



*Minutes of a General Meeting  
held on Tuesday 30<sup>th</sup> April 2024*

**Present**

Phil Bennett (ORIFG Chair), Habib Choudhury (Maritime & Coastguard Agency), Hannah Fennell (Orkney Fisheries Association), Andrew Livingston (Marine Directorate Compliance), Nina Valentine (Scottish Fishermen's Federation - via Teams), Ivan James (Fisherman), Ian Spence, (Fisherman) Kevin Manson (Fisherman), Katie Cubbon (Community Catch Pilot Scheme Coordinator) Arthur Geddes (Fisherman), Jimmy Sinclair (Fisherman), Neil Matheson (Fisherman), Kevin McDonnell (Orkney Fish Producers Organisation), Christine Rosie (Orkney Fish Producers Organisation), Beta Rodrigues (Herriot Watt University), Andy Braunston (Minutes)

**1: Welcome and Introductions**

Phil welcomed everyone to the meeting, particularly Habib Choudhury from the MCA, Nina Valentine from the Scottish Fisheries Federation, and Katie Cubbon from the Community Catch Pilot Scheme.

**2: Apologies**

Apologies were received from Martin Foulis and Marine Directorate

### **3: Minutes of the Meeting held on 30th January 2024**

These were deemed as an accurate record following responses sent by members since the last meeting. Phil noted that the online version will be anonymised, but the original version will be retained including the names of all contributors.

### **4: Matters arising not otherwise on the agenda**

#### *6. Review of RIFG Network*

Assessors have said the field work research has now been completed. 30 interviews with fishers and 70 responses to the online survey had been completed by mid-April. Now the team will review the responses with an outcome report being drafted later in the year.

A meeting with the Fisheries Management and Conservations Forum was held with fishers present was more challenging as the views of fishers were heard clearly!

### **5: RIFG Chair's Report**

Phil gave an overview of his work since the last meeting. He noted that he'd continued to assist with the upkeep of the RIFG website. Gordon Tailor is now taking this on. Phil has had meetings with fishermen as required, followed up on enquiries, contacted local stakeholders and engaged in relevant research. He noted that he had mentioned to Marine Scotland that information on their website is often out of date. He noted Cat C Medical Store Requirements are the ones that fishers must follow. (Additional) First Aid kits are required only when a crew is larger than 10 people. Confusion is caused when manufacturers label their Cat C Medical Kits as First Aid Kits.

Phil had continued to meet with fellow RIFG chairs and assisted in the development of a Network Plan which can be viewed on the RIFG website.

He had attended various meetings with the Marine Directorate Inshore Fisheries and Communities Team, had met Gillian Martin MSP, the Minister for Energy, Just Transition & Fair Work, Liam MacArthur the MSP for Orkney, and Jamie Halco-Johnson an MSP for the Highlands and Islands Region.

Phil had met various academics and Marine Science - Linda Blackadder, Senior Inshore Fisheries Advisor at Marine Scotland Science, Dr Mike Bell, retired from the International Centre for Island Technology at Heriot Watt University, and has tried to contact Dr Sandy Kerr also from Heriot Watt.

Phil noted various discussions with the Maritime and Coastguard Agency in Aberdeen and meetings around education and training at the UHI.

He had attended three meetings of the Inshore Fisheries Subgroup and two virtual meetings about National Maritime Planning (NMP2).

Phil had attended a range of meetings around renewables particularly with the West of Orkney Windfarm who are willing to come and talk to the RIFG. Phil asked if the group was interested in hearing them. A fisherman wondered if the groups' views would make any difference! Phil suggested that it would be useful for them to hear about proposed ways to move boulders on the seabed and the trench for the cable into Flotta. Another fisherman remarked the compensation was very poor from SSE when creels had to be moved. It was also suggested that the group should not be shy for asking for compensation as money seemed to be no object to the renewables industry. The group felt it would be interesting to hear what the West of Orkney Windfarm would say. Phil would ask them to a future meeting.

Phil had also met with Cllr Heather Woodbridge the new leader of Orkney Islands Council, and James Green the Team Manager for Marine Planning.

In addition, Phil had responded to consultations on medical exemptions and the Marine Licence.

**ACTION: Phil - to invite the West of Orkney Windfarm to the next RIFG meeting**

## **6: Orkney Community Catch Beta Trial**

Katie Cubbon, from Orkney Crab, introduced herself and the Community Catch Beta pilot scheme. This is a new sustainability scheme to target small scale fisheries and the challenges they face - particularly the issues of certification of fisheries products. Certification standards are often difficult for small scale fisheries to meet. The Orkney project is one of 5 taking place with a focus on the small scale with boats less than 24m. Marks and Spencer are partly funding the trial. The idea is the study will feed into the standards that will be required. It is hoped that this will strengthen Orkney Crabs in the UK market and is looking, in particular at Brown Crab, Velvet Crab and Lobster. There are a range of standards that fisheries will be tested against, and these include social aspects (e.g. labour rights) as well as environmental and sustainability. Katie is looking for 12-15 fishers to engage with the trial which will involve skippers and crew filling out a worker's survey and providing information to help with self-assessment. These can be completed online. It is hoped the survey will take 15 minutes or so to complete. After the consultation Orkney Crab will develop a work plan to ensure we continue to meet the Community Catch standard. Katie hoped fishermen would contribute to the scheme.

