



## **RIFG meeting minutes**

**Date:** 30/08/2023

**Time:** 12.30

**Location:** UHI Shetland Scalloway Campus, room F9

**Chair:** Hilary Burgess

**Attendees:** Stuart Bell (SB)- Marine Directorate

John Robertson (JR)- SSMO

Sheila Keith (SK)- SFA

Chevonne Angus (CA)- UHI Shetland

Lynda Blackadder (LB)- Marine Directorate

Elisa Barreto (EB)- Marine Directorate

Caroline Hepburn (CH)- Independent

Alastair Cooper (AC)- SSMO

Leonard Johnson (LJ)- Fishing Forward UK

Alastair Inkster (AI)- Fishing Forward UK

Mark Berry (MB)- Fishery officer

Eleanor Hutcheon (EH)- UHI Shetland

**Minute taker:** Kathryn Allan- UHI Shetland

**Apologies:** Beth Mouat, Sydney Johnson, Magnus Laurenson

## Agenda Items

### 1. Welcome and Introduction to the RIFG network. Hilary Burgess

Firstly, HB thanked RIFG members for all their help and assistance she has received since she started the role as Chair.

HB gave a brief history of the RIFGs which started in 2013 with currently 6 groups in Scotland who work on issues in own areas and collaborate on wider issues.

The main aim of the RIFGs is to help and support fishers and improve communication channels between Scottish Government (SG) and fishers.

### 2. Update from Marine Directorate (MD). Stuart Bell

SB started by noting that the MD are currently under extreme pressure and are under resourced.

SB made the group aware of the SG's Fisheries Management Strategy which can be found on their website and clearly states current priorities and where resources will be spent.

SB stated that the RIFGs have been in place for 10yrs and are currently working on reviewing and refocusing RIFGs and MD are very much open to stakeholder opinion.

The current aims are to:

- act as representative organisations for all inshore fishers
- refocus to work under the current Fisheries Management Strategy
- better use of RIFG project framework

SB brought the following points to the group's attention:

1. Marine Fund Scotland, a pot of £14 million available for projects linked to themes such as fuel saving, gear improvements and catch handling improvements. The current round is open for another 2 weeks and is open to all within the fishing industry. RIFGs can support fishers with applications.
2. Future Catching Policy consultation.
3. Remote Electronic Monitoring (REM) for fleet consultation.
4. Vessel tracking consultation- it is proposed that every vessel under 12m would carry a simple GPS. We urge stakeholders to respond to the consultation – through the RIFG if they prefer.
5. National Marine Planning Interactive (NMPi) has new filters which may be of interest to fishers such as catch by value by method for the whole of Scotland. MD would be interested in receiving feedback on these – links and email address is available through RIFG or MD.
6. MD would like to improve the RIFG network website and any feedback from users would be appreciated.
7. The SG have recently published their stock assessment data for crab and lobster.

**Actions- Feedback required on points 5 and 6 above.**

### **Questions**

- How can the RIFG chair reach out to fishers when they are not provided with contact information for fishers?

Response- The RIFGs operate independently from MD so they are not able to share contact details under current GDPR. MD agrees there are issues but that they are supporting the RIFG Chair and working with local fisheries groups to promote RIFG to enable them to succeed in their role.

It was decided that further discussion on this point would be picked up under agenda item 7 Operational Planning.

- Should inshore fishers be concerned that the third ministers background is in energy and environment.

Response- It was noted that there had been a lot of similar feedback and wanted the group to be reassured it was purely due to inshore fisheries being so complex resulting in the SG spreading workload between multiple ministers.

- One attendee raised concerns over MD current traffic light system for stock assessment of crabs and lobster. They specifically expressed concerns on the limited level of data available for Shetland and asked why the vast and detailed data set held by the SSMO could not be included as this would provide a much more accurate picture of the Shetland stocks.

Response- MD noted the traffic light system was previously put in place by ICES and was used in the recent presentation (FMAC -Inshore), although was not used in the report. There have been discussions internally at the MD on the subject of limited data for Shetland. It was stated that there is an MoU with UHI Shetland for data collection but current data collection levels have been limited by issues such as COVID and staff absence, but that this should improve going forward.

The SSMO responded that they use a similar traffic light system and would be happy to collaborate with MD in the future.

- It was put to MD that there had previously been obstructions to the collection of scallop data locally due to the time lag for approval in towing in MPAs which had resulted in survey tows being missed. They went on to state that there is no collaboration between MD and UHI Shetland who collect data for the SSMO stock assessments. They call for closer collaboration in the future and suggested that as the SSMO and MD both have limited resources available, they could do one survey which would meet both the needs of the SSMO and MD and save costs.

