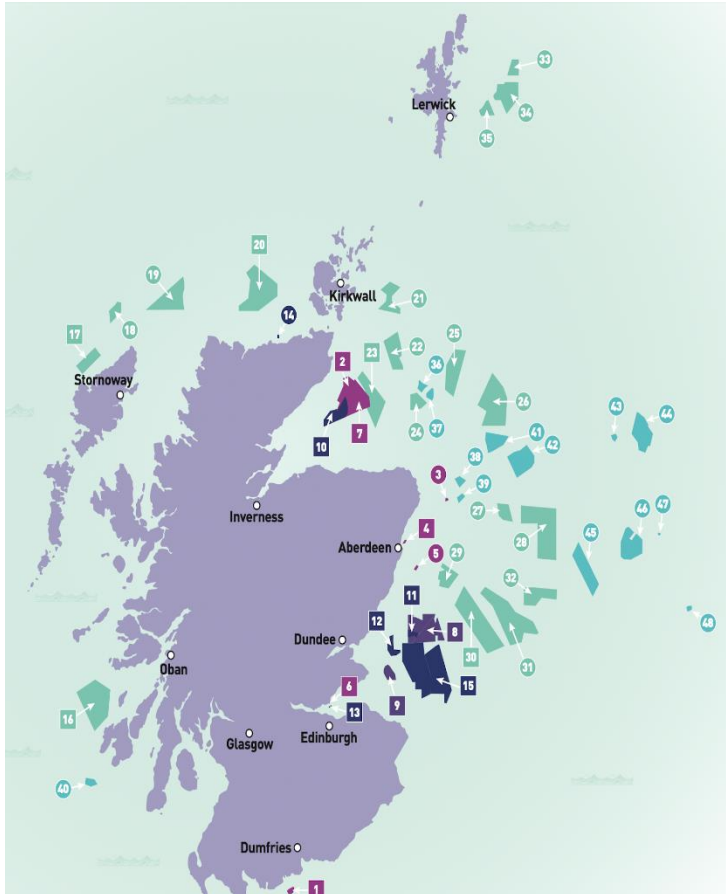


Update from Regional Inshore Fisheries Group (RIFG) Chairs – January 2024

North and East Coast RIFG

There is continued focus on renewables consultations both formal and informal. There are existing consented projects which are built or in construction as well as the Scotwind and INTOG projects. The timing of surveys as well as the complication of where cables will make landfill require considerable input to try to minimise impact on inshore fishers. There is



uncertainty for developers as to where they will receive landfill connection adds to the uncertainty. This all adds to the issue of spatial squeeze and the perceived desire for coexistence. We continue to be hampered by a lack of data for the inshore area.

We are currently working with Hywind to look at issues around EMF which has been raised around the Peterhead area.

The inshore mackerel season 2023 went fairly well with some mixed reports across the NECRIFG area. The issues around markets and price continue as does continued interactions with seals across the entire area.

Diversification opportunities are becoming more important to the

inshore sector. The recent stock assessment shows a picture where intervention may be needed. We are continuing to develop a project to look at how diversification could be taken forward in the inshore sector.

The impact of weather related to the increase of winter storms has caused a number of issues including lost and broken gear, loss of fishing time, and additional costs. A report will be sent to the Marine Directorate in due course.

The Coastal Partnerships have been more active and we are working with one to collate a State of the Coast report which will be a valuable repository of data.

Orkney RIFG

Since the last meeting of the FMAC sub group last August, Orkney had its second RIFG meeting with the third scheduled for Tuesday 30th January 2024.

The Head of the Maritime Studies Department, University of Highlands and Island has been invited to the meeting to discuss the MCA's proposed changes to the training and qualifications needed by Commercial fishermen.

The RIFG Chair attended a meeting between OFA and Gillian Martin, Minister for Energy and the Environment in November 2024 regarding local issues affecting inshore fishermen.

There was also much concern when Orkney Fishermen's Society recently went into administration. Fortunately, it was bought out of administration by the PDK group.

The majority of the income of Orkney Fishermen comes from crab and lobster and diversification has become a priority focus for the work of the RIFG. Fishermen have reported that the main barrier to diversification is access to markets. The RIFG-Industry Working Group is looking at the viability of ice-making and chill store facilities and improved transportation.

Tourism is the fastest growing local sector within Orkney and we are the most visited destination for cruise ships in the UK. Dovetailing with the above work, the RIFG working group is looking at regaining the fishing heritage of Orkney and will be encouraging local restaurants to use locally sourced fish and shellfish. We want to promote a 'sea to plate', fully traceable, low food miles culture, giving visitors to Orkney the full range of experiences.

