

NW Regional Inshore Fisheries Group

Minute of Meeting held in

Broadford Village Hall on the 13th February 2024

Attending:

Local skippers:	Alastair Mackinnon, Graham Eadie, Blair Mackinnon, WM Mackinnon, Ian Matheson, Ken MacPherson, Iain Urquhart, DJ Gilpin, Duncan MacAndrew, Alexander Tindall, James Corrigan, Ally Corrigan, James Robertson, Neil Macdonald, Martin Welch, David Grout, Phillip Wilkinson, Online: Scott Dutton Sandy and Vicky Mathers
Reps and Professionals	Neil Robertson Ross Sutherland Skye and Lochalsh Fisherman's Association Duncan MacAndrew, NW Responsible Fisherman's Association Dr Iona Hodgson, University of Stirling Alistair Philp, Scottish Creel Fishers Federation Alec Cadden, Marine Directorate, Portree Fisheries Office Jo Riley, Marine Directorate, Portree Fisheries Office Alastair Hamilton NW Regional Inshore Fisheries Group Online: Robyn Dutton, Ullapool Fishermen's Association Mairi – Mallaig and NW Fishermen's Association

The Chair opened the meeting, thanked the attendees, both in person and online and declared the meeting open. He introduced Dr Isla Hodgson, of the University of Stirling, who was attending as part of a project unrelated to the work of the NW Regional Inshore Fisheries Group.

The meeting considered the Minute of the previous NW Regional Inshore Fisheries Group meeting held in Ullapool and note the contents.

The meeting then considered the draft proposals from Marine Scotland to introduce measures designed to protect the stock within the Crab and Lobster fishery.

These were discussed at length and in a constructive manner with most parties contributing.

The general feeling was that it is naïve to attempt to connect stock reductions directly to overfishing as:

- Nature Scot, on their website, note that, possibly as a consequence of warming seas, there is a 398% increase in octopus stocks, a species that predates crustaceans. This is reflected in an "explosion" in the numbers of recently fed octopus being recovered, trapped in creels:
- The move to an increased landing size of 90mm was done in 2018 with an expected impact arising in 7-8 years. That impact will only be felt over the coming year or two. Anecdotal evidence is of a significant and increased population of juvenile crustaceans being returned as a result of this

change. These are not expected to be grown to size for a further year or two.

- There is disquiet about the current MLS being higher than neighbouring fisheries and this is permitting poaching of near-sized stock for landing elsewhere. There would be support for a move to a singular MLS across all Scottish fisheries and that that requires policing to prevent pilfering from neighbouring legislatures with a smaller MLS.
- The meeting was unanimous that berried hens are being returned to the sea without fail.
- The impact of the increasing density of aquaculture in northern waters is suspected of contributing significantly to stock depletion. The meeting would have welcomed MD Science resources being better invested in understanding issues such as the impact of fish farm chemicals on crustaceans than on simply measuring stocks. It was reported that this year has been the first year that the winter sea temperature has not fallen below 8 degrees, the temperature at which the sea lice population emanating from fish farms cannot survive. Their impact is expected to increase in future. Additionally the impact of filamentous algae in utrophic water on burrowing crustaceans is not understood despite some local scientific work being carried out.
- The date of the MD stock assessment data was seen to be significant in a number of regards:
 - There have been significant changes in both the environment and fishing activity since 2019. At the time of the data there were a number of super-crabbers fishing NW waters and contributing to stock depletion. These have since been sold to operate in other fisheries (China and Holland in particular) and the result is a measureable increase in stocks recently. There was little resistance at the meeting to keeping super-crabbers permanently out of the 12 mile limit.
 - Basing policy decisions on data five years old, largely gathered in Orkney and much of which states that there is insufficient data to classify stocks in our waters, will lead to poor quality decisions. In the absence of scientific data, landing information cannot be used to support decisions due to it's fluctuations based on external factors as boats come, go and diversify. (See above re the reduction in super-crabbers). The industry would welcome swift and accurate scientific data published within 2 years of collection and fails to understand why this cannot be attained.

The effect of electro magnetic waves from shore cables from turbine fields was discussed with learning from the experience in Lyme Bay welcomed. In particular their impact on brown crab migration routes, little of which is understood. The meeting has experienced several crabs, tagged in Orkney, being caught off western Skye. An example of the issue that was experienced Lyme Bay (English Channel) was presented and considered.

AOB:

A question was asked regarding the timing of issuing letters of derogation for wrasse fishing. In particular, as they were issued so close to the season, they left little time for investment prior to the commencement. The Chair agreed to raise this matter with the appropriate person in the Marine Directorate.

With no further business, the Chair thanked the attendees, and closed the meeting at 20 40.