Response- MD are concerned that there had been a time lag with issuing of scientific research derogations in the past which they were not aware of. This is a process that should take approximately three weeks, but also requires that NatureScot are informed

of the request. They will raise this concern with staff involved with issuing of derogations. Regarding collaboration, UHI fisheries staff and SSMO staff were welcomed onboard the MD survey vessel during their last scallop survey and they were working towards closer collaboration in the future, but that resources are extremely stretched at the moment and work is being prioritised. They went on to note that as per a previous request, all survey programmes and reports are available publicly on BODC and survey data will be added to NMPi as an update in the next few months.

**Action- LB to raise collaboration point at next MD Sea Fisheries Team meeting and to also raise concerns around derogations with the appropriate team at MD.**

Feedback time frame from MD was given as November as this is after the annual ICES WGScallop meeting in October.

It was discussed that there could be a separate meeting organised to discuss the scallop surveys with attendees from MD, SSMO and UHI Shetland.

**Action- HB to speak to relevant parties and set a date for above meeting.**

- Concerns were then raised over the quality of monitoring demersal fish landings in Shetland by MD. Specifically that foreign vessels are not always labelling their boxes resulting in fisheries officers not knowing what is being landed. In addition, as fisheries officers only sample a proportion of boxes they cannot effectively monitor landings. They would like to see a change in regulations to label at point of landing not point of sale. SB asked what the basis was for these concerns and responded that Compliance Officers carry out both full monitors and partial monitors of landed catch on a risk assessed basis.

Fishing First representative requested legislation be changed so that boxes were labelled with species and weight and point of capture rather than point of sale. SB responded that he would make Compliance colleagues aware of these views but that he was not aware of any planned changes to Buyers and Seller legislation at the current time. He advised that the process of considering changes to legislation was built on a process of stakeholder engagement, consultation and assessment of options in response to an issue.

**Action- SB will respond formally to Fishing First points regarding monitoring.**

## **2. Update from the SSMO. John Robertson**

The SSMO is involved in the licensing and regulation of inshore shellfish fisheries with the objective of maintaining sustainable stocks which leads to sustainable fishing.

There are currently 106 licence holders paying an annual fee of £450.

This level of locally control means that access to inshore fishing grounds is kept for small scale local fishers. There is some local resentment however, among locals due to restriction in number of licences.

#### Activities and issues

- The current shellfish stocks assessment has been updated and shows no concerns.
- Within the scallop fleet, some vessels will move to squid during the squid fishing season but this didn't happen last year due to the Cod Avoidance Plan. This has had a knock-on effect on the scallop fishery as it didn't take pressure of scallop stocks like it usually would.
- It has been a difficult year for the SSMO, there has been less support each year from the local council. The SSMO is now under pressure to fund internal costs from membership which could result in an increase in membership fees. As the only fee-paying licence holders in Scotland, this would not be welcomed by fishers. Without available funds the SSMO would not be able to access the scientific support it needs to maintain sustainable stocks.
- If funded, there is potential for research to be carried out by UHI Shetland to look into the breeding patterns of velvet crabs as fishers have been noting changes in this pattern resulting in soft crabs being seen all year round. Fishers rely heavily on the velvet fishery and this change is causing a destabilisation in the markets.

#### **Action- SB to look into potential funding to assist with this research.**

- The SSMO have trackers on order, for fishers to trial.
- They noted the concerns their licence holders have over spatial squeeze and there being space for everyone particularly on already limited scallop grounds
- There is continued pressures from environmental groups around bottom dredging and live transport of crabs and lobsters.
- MPAs and PMFs are affecting where fishers can fish and additional buffer zones around these areas only compounds the issue. Fishers would like to be able to fish closer to the protected areas.
- The SSMO is currently a regulatory body but not a statutory consultee and feel they should have a seat at the table. They would call for change in planning regulations to allow them to become a statutory consultee.

#### **Actions- JR will write a letter to local council requesting alteration in provision to change statutory consultee.**

#### **SB- to look at whether statutory consultees are specifically named in legislation.**

### **3. Update from the SFA. Sheila Keith**

The SFA represent paid members who are active fishers. They lobby fishers' views and speak on behalf of them. There are currently 170+ registered to land fish and the number is growing. However, this growth in the sector is not aligned with available quota. The growth has happened too fast and the under 10m quota is not being managed by SG resulting in vessels share of the quota decreasing. With the SG policy on inshore cap on hold this may

only get worse. There are many other impacts and concerns that SFA are supporting fishers on.

It is noted that MDs blanket policies do not work for Shetland and that MD would need a better understanding of the industry in Shetland and there is data available locally to support this.

The SFA feel that current SG constraints are affecting fishers and cannot continue. They are concerned that the SG have made promises they cannot deliver.

#### **4. Fishers**

HB shared some points with the group that had been raised with her via email from fishers:

- Costs of tracking systems
- Loss of squid season due to the Cod Avoidance Plans. It was noted by an attendee that there had been a promise in 2021 that there would be a derogation put in place for squid fishing within 12nm but due to staffing issues this did not happen. The inshore squid fishery is worth £16.5 million in Scotland which fishers are not able to access and is resulting in additional pressure on scallop fishery and environmental pressures.

