



*Minutes of a General Meeting
held on Tuesday 26th September 2023*

Present

Phil Bennett, Chair, Orkney Regional Inshore Fisheries Group (PB); Hannah Fennell, Orkney Fisheries Association (HF); Arthur Geddes, Fisherman (AG); Martin Foulis Fisherman (MF); Christine Rosie, Orkney Fish Producers Organisation (CR); Tommy Thomson, Fisherman (TT), Andy Braunston (Minutes)

1: Welcome and Introductions

PB welcomed everyone to the meeting.

2: Apologies

Stuart Bell, (Senior Policy Manager, Marine Directorate)
Andrew Livingston, (Kirkwall Fishery Office, Marine Directorate)
Neil Matheson (Fisherman)
Keith McDonnell, (Orkney Fish Producers Organisation)
Ronnie Norquoy (Fisherman)
Cara Duncan, (Policy Officer, Marine Directorate)

3: Minutes from the Meeting of 27th June 2023

These were accepted as an accurate record.

4: Matters Arising (not otherwise on the agenda)

4a Succession Planning / Recruitment

PB said there had been slow progress on this due to holidays and other commitments of all involved.

He has been looking new schemes emerging around the UK, including Shetland and New Lime Bay Fishermen's which have started schemes to encourage people to move into the industry. Succession planning will continue to be worked on by a working group including HF and PB.

Concern was expressed about what exactly under 16s are allowed to do on boats. There seems to be no clarity about what is "guidance" and what are regulations. PB agreed to seek clarification on this.

4b Training

PB had been informed today, that the MCA are proposing taking over training from SeaFish. PB doesn't have all the details yet but the new entrants will follow a STCW-F programme will comprising of 6 courses, rather the current 4. Existing holders will have Grandfather rights.

The Nav school are already looking at the new structure and PB suggested asking Mark Shiner (Head of Department) to the next meeting as he will be getting further information / clarification soon. This was agreed by all present

4c Inspections/Interpretations

A wide-ranging discussion ensued about how inspection regulations were interpreted by the MCA and a lack of clarity that seems to exist about these interpretations which seemed to vary depending on the inspector. PB will look into this matter.

4d Improving Science for Stock Assessments

PB had spoken to Professor Mike Bell who held the basic assumptions are wrong in the calculations of crab stock as the original data was never verified. Prof Bell thinks that this data needs to be challenged and would like to write a paper to be peer reviewed. Prof Bell thinks lobster numbers are right but not crab. The meeting felt that the main requirement was reliable and up to date data. The scientists needed to listen more to fishermen as was the practice in Norway and Norwegian waters. The meeting felt that Norwegian culture respected fishermen more than British.

4e Scallop Size

There was a suggestion at the last meeting that the size of the scallop needed to be increased and a three-mile limit enforced. PB said that an Order by the Council would be needed to increase the size and other scallop divers / dredgers would need to be consulted.

4f Preventing Larger Dredgers

Marine Scotland say that an “exceptionally compelling argument would be needed” to restrict larger dredgers coming into our waters. It was noted that Fiona Matheson had done some work on this and PB will follow up with her.

5: RIFG Chair Update

PB updated the group about his work since the last meeting:

Group membership

PB has been involved with the RFIG Network meetings which comprises chairs of RFIG and the Marine Directorate. The first meeting included representatives from NGO's. HF asked which NGOs were present. PB will check and let her know. He also clarified that NGO's were present by way of introduction and would not normally be present.

One of the skippers gave a historic context of how conservation groups have come into these discussions and these can outgun fishermen.

PB also meets, virtually, with the other RFIG Chairs on a monthly basis. Chairs discuss common issues, share projects and information. They have also set up a WhatsApp group to ensure speedy sharing of information.

PB is part of a core working group along with HF and Kate from OSF. Others could be co-opted in as appropriate

PB is a member of the Inshore Fisheries sub group of the Fisheries Management and Conversation Group (FMAC). PB may also join other FMAC sub groups in the future

PB has been invited to be a member Orkney Marine Planning Advisory Group (OMPAG) chaired by OIC. There have been no recent meetings as OIC are still waiting for a sign off of their Orkney Islands Regional Marine Plan Consultation. The delay in the sign off means that their planned summer consultation schedule has been missed and some of the information contained in the report is out of date.

Meetings

PB has met with Neil Kermode of The European Marine Energy Centre (EMEC) whom he sees as a practical conservationist. PB and HF will be meeting with him tomorrow.

Local MPs: PB has productive meetings with Liam McArthur MSP and Alistair Carmichael MP who are supportive of the fishing industry. Alistair will be taking the issue of recruitment into the fishing industry to a cross party working group

Local Authority: PB has had various meetings with Council Officers including James Green (OIC Marine Planning), OIC Harbours and OIC Economic Development

Renewables: meetings with West of Orkney Wind, Thistle wind and Orbital Marine. He's not got any further than the glossy brochure stage but they are willing to talk and may be a source of funding for local projects

Has talked with the Seagrass Project who stated their surveys of sea grass meadows in Orkney, show that there is no damage from fishermen to the sea bed.