Succession remains a concern within Orkney as the majority of commercial fishermen are in their 50s, 60s. With very few younger people entering the fishing industry, it is at risk of losing skills and local environmental knowledge.

The growth of other marine sectors, in Orkney, especially aquaculture and renewables, continues to create competition for space within our shared marine space.

The RIFG is responding to all planning permission applications within Orkney and continues to foster close working relationships with other marine users, in particular, the aquaculture and renewables sectors.

Shetland RIFG

Meetings

The Shetland RIFG group has held its first two committee meetings in August 23 and January 24. The main areas which the group decided to focus on are; New Entrants, Co-operation and Science, and Sustainability.

There have also been drop-in meetings held for fishers in Lerwick, Whalsay and Yell held at the end of November. The RIFG chairs had the opportunity to meet with Gillian Martin MSP in November and raise issues of concern to fishers across the network.

New Entrants

It has been really positive that there has been good availability and uptake of training opportunities for young folk in Shetland. There has been a fully subscribed 'Introduction to

Commercial Fishing' course run in 2023 and a second course will be running shortly. There is also an option for S3 and S4 pupils to take up a course run by UHI Shetland, 'Skills for Work Maritime Skills' which is aimed at young people interested in careers in the maritime sector and provides a range of knowledge and practical skills.

This course is available for young people from remote communities and is also a good opportunity for them to meet young people from other areas. The Shetland RIFG is working on initiatives aimed at younger students to raise knowledge and awareness of the fishing industry.

To find out more about young people's views on careers in fishing and marine science -a series of S1 and S2 discussion groups will be held. This will include a focus on careers for women in these industries. The Shetland RIFG is working with the Scottish Association for Marine Science to pilot a lesson on marine planning which will use role play to engage students with the differing views of stakeholders. If successful this could be used to create a template for this type of interactive learning which could be used in other areas.

We are also working with members of a local fishing history group to update booklets for children on Shetland's maritime heritage. The Shetland RIFG group has also been working with UHI Shetland STEM project which will be using VR technology to bring experiences of the fishing industry into schools. The Shetland RIFG is looking at how this technology and experiences could be utilised in other community settings for example for the benefit of care home residents.

From the Boats

Shetland fishers are very keen that the SG authorise a derogation to tackle the loss of squid fishing due to the Cod Avoidance plans. A derogation would also reduce pressure on other stocks such as the scallop fishery. Data from the recent inshore fish survey found that squid catch rates on shallow water grounds in Shetland were the highest yet recorded at 13.00kg/hour.

Issues were also raised by fishers from small boats about large trawlers fishing close inshore and the impact this is having on livelihoods and the environment. Issues relating to the spatial squeeze affecting fishers caused by; protected areas, offshore wind and proposed expansion of aquaculture are ongoing in Shetland, as in other areas of the network.

Sustainability

At the January Shetland RIFG meeting the Shetland Shellfish Management Organisation (SSMO) proposed that there should be a ban on the landing and possession of berried lobsters across Scotland to help ensure the long- term sustainability of the fishery. In Shetland under SSMO regulations it is not permitted to land berried lobsters.

The SSMO has responsibility for the management of shellfish within Shetland's six mile limit and this is achieved by issuing licenses and implementing regulations. The annual stock assessments commissioned by the SSMO and carried out by scientists from UHI Shetland have demonstrated the success of this approach for stock management

The Shetland RIFG is working to engage the wider Shetland community with the fishing industry and the RIFG network. In November the Shetland RIFG hosted a community talk on the European Eel. The talk given by the Sustainable Eel Group and provided a

fascinating example of how links between fishers, conservationists, marine science, accreditation systems and retailers can work together for the benefit of a critically endangered species.

Science and Co-operation

The Shetland RIFG group provided partial project funding for the 2023 Shetland Inshore Fish Survey carried out by scientists from UHI Shetland. This work has now been completed and the results provide very useful information on the distribution, relative abundance and population structure of fish species in local waters. This includes data which suggests that some nearshore grounds around the coastline of Shetland are nursery areas for a variety of commercial species, for example plaice and monkfish. There is also an opportunity for further analysis of this data going forward to look more closely at spatial distributions, and also to tie in with other local and international surveys. A link to the full report on this survey work is below.

[https://pureadmin.uhi.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/29741097/Fraser et al. 2022. Overview of SIFS data.pdf](https://pureadmin.uhi.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/29741097/Fraser_et_al._2022_Overview_of_SIFS_data.pdf)

The Shetland RIFG members have also been looking at improving links between UHI Scalloway and MD scientists. This includes looking to improve future processing times for research derogations and also in a member of UHI Scalloway joining the ICES WGScallop and scallop survey. There have also been steps taken towards using Shetland survey data for ICES assessments.