MD stated that it is currently under consideration with ministers and should hear in the next 2 weeks.

- General comment on pressures that fishers are under and concerns for future generations.

#### **5. Shetland RIFG Project update Chevonne Angus**

UHI Shetland are currently halfway through the annual inshore fish survey. The survey first started in 2009 as a cod survey and in 2011 moved to its current format. Additional shallow water tows were included in 2017 and in 2022 tows around Fair Isle funded by the DRMPA.

The data has shown when there have been strong recruitment years which can be followed through into subsequent years and allowed for insight into spatial distribution of species. The collected data has also been used to support industry knowledge with regard to potential fish nursery areas.

Data is freely available on request and has been used in research around marine mammal and bird feeding behaviour.

Key goal is to have the data used as supplementary evidence to WGs for formal stock assessment within MD but this requires dialogue with SG and MD.

It was noted that there had been issues getting derogations from MD in previous years but that had improved this year.

Funding uncertainties are a continued concern. Local council funding is to phase out and alternative options are required to secure the future of the survey.

#### **Questions-**

Is there any work being undertaken to look at the effect of climate change on fish stock similar to that being undertaken at Bangor University on shellfish stocks?

Response- CA stated that there was a PhD about to start at SAMS, another UHI partner university using the inshore fish survey data.

**Actions- LB to check progress of team that are looking into using UHI Shetland inshore survey data in ICES WGs.**

#### **6. Discussion on SG Consultation: requiring electronic tracking and monitoring technology on under 12m commercial fishing vessels.**

SFA and SSMO will be responding to this consultation.

Main points raised during discussion; system should be simple, robust and easy to install. Fitting must be possible using local suppliers and avoiding situations where there are designated suppliers that it is not possible to access. Scotland should learn from how this is being implemented in the other home nations. The importance of keeping cost low was also discussed. A data usage policy and with fishers involved in any discussions on data use or mission creep. Any legislation should be future proofed to allow fishers to utilise any technological developments.

#### **7. Young people in the Industry**

HB noted that training for fishers has been a theme that has come up since starting in post and has been looking at school curriculums around fishing and fisheries/ environmental science. There could also be a focus on the history and culture surrounding the fishing industry to keep the wider community aware of positive stories for sustainable fishing.

HB has had some discussions with individuals involved in curriculum and emailed Hayfield House and has received a positive response in adding to the current curriculum.

Through Developing Young Workforce HB has found some areas have curriculum materials already made which could be updated and used.

EH introduced herself and her new role as STEM coordinator at UHI Shetland. Part of this role will include increasing young people engagement with the fishing industry in schools funded by Seafish. The vision is to incorporate VR in schools which can be delivered remotely. There is also collaboration with lecturers at UHI Shetland with a focus on fishing and aquaculture.

**Action EH to undertake horizon scanning and look at currently available resources such as Seafood Scotland and So much to Sea project and keep dialogue with HB.**

CH gave an update on current Introduction to Fishing course which has 12 students. It had not been run for 4 years and the high uptake level shows there is a need for it. Ideally the course would be moved to June to allow school leavers to access it start after the end of term, allowing them access to the fishing sooner.

If Seafish funding is secured there could be another Introduction to Fishing course run within the next 3 months as there are currently 6 people on the waiting list.

### **Questions**

- Is there the possibility that the Introduction to Fishing course could be down at a younger age? On the mainland some areas allow for students under 16 to attend courses and then pick up the certificate once they turn 16. Another option could be a Skills for Work opportunity for S3 and S4 pupils to come to UHI Shetland to learn about fishing as they do aquaculture and engineering.

Response- This has potential but may be limited by teaching staff available at UHI Shetland

**Action- HB speak to Laura Burden at UHI Shetland and to other RIFG Chairs in areas that are already doing this.**

**SK is currently looking for a dedicated fishing industry tutor to work at UHI Shetland. If anyone knows of anyone who might be interested can they contact herself or Laura Burden at UHI Shetland. They will be trained and materials provided. It is a paid position.**

Career fairs were noted as an opportunity for outreach however previously fisheries related organisations have not been approached to attend and were turned down when they requested a space.

It was also noted however that there is a difficult balance to be achieved between the number of people trained and jobs available in the industry.

**Action- HB to look into career fairs.**

## **8. Operational Plan**

The initial priorities of the Shetland RIFG group

1. New Entrants
2. Co-operation and Science
3. Sustainability

## **9. AOCB**

Caitlin Lamb is looking for volunteers to assist with her PHD research project - studying the long-term resilience and adaptation of the Scottish MPA network in response to climate change.

**Date of next meeting:** Group will meet again in January