PB attended a meeting with Màiri McAllan, MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero and Just Transition, along with others. PB wished to personally thank Martin and Sean for their contribution. HPMA's have been scrapped and Màiri conceded that the consultation process had been poorly managed and Scottish Government were taking a far more holistic view of protecting the environment. They will now be regional focus going forward. The group felt the science needed to be done first. Cooke Agriculture, Scottish Sea Farms were amongst the attendees but they did not get the air time that the Fishers did. PB suggested that there no doubt that the minister heard and understood the concerns fishermen and local communities.

One of the skippers pointed out that the rules at the moment don't enable changes to boats to become net zero. Insurance won't insure for retro fitting to Lithium-Ion batteries. The MCA require retro fitting engines to go to MacDuff Marine Design. Clarity is needed as to how boats might go green.

Next month, PB, and the other RIFG chairs, will be meeting with Gillian Martin: The Minister for Energy and the Environment

6: Tracking and Remote Electronic Monitoring (REM)

There is a consultation out at the moment about this. HF will be responding, on behalf of OFA, but is encouraging individual fishermen to reply too. It was commented that the decision had already been made and the consultation won't change anything.

The consultation suggests there are 3 options

Do nothing and the RIFGs to continue to encourage fishermen fit trackers on a voluntary basis;

Blanket approach where all boats will be fitted with a low-cost tracker. There will be a "contribution" made by the Scottish Government but data transmission and replacement costs will be met by the industry

Tailored approach: A Low-cost tracker will be fitted on the majority of boats. More comprehensive Remote Electronic Monitoring (REM) with Gear sensors, possible

cameras etc. will be fitted to boats on a risk assessed basis. Again, there will be a “contribution” made by the Scottish Government but data transmission and replacement costs will be met by the industry

PB noted, however, that the consultation, in Para 18, states that Scottish Government “intend to introduce legislation that will make this technology mandatory on all scallop dredge vessels in Scottish waters.” This means there will be a degree of “tailoring” in all the options.

PB discussed some of the projected costs for Scottish Government in introducing Tracking and REM and the how the costs of replacement may be higher in Island locations due to higher delivery and engineer costs.

There was a general discussion and a consensus that clarity was needed about how the data will be used and how it might be interpreted. If it was used properly, it could be a useful tool to help fishermen. There was a consensus that the practicalities for island communities needs to be taken into account - for example how engineers will access where the boats are, how data will be transferred in areas where there is very poor mobile reception.

PB also clarified that any boat in fishing in, or transiting through Scottish waters would need to comply.

PB and HF are willing to help individuals complete a response to the consultation if needed.

7: Medicals

The group felt the ML5 form and process was a shambles and is an attempt to fix problems that the group felt don't exist. PB noted the process for getting a medical for diving is also very complex. The general advice is to get the medical certificate as soon as possible to ensure potential Grandfather Rights are retained

8: Handline Caught Mackerel

PB received the following email from Cara Duncan.

The quota for the handline mackerel is currently managed on a fortnightly basis to provide flexibility in order for fishers to obtain best market prices. The flexibility in landing allows a close link to develop throughout the season which is responsive to supply and demand. Additionally, as the HLM sector is centrally managed this provides the Marine Directorate better control over the fishery to open/close and adjust catch limits on the data received; ie if FISH1 forms are not returned promptly or there is a delay.

The HLM fishery opened in May 2023, for Orkney the weekly variation has not been adjusted with a fortnightly catch limit of 2 tonnes per fortnight. Very little uptake has been achieved despite this consistency?

If Orkney was to operate on a fix catch limit throughout the whole season with no option of changing the catch limit, it could result in poor prices throughout the whole season. Additionally, it could also result in the fishery for Orkney closing earlier in the season once the quota was utilised. However, under the current system it can be adjusted to keep the fishery open for as long as possible within the year.

At this current time and evidence of underutilisation of available mackerel stocks, it is unlikely that there would be discussions held in which more mackerel quota would be made available to Orkney due to fishers' requests.

As mentioned, the Additional Quota consultation is due to be released soon and might be better to discuss further then?

9: Any Other Business

PB encouraged those present to engage with other fishermen to make contact with him and had supplied business card to pass on his details. PB stated that even if they are not the type of people who attend meetings, it is essential to hear their voices and know their opinions. PB happy to talk to them 1-2-1 in person, by phone, email or WhatsApp.

10: Next Meeting

As the next RIFG meeting would be at the end of December, PB suggested a date towards the end of January. This would then give a pattern of meetings in January, April, July and October which was unanimously agreed.

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