

FMAC - Inshore Subgroup

Update from RIFG Network

August 2023

North and East Coast

Marine Planning

Marine Planning issues relating to Renewable energy continue to take up a huge amount of time on the East Coast, both with the existing consented sites and the new Scotwind and INTOG sites. Although these developments are mainly outside the 12nm limit the cable routes, surveys and infrastructure impacts are very much an issue. To date industry have been working together to try to meet as many developers as possible to encourage early engagement and discussion particularly on cable routes and timing of survey work. The aim of this early engagement is to work with developers to mitigate the impact of their sites and ensure that fishers knowledge is taken into account with their site and cable designs.

Alongside the early engagement we are also responding to all the relevant Marine Licence applications and formal consultation on Scoping reports etc. The resource required for this is considerable. Issues such as potential EMF implications is an issue which is often raised and the outputs of new research into this issue will be of huge interest.

Input has been sought on the development of the new Marine Spatial Plan as well as the Sectoral Marine Plan for Offshore Wind Energy and INTOG. The SEIA assessments are available on which comments are being sought. Engagement with the Marine Planning Partnerships is also ongoing.

Projects

The Aid to Navigation project is ongoing with good reports from the skippers. The project was developed due to ongoing gear conflict in the Moray Firth, an initial pilot project was set up to test the use of Aid to Navigation units. An EU CE accredited AIS Aid-to-Navigation (AtoN) transceiver is attached to a dhans marking one end of the fleet and a large buoy marks the other end. Hence, visiting vessels will see where those fleets are and which direction they are laid. They can either avoid steaming through or use the Call Ahead information to negotiate access for fishing, which would not be unreasonably withheld. It is hoped that the project will deliver a viable option for the marking of gear in areas where there is a mix of both static and mobile gear.

The inshore mackerel season is well underway with variable reports across the NECRIFG area. Further down the coast logistics and markets are an issue with

mackerel being landed as bait. Further north a high percentage of the catch is being landed directly to the processor, however, this is still subject to market forces and can result in large variances in price and demand. We are looking at a project to maximise the benefit of the inshore mackerel quota to the fishers and onwards to the communities along the coast.

The issue of Management measures in the static sector has been raised by a number of fishers and with the OH Pilot and the Voluntary Creel Project in the Clyde there are opportunities to learn from these projects and have discussions on practical, proportionate and appropriate measures across the fleet.

Shetland

Update on Shetland RIFG activities for FMAC meeting August 23rd 2023

Shetland Group work so far has focused around two main areas, young people and the fishing industry and fishing and the environment with a thread running through both areas of engaging with the wider Shetland community on all things Fishing.

Young People and the Fishing Industry

Activities undertaken so far:

A review of education on fishing in Shetland has been carried out this has identified areas where information on the local fishing industry could be incorporated into the Curriculum for Excellence, identified existing resources for schools in need of updating, identified individual projects within schools which could be used as exemplar models and expanded to enable more children to benefit and looking at potential ways to look at training needs for young people interested in entering the fishing industry.

Joint working:

This has involved working with representatives from the SSMO and SFA along with the Shetland Island Council, UHI Shetland, Individual Head Teachers, Developing the Young Workforce Shetland and e-sgoil.

Fishing and the Environment

Activities undertaken so far:

Funding has been obtained for the RIFG network to partially fund the 2023 Inshore Fish Survey. This is a survey which looks at abundance, size and species distribution of fish in the inshore waters of Shetland. The next phase of this project would be to obtain funding to look at the data set in different ways particularly with a view to looking at more detail of populations of juvenile fish. The Shetland RIFG is also hosting a visit from Nature Scotland to organise meetings with local fishing representatives and also to host a public meeting jointly with the local Nature

Scotland office on European Eels. This meeting will also engage with the Shetland Community Nature Group and the wider Shetland community. A review of a selection of academic literature on no take zones both with Scotland, the UK and globally has also been carried out in order to present some of the available evidence base in a form more readily accessible to fishermen.

