

Marine Directorate

Measures to Improve Inshore Fisheries in Scotland

Background

Fisheries Management and Conservation (FMAC) Inshore Subgroup was convened in January 2023, aimed at developing a co-management approach under the 2020 - 2030 Fisheries Management Strategy.

The Scottish Government wishes to use this forum to inform transition towards more agile management of inshore fisheries that is more regionalised and supported by more frequent scientific advice to balance economic, social and environmental outcomes.

Issue

Over the last year, concern about the health of our shellfish stocks has grown. The latest Marine Directorate (MD) assessment report shows that crab and lobster are being exploited at or above fishing maximum sustainable yield in most inshore waters. This picture of crab and lobster stock health is supported by anecdotal evidence from across our stakeholders with some groups of fishers reporting diminishing catch rates, others excessive gear in the water.

We are already progressing transformational projects that will, in time deliver benefits for our inshore fisheries. These include our recent consultation on the use of vessel tracking and inshore REM for the under 12 metre commercial fleet and development of a new Future Catching Policy (FCP). However, one emerging theme is that many of our stakeholders feel that these measures in isolation will not deliver sufficient benefit to the health of our inshore fisheries for crab and lobster.

Role of FMAC Inshore Subgroup

At the FMAC Inshore Subgroup meeting on 29th January 2024 there was general agreement on the need for specific action in response to the recent stock assessment advice for crab and lobster. A presentation by Marine Directorate on how we might work together to improve inshore fisheries management was positively received by the group. There are three elements to this roadmap:

1: Consult on a broad package of inshore management proposals in late 2024, informed by advice from our FMAC Inshore group.

For example, proposals for full consultation might include:

- Input controls on vessels (e.g. days at sea, using a permit to limit activity in inshore waters and/or in relation to fishing gear, e.g. on creel numbers / soak time / string length).
- Output controls such as quota or catch limit.
- Technical measures including regulation on gear construction.

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- Spatial management measures.

Any such consultation would be accompanied by rigorous stakeholder engagement and a full suite of impact assessments. This will include a strategic environmental assessment, island communities impact assessment and business & regulatory impact assessment.

2: Progress complementary transformational projects including inshore vessel tracking, update and improvement of our inshore evidence base, and reviewing our RIFG network.

3: Evaluate the potential for introducing shorter-term interim measures for the 2024 crab and lobster fishery.

For example, these might include measures such as (or a combination of):

- Use of voluntary agreements.
- Seasonal and/or temporal area closures.
- Review of latent fishing capacity and unused licence entitlements.
- Prohibition on retaining or landing berried females.
- Changes to Minimum or Maximum landing sizes.

We consider co-management via our FMAC Inshore subgroup as central to development of new management measures. In order to make best use of time and available resources, we wish to focus on potential shorter term interim measures for 2024 at the current time.

As agreed at the FMAC inshore meeting on the 29th January we now invite you to discuss potential interim options with your membership.

A follow up (in person) FMAC Inshore Subgroup meeting focussed on discussing in detail, possible short term interim crab and lobster measures for introduction from May 2024, will be held in early March. All members will be asked to set out at this meeting their considerations and proposals.

In framing these discussions and evaluating potential options for the 2024 fishery, you may wish to consider key points including those that arose during our meeting on the 29th:

- Practical limitations of ensuring compliance with different approaches.
- That we consider approaches to management that have worked elsewhere.
- That the infrastructure may not yet be preset to get optimum benefit from some of these measures – for example vessel tracking for inshore vessels.

Marine Directorate, Scottish Government,

2 February 2024