



RIFG meeting minutes

Date: 17-01-2024

Time: 12.00

Location: Online via Teams

Chair: Hilary Burgess

Attendees: Eleanor Hutcheon (EH)- UHI Shetland

Sheila Keith (SK)- SFA

Daniel Lawson (DL)- SFA

John Robertson (JR)- SSMO Inshore Coordinator

Barbara Watt (BW)- Marine Directorate

Geo-Under 10m Fishermen

Johno- under 10m Fishermen

Lynda Blackadder (LB)- Marine Directorate

Nina Valentine- SFF

Leander Harlow- UHI Shetland

Erin Rizzato- Observer-PhD Student UHI Shetland

Stuart Bell (SB)- Marine Directorate

Alastair Cooper (AC)- SSMO Chair

Chevonne Angus (CA)- UHI Shetland

Minute taker: Kathryn Allan- UHI Shetland

Agenda Items

1. Welcome, apologies, minutes and actions from the previous meeting

Apologies: Brian Anderson, Beth Mouat, Toby Flint, Ben Wilcock

Minutes- no comments, minutes approved

Actions from previous meeting:

- **Delays to derogations:** CA- no new derogations submitted since last meeting. LB- Spoke to licensing team at Marine Directorate (MD) who apologised for the delays in derogations being approved for the Shetland inshore fish survey. New staff have since joined the team and improved systems are in place. Turn around expected to be 3 weeks but submit in good time. Action closed.
- **Labelling fish boxes at landing not point of sale-** SB-raised with compliance, no current plans to re-evaluate and a written response has been provided to Fishing Forward. Action closed.
- **Project funding SSMO-** SB- currently no additional funding available through MD. JR- SSMO looking to incorporate extra velvet surveys due to concerns in breeding season changes. HB- may be budget in RIFG project funding.

ACTION- JR to speak to HB regarding funding

- **SSMO to be included as a statutory consultee-** JR- this is still ongoing. Action closed as part of RIFG.
- **Squid quota concerns-** SB- explain that this issue has not been picked up by ministers yet due to resource constraints.
In response, attendees raised concerns as has been ongoing for a long time (2021). Need a compensation package for fishers as they currently can't make a living and they will be looking to start squid fishing in 12 weeks. It also has an impact on scallop fishery if fishers do not move to targeting squid.

ACTION- SB- pass the concerns on to lead Officials in Marine Directorate to follow up.

- **Combining Shetland inshore survey data with MD data-** LB- the focus at the moment had been around cod data. Shaun Fraser (UHI Shetland) has been working with CEFAS and MD to use survey data for ICES cod assessments. But will require approval from ICES working group and advisory committee. CA- A data sharing agreement has been sent to MD and waiting response, progress so far has been slow.

ACTION- LB to find out where they are with agreement- update at next meeting.

- **VR headsets-** EH- been in touch with Norwegian university who have already developed aquaculture VR software and will be working in partnership with them. Can develop scenarios relevant for Shetland. Also developing a marine science lend-a-lab with SAMS for use in primary schools containing themes around food chains, genetics, pollution etc.

ACTION- EH, HB and DL to discuss potential to contribute input to lend-a-lab kit contents

- **Introduction to fishing course.** SK- worked with UHI to access funding and the course will be run again at the end of this month. Action closed.
- **Careers fair-** SFA had attended the last careers fair and were expecting to attend again this year. Action closed.
- **Search for fishing industry tutor-** SK- Some interest and it is progressing at UHI Shetland. Action closed.

2. Update from Marine Directorate

SB- Policy update

- Additional quota- consultation ended on 11 Jan. Within Shetland there is scope to try and source additional quota for under 10m vessels with a licence for demersal line caught gear. Report in coming months.
- Vessel tracking consultation now closed. Received 116 responses. Cons from Shetland- variety of different tracking devices- VMS, REM and under 12 m tracking devices. Addressed as best we can. RFGs will discuss locally.
- National group, Fisheries Management Conservation- next meeting 29th Jan. Will speak to HB regarding any issues the group would like raised. One issue for discussion will be crab and lobster sustainability and inshore stocks in Shetland.