Phil noted, unlike the MSC scheme, the cost was being met by the industry, not fishermen.

Kevin McDonnell noted that OFPO felt this approach was a better fit than previous initiatives. He hoped it was a good model for future consultations. He also noted it was not just Marks and Spencer who were involved but a range of European retailers.

**ACTION: Fishermen – those interested to contact Katie Cubbon by email [sustainable@orknecrab.com](mailto:sustainable@orknecrab.com)**

## **7: Fisheries Management and Conservation (FMAC) Inshore Fisheries Sub-Group & Proposed Measures to Improve Inshore Fisheries in Scotland Roadmap**

Phil has attended three FMAC meetings with in-depth discussions on the proposed road map and interim measures. FMAC are aware of regional differences of opinion in our waters. The Scottish Government is trying to reset relationships with fishers, the minister had noted that a “one size fits all” approach can’t be used. FMAC knows they need additional data and want more scientific assessment and advice. They don’t want restrictions that would deter new entrants. Phil noted that Blue Marine had requested to join but this had not yet been decided.

A meeting with Linda Blackadder revealed that Orkney had sent a lot of data to government agencies. Linda had made a direct appeal for the industry and academia to collaborate on data gathering. Phil is hoping that Orkney data can continue to be fed into the Marine Directorate.

Phil noted the various regions held different views about proposed crab landing regulations. There was concern about super crabbers (and difficulties in defining them) but they mostly tend to operate outwith inshore fisheries. Phil noted that FMAC recognise that there are different views on declining stock and more evidence is needed.

A local fisherman noted para 32 said there was a decline in crab and lobster landings but that there were record landings last year! Hannah explained the data was five years out of date. He asked what the point of printing the data was if it was so out of date. Phil noted that there needed to be more contextualisation of the figures. Another fisherman noted that fishers give information on landing every week to the MD. Andrew Livingston agreed that fishermen had stated that last year was the best lobster season for a decade.

The group expressed considerable disquiet about the lack of data on stock and the policies that flow from flawed data. Hannah noted that as a country we can’t monitor, evaluate and plan without significant investment in science.

## **8: Maritime & Coastguard Agency**

Habib introduced himself and explained part of his role was to engage with RIFGs. He hoped that his presence will provide better links with the MCA.

In relation to the age at which people can work on boats he noted a requirement that under 16s can engage in light duties but must have some training before they go to sea. He noted the response [ILO Work in fishing convention 2007 minimum age and protection for young persons on fishing vessels - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#) didn't define "light duties" though he emphasised the need for a good risk assessment.

Habib confirmed that a scupper height of less than 300mm will not necessarily fail an inspection provided the vessel passes a roll test. It was noted, by a fisherman, that certificates used to say 200mm as the safe height so wondered about those certificates and their validity now. Habib said the standard had changed but there was some leeway. The fisherman felt that some inspectors may rule differently to Habib!

A fisherman asked if it was possible to try people out on boats before they get their certificates due to the cost of getting them to see if they will like the job first. Andrew Livingston noted that new recruits have 3 months to gain their certificates provided they had the survival at sea accreditation.

Another fisherman asked if someone wanted a pleasure trip if they'd need a certificate; Habib said he would check but if the boat was not operating as a fishing boat at that time no certificates would be needed for passengers.

A fishing boat owner asked about the roll period when bilge keels are fitted. Habib noted that if bilge keels are fitted then one is tested for offset not a roll test.

A fisherman had indicated before the meeting that the sentiment is that many fishermen feel bullied by the number of rules and regulations put upon them. Habib noted that the MCA is between a rock and a hard place; they try to help, and it was hoped that the presence of Inspectorate staff at RIFG meetings will improve communications.

The group felt that more support was needed from the Scottish Government to promote fishing and to assist in the early stages of one's career.

## **9: Any Other Business**

A local fisherman noted the damage done to seabeds by renewables in Marine Protected Areas meant that Fishers will be the losers as alternative space will be designated as Marine Protected Areas. He felt the Government are scared of the environmental terrorists but not scared of fishers who lack political influence.

Phil stated that he did not believe that this was not the case.

Another fisherman asked about Priority Marine Features which might mean closing of waters to fishing.

## **11: Date of Next Meeting**

Tuesday 30th July 7.30pm at the NavSchool.

## **12: Close**

Phil closed the meeting thanking everyone for their attendance, especial Katie and Habib

Contact details for Phil Bennett (ORIFG Chair)



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