Outer Hebrides RIFG

The Chair was present at five Western Isles Fishermen's Organisation (WIFO) meetings from the Lewis to Barra which were very well attended.

One of the most dominant topic at all the meetings was Additional Quota and it got a good airing everywhere.

Marine Designations were discussed at every meeting as were the New Visa Proposals, Developing the Young Workforce within schools, the Catch App and the Pot Limitation Scheme.

Whilst in Barra the Chair was given a tour of Vatersay by a local fisherman. There are 26 fishermen working out of the island and they have very ambitious proposals for a new £6 million harbour development, but funding is proving problematic.

The Chair has also been on Uist for a series of meetings planned with your colleagues from Marine Scotland on marine protections and others on Set-net Activity in the Outer Hebrides.

The Chair was in Glasgow last week for the Food Plus/Good Food Nation Conference.

South West RIFG

Crew shortages and new entrants remains amongst the most difficult impediments to securing a long term viable industry. There are a few localised initiatives within schools to promote the industry but generally focusing on the quality of Scottish seafood rather than as a career opportunity.

Financing and legislative requirements for setting up and operating an inshore fishing boat remains a substantial barrier for the smaller individual/family run businesses. The proportion of under 40 year old skipper/owners is significantly low in the fleet.

South west coast inshore fishing is dominated by scallops, prawns, crab and lobster. Economically there is little resilience if there is a significant reduction in any of these stocks. As the environmental impacts of climate change develop, inshore fisheries will have to become more flexible and adapt swiftly to changes in stock density and species abundance. To that end there is currently interest in:

- Re-establishing the Solway Firth Cockle Fishery. Following many years in abeyance, a Defra sponsored scientific stock survey along the Scottish Solway coast has identified a significant increase in the cockle biomass. This in turn has led to the possibility of developing a cockle fishery subject to further surveys in 2024 and subsequent pilot projects to prove the viability and sustainability of a new fishery.
- Herring in the Clyde. There is reason to believe that herring numbers are improving within the Clyde and that subject to specific species surveys, this might prove to be an economic opportunity to re-establish and manage this fishery.
- Husbandry of shellfish stock (crab/lobster). The latest ICES and Scot Govt crab and lobster assessments show a significant decline in stock due predominantly to an unsustainable increase in fish mortality. Recognising this and following numerous meetings/consultations to discuss the issue, the SWRIFG have submitted a voluntary Code of Practice to Marine Directorate for approval to reduce fishing effort and preserve stocks. The agreement includes measures over and above those listed in 'The Specified Crustaceans (Prohibition on Landing, Sale and Carriage) (Scotland) Order 2017'. Out to 12NM this agreement includes:
 - Reductions in the number of creels allowed in the water per boat irrespective of size and engine capacity.
 - Reductions in creel numbers within geographic areas.
 - Prohibitions for landing 'berried' Brown Crab and Lobster.

The majority of industry keen to adopt vessel tracking in its various forms as soon as possible to improve industry data collection as well as for compliance purposes.

Galloway and S Ayrshire Biosphere UNESCO Biosphere re-accreditation in 2022 expanding the sphere to include Rhins of Galloway and inshore waters out to 12Nm from Kirkcudbright to Ayr. Liaison between SWRIFG and the Biosphere will commence in 2024 to explore how this may be advantageous to the SWRIFG/Galloway community in terms of marketing and sales.

North West RIFG

The Chair has carried out port visits to Kinlochbervie, Lochinver and Kyle, and additional effort was made to engage with skippers in smaller harbours. This included visiting Northern Ardnamurchan, Plockton and Arisaig.

Discussions were held in KLB with the over 15m fleet regarding quota and the allocation of Additional Quota which, at the time, was subject to consultation.

The Chair has been lead author of the 2024 National Operational Plan for the Regional Inshore Fisheries Network. Which is currently being finalised and will be share via the website in due course.

All current RIFG Chairs met with the Minister for Energy and the Environment in November where discussion centered on the need to protect crab and lobster stocks.

A formal NW Regional Inshore Fisheries Group meeting was planned for November but has been re-scheduled for February.

At the request of the North West Responsible Fisherman's Association the Chair engaged in discussions with Kishorn Port in attempt to negotiate a framework agreement regarding roles and responsibilities when the Port is navigating oil rigs into and out of their dry dock. These responsibilities include a compensation framework for local fishers who lose access during rig movements. These discussions have not yet been concluded.