Joint Working

SFA, SSMO, Nature Scotland, SIC and Shetland Fish Producers Organisation, Shetland Community Wildlife Group.

South West Coast

Key Issues

- Biggest issue is lack of new/young fishers moving into the industry. Difficulties include capital costs, licences and perceived loss of job security as well as insecure future of fishing industry. As a result there is an increasing reliance on foreign crew which is both expensive (to attract and retain) and a short term measure not sufficient to sustain a viable industry moving forward.

Other Issues

- Diversification. SW coast fishing dominated by scallops and prawns. Economically there is little resilience if there is a loss in either of these stocks. Looking to diversify into other major species as their stocks become economically viable as a sustainable fishery such as Herring and Cod.
- Husbandry of shellfish stock (crab/lobster). Expansion of static fishing effort for shellfish in an unregulated manner will put pressure on stocks. Fishers looking for stock management measures to be applied such as creel limits, soak times, closed seasons and locations management.
- Majority of industry keen to adopt VMS in its various forms as soon as possible to improve industry data collection as well as for compliance purposes.

Projects and Initiatives

- Mull Crab Box.
- Clyde Herring stock analysis. Clyde Fishermen's Association seeking to conduct a herring stock survey to update the current MS/ Nature Scot data with a view to economic viability for diversification for the fleet.
- Cockle biomass and relaying survey Solway Firth. 2 year survey to assess status of cockle population and viability of relaying techniques to expand stock with possibility of a future diversification stock.

North West Coast

During this period one formal NW Regional Inshore Fisheries Group meeting took place in Ullapool. It was reasonably attended given that it took place on a calm June evening and had Skippers attending from as far away as Lochinver, Achiltibuie and Kinlochbervie.

Informal meetings with Skippers have taken place in Dunvegan, Gairloch, Kyleakin and Lochinver.

All Fishery Offices in the Region have been visited since the Chair has taken up his position.

The RIFG has actively supported Skippers to lodge formal responses regarding two planning applications that potentially restrict fishing grounds and has been involved in pre-application discussions on a further proposal.

The Chair has taken issues raised by Skippers to government on two occasions- once to the MCA and once to Marine Scotland. One of these has led to a resolution of the issue and the other is outstanding at the time of writing.

Meetings have taken place of West of Scotland PO, North West Responsible Fisherman's Association, the Scottish Creel Fishermen's Federation and Wester Ross Fisheries Trust.

The Chair has represented the views of skippers at a number of fora. Notably the National Marine Planning Workshop and Marine Scotland's MPA's Workshop.

Outer Hebrides

RIFG activity in the Outer Hebrides since the new Chair took up his position, has included:

- Representing the OHRIFG at various meetings during June/July 2023.
- Attending two meetings organised by Eunomia Research Consultancy in Stornoway at the end of June on the Impacts of Priority Marine Features in the waters round the OH. Awaiting feedback from ERC on these meetings.
- Attending a number of meetings with WIFA regarding various issues in the OH fisheries sector including Blue Fin Tuna, Offshore Windfarm proposals, surf clams proposal from Barra and the new Bakkafrost fish farm proposal.
- Attending meetings with representatives from the two major windfarm operators who have acquired licences to establish windfarm round the Island of Lewis. The two operators are Northland Power from Canada and Magnora from Norway.
- Our Islands Our Deal. I have been appointed to the OH Food and Drink Programme project board to represent the fisheries interest which is a key strand in the Islands Deal. Monthly meetings are being planned and the first meeting took place on 27/7/23.

Orkney

Key pressures and challenges

Orkney marine environment presents the local fishing industry with many unique benefits and unique challenges in addition to those similar to other fishing communities. Although, undoubtedly, other challenges will arise in the future, the main themes that have become prevalent relate to succession (few younger generations entering the fishing industry), the marine spatial squeeze, the need for diversification and sustainability.