Questions/ Comments

Attendee raised concerns that there is a pre-emptive approach to consultation before responses received. They need to be able to trust that responses are listened to but it feels like MD already know what action they will take before integrating all responses.

Concerns that the decisions around VMS tracking have already been made. Comments were also made that there should be no additional quota without VMS being fitted so that quota can be monitored.

Need reassurance that any additional quota for line caught fishers goes to people that can make use of it.

SB response- reassured the group that no decisions have been made yet but wanted the group to be aware that discussions around quota and vessel tracking will be happening soon. If tracking used it will be proportionate to the fleet and scale of fishing operation.

LB- Science update

- Ongoing Resource shortages. Currently focusing on king scallops. There is an updated assessment for Shetland which is positive showing an increase in stock biomass. The plan is to present at next FMC scallops sub group in Feb.
- Annual king scallop survey starts next week and includes greater collaboration with scientists in Shetland. LH is planning on coming out on Alba na Mara during the survey and also participated in the ICES WGScallop meeting.
- New Science and Innovation Strategy launched last week. Making work streams more accessible and transparent in MD data portal- meetings in progress.

Questions/ Comments

Regarding the Science and Innovation Strategy, it was shocking to fish industry to see so little reflection of value of fishing industry in Shetland. Local fishing associations were not invited to comment only the SFF. SFA would like the opportunity to discuss.

ACTION-LB will feed that back to the relevant team at MD.

BW- Compliance update

- The team have been busy with pelagic season, inshore work has been quieter.
- Aware of issues surrounding multiple boat ownership, measures now in place are working to reduce “quota hopping”

3. Report on meeting with Gillian Martin- HB

RIFG chairs met with Gillian Martin in November, very positive and engaged felt that her ministerial brief covering energy and inshore fisheries gave her ability to work with developers and fishing industry and that there was an appetite with developers to do that.

Raised points on;

- importance of the inshore sector,
- the need for more inshore scientific data (reasonable cyclical timetable of stock assessments),
- staffing in the Marine Directorate – mismatch between policy and MD resources to implement,
- new entrants to inshore fishing,
- delay to adopting marine plans.

Gave strong examples of inshore fisheries management e.g. SSMO regulating order and the ban on berried lobsters. Discussion on encouraging new entrants, minister highlighted the developing the young workforce initiative.

4. Update from the SSMO

JR & AC

- In a current funding crisis. SIC no longer paying towards running costs so will need to make up this shortfall through licence holders licence fees. Previous been flat fee regardless of gear amount but currently debating whether to band fees/ tier system dependant on gear or flat rate increase for all. Either way there will be upset from licence holders.
- No new licences will be issued this year due to scientific advice. King scallop assessments have been positive however, this does not match up with fishers catch rates who are reporting more effort being required to catch same numbers. Mismatch between science and fishers. Scallop survey will hopefully allow for a better picture and discussing potential to use active fishers as part of the survey with the scientists.
- Shetland ban on berried lobsters this is having a big impact on fishers who are throwing a lot back and due to high price incentives, high market demand and difficulties in enforcing the ban, it may not be credible to continue a ban when no restrictions on buyers and no ban on berried lobsters is in place across Scotland. Will MD bring in a Scottish ban?
- A lot of effort goes into preparing consultation responses for planning application and MPAs etc. but this work is often unseen.
- Looking at shortening buckie season to 5months to protect stock.

Questions/ Comments

SB- MD are considering all management tools at their disposal and will consider all avenues of how inshore fisheries are managed and decision making but would be subject to due process and consultation.

HB commented that there was positive feedback from inshore fisheries groups in Cornwall where a ban has been successful.

BW- re. MD compliance. They are always looking out for berried lobsters but cannot take enforcement action as the ban is not legislation so no offence is being committed. Only able to advise fisher that not allowed under SSMO licence conditions and pass details on to SSMO.

Regarding funding shortfall it was commented that there is a standard number of gear per licence but not all fishers use it. Could the SSMO give unused gear to fishers that could use it and charge them extra for it?

SSMO responded saying they are currently looking at licence fees for effort used in 2023 by vessels on their log sheets. They are aware of issue of unutilised effort and this needs to be assessed on how it would impact stock assessment. Been spoken about in 2023 and looking to make actions in 2024.

