She recognised that ECCLR had prepared a report outlining recommendations to improve the MPPs and confirmed that SG are drafting a response to this report. SH confirmed that fisheries management is not considered part of the remit of MPPs and highlighted that they will be shortly looking to review lessons learnt /best practices with MPPs to address this issue.

SH asked how Shetland gets on with MPP – JR did not feel he had sufficient experience to report back on this issue. SH highlighted that it is her understanding that this MPP seems to work better and so is interested to hear of experiences. DM highlighted that they previously had presentation from Shetland and were seeking to mirror that strategy, as there appeared to be significant support.

SH outlined that it was perhaps once an expectation that MPPs would be rolled out quicker, but that they have taken longer than anticipated. Local Coastal Partnerships are currently each preparing a “readiness report” to consider their status and readiness for MPPs, but SH clarified that nothing was imminent and that the title of the report may give misleading impression as to the stage of progression.

JW highlighted that RIFGs are exclusively for fishers and provide fisheries management within Scotland, and that there are other forums to enable other stakeholders to engage. JW and SH agreed that more regular dialogue between officials within the inshore fisheries team and the Marine Planning team would be beneficial going forward, to help us consider how we can improve engagement.

5. Allocation of additional quota

MM described when we exited EU and received some additional UK quota, we committed to allocating it separately. However, the UK got significantly less quota than anticipated. The considerations outlined within the Fisheries Act 2020 applies to all UK Fisheries Administrations and requires them to consider environmental, social and economic factors.

We have completed this process for 2020 & 2021 and are now considering how we do it for the rest of the Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA). MM highlighted that the RIFG Chairs should be aware of this at an early stage as SG plans to consult this autumn on the matter.

SM highlighted that fishers in the Solway are keen to catch sea bass but have no quota. MM highlighted that this is not a stock for which we have quota and therefore not part of this process.

JM agreed that there is a role for RIFGs to look at this on a regional basis and consider stocks/non-sector opportunities.

DM felt that opportunities exist on temporal/seasonal basis. For instance, some parties are angling for white fish in the Clyde. Would like to see netting for whitefish, spurdog, and hake. Highlighted need to consider what methods could be used on seasonal basis and felt netting should be a method going forward.

MM reiterated that there are different drivers affecting allocation, and therefore economic and environmental considerations such as burning less fuel might be a driver going forward.

Actions

None

6. AOB/Close

JW thanked everybody for their time and closed the meeting.