Succession

Succession is a major concern within Orkney as the majority of commercial fishermen are in their 50's, 60's and some older. Although there is good profit to be made within the fishing industry in Orkney, the fishing heritage, community identity, is being lost with the previous tradition of sons following fathers into fishing has been greatly reduced. Younger people (the smallest age group in Orkney) are being attracted to well-paid regular marine employment in Renewables and Aquaculture. Included in the barriers to succession are the rising costs of entry into the fishing industry. This includes skills and training requirements (getting their tickets), finance to purchase of a boat, a fishing licence and quota (if they intend to target species which require one). Additional costs exist in the buying of gear and equipment along with establishment of fishing grounds. With very few younger generations entering the fishing industry the industry is at risk of losing skills from long-term fishermen, local environmental knowledge and increased dependence on foreign workers when the current body of fishermen retire.

The RIFG is currently in dialogue with the Head of the Maritime Studies Department of the University of Highland and Islands and is looking at other initiatives around the UK. With the creation of a local fishing industry working group, the RIFG is looking at developing a clear pathway to a career within the local fishing industry. From early education, where we can educate and inspire young people, through to apprentices and on to boat ownership.

Spatial Squeeze

The growth of other marine sectors, in Orkney, especially aquaculture and renewables, is creating competition for space within our shared marine space (the Spatial Squeeze). The affects include loss of access to fishing grounds; Impacts on nursery and spawning areas for commercially-fished species, impacts from the displacement of fishing activities on fish stocks, the increased use of fuel by fishing vessels and the socio-economic costs to fishers and their communities; impacts on safe access to marine space including the seabed, water column and sea surface, and navigational access to and from landfall areas that support fishing vessels; Impacts on the cultural and economic value of fishing, in particular to fragile coastal and island communities.

The RIFG is has already been built meaningful relationships with other marine users, in particular, the aquaculture and renewables sectors. Wave and tidal renewables are well established in Orkney. Based in Stromness, Orkney, the European Marine Energy Centre (EMEC) which was set up in 2003 and is the world's first and leading facility for demonstrating and testing wave and tidal energy converters.

There are 2 large wind farms proposed around Orkney and the RIFG has already started an open, constructive dialogue with the management of the West of Orkney Windfarm and Thistle Wind Partnership.

Diversification

The majority of the income of Orkney Fishermen comes from crab, lobster, nephrops and scallops catch, with some fishermen catching small amounts of Haddock, Wrasse and Dogfish. The one remaining white fish boat is fishing quota which is allocated and is managed through the Orkney Producers Organisation although the catch is not landed in Orkney.

Whilst it is recognised that there is a need for diversification within the Orkney fishing industry, issues relating to infrastructure and access to markets need to be addressed. The RIFG industry working group is currently scoping the need and viability relating to commercial ice machine, and the possibility of creating a community quota scheme with external assistance.

Sustainability

In Orkney, there has been much work done to understand the state of our waters and ensure sustainability. Whilst a report undertaken on behalf of MSC stated "There is no evidence of recruitment overfishing in the Orkney brown crab stock", it is recognised that ongoing research and data collection is needed to monitor the effects on our marine environment due to climate change.

Orkney is fortunate to be the home of Herriot Watt University's International Centre for Island Technology (ICIT) which also explores "science in support of sustainable fishery management." ICIT, who have an ongoing environmental research programme, recognise that there is a lot of collaboration between the university and the industry and the community of Orkney

Overall, the fishermen in Orkney have been very keen to ensure sustainability of their target fish stocks and have spent considerable time engaging in a variety of projects with academic and industry bodies. Despite the progress and successes, it is clear that information is fragmented, difficult to locate and the good news stories are not promoted widely enough. Orkney's draft Marine Plan mentions the difficulty measuring and understanding the marine economy is difficult due to "a lack of robust, reliable and locally specific economic data".

The RIFG will continue to work with all relevant partners to foster greater communication and cooperation with regards to sustainability. This will include

examining how data is currently collected and shared, identifying any data gaps and future data needs. The RIFG is exploring the viability of, a port sampler, or similar role, being employed locally, to aid in data collection. The RIFG will explore methods to collate information on the outcomes of the various sustainability projects already been undertaken, and how this may be more widely promoted.