5. Update from the SFA- SK

Main concerns from their members are;

- Continuation of fishing opportunities. There are currently 200 inshore fishing vessels in Shetland targeting a mix of species. They want reassurances that there will be continuity to access to fishing opportunities which include- additional quota allocation given to vessels that can justify utilising it and access to fishing grounds. Fishing businesses cannot remain sustainable if they keep losing grounds.
- Reliance of fishermen to prove their need but not same evidencing requirement from developers or presence of/ protected marine features, for example. Discussions are ongoing and progress is being made.
- Latest MCA rules on medicals - consultations open for option of no medical requirement for under 10m vessels. Why - after so close to putting in new rules where all fishers require medical? This is causing frustrations among the fleet.
- The importance of using objective evidence rather than a subjective evidence base when developing policy.

6. Issues from Shetland Fishermen-HB

- Fishers are frustrated with larger boats coming inshore and creating gear conflict. Small inshore boats getting good fishing and then next day large vessels came very close inshore (depth of 20 fathom) and took large numbers of fish. Small boats are already restricted by weather, tide and sea beds. Detrimental effect for small inshore vessels whose income is being badly affected as well as reports of loss of gear (pots

and gillnets). Fishers stating that in subsequent years, fish do not return. Call for a 3 nm limit enforced to give under 10m boats a chance.

SB response- similar situation in other areas of Scotland. Understand it is very frustrating but if the vessel is operating within the confines of the law there is nothing to be done. But MD monitor fishing activity on a risk-assessed basis and request information from fishers to be fed back to Compliance.

ACTION- Evidence to be passed to HB and feedback to MD

- Some positive feedback on young people – maritime course at UHI Scalloway very good and practical and helped island pupils to make the transition to S5 and hostel if they made friends at college from other areas of Shetland.
- Raised by several fishers were the issues around the squid fishery. Several said this was affecting income and putting more pressure onto the scallop fishery. Shetland fishers can only use 120mm nets in Shetland waters. Also, squid in high numbers. Need to raise the profile and make progress quickly on this issue.
- Fishers have concerns around access to SSMO licences for new entrants and unequal access.
- General comments; feeling entrenched by regulations and restrictions, disconnect of fishing from the next generation, housing problems, dissatisfaction and disconnect from the SG.

7. Shetland RIFG Project update and discussion on future project options

- **Inshore fisheries survey-** CA was to give an update on the Shetland Inshore Fisheries Survey but unfortunately had connection issues due to power outages. An update will be given at the next meeting.
- **Project ideas from UHI Shetland-** As CA was unavailable HB will forward project ideas to group members for consideration.
- **Funding available through RIFG-** HB have funding that can be used if there are ideas for projects. Yearly allocation of funds. Projects need to be completed and funds spent by end of each funding year (end March).

ACTION- Any project ideas can be passed to HB.

ACTION- HB to forward CA's project ideas.

8. Shetland RIFG education projects (community talks, school visits and community use of VR technology)- HB

- **Heritage leaflets-** receiving help from Whalsay Heritage Centre to update and HB to look for funding to print.
- **Eel talk-** interesting and good discussion. Good example of fishing and conservation working together. Next talk possible around sharks, skate and rays
- **Developing young workforce-** Finalised questions for young people for S1 and S2 discussion groups. EH- meeting with staff at SAMS. Looking at running a marine planning role play in schools. If works as pilot could be rolled out in Scotland. Minister was interested in work of DYW and careers in Marine Planning.

- **Taking VR headsets into care homes-** Could this be done in Shetland? Videos from fishing boats to show to elderly members of the community. Looking for suggestions of people who may be interested in piloting.

LB- In the past worked with people at Anstruther museum and they may be interested in partnering.

- Lend-a-lab box. HB- can SRIFG contribute to what it looks like and feed into it. EH- yes hopefully and will stay in contact with SAMS. **See action in section 1.**

LB- could be applicable for funding under MD RIFG.

ACTION- pass names of any elderly friends/ family who may be interested in trying out the VR headset to HB.

ACTION- LB pass HB contact details for Anstruther Fishing Museum

9. AOCB

No comments

10. Date of next meeting

End of May/ beginning of June. Date TBC