



*Minutes of a General Meeting
held on Tuesday 30th January 2024*

Present: Philip Bennett: ORIFG Chair (PB), Ivan James (IJ), Arthur Geddes (AG), Colin Mowatt (CM), Neil Matheson (NM), Mark Shiner: Maritime Studies Department, Orkney College UHI (MS), Hannah Fennell: Orkney Fisheries Association (HF), Andrew Livingston: Marine Directorate Compliance (AL), Stuart Bell: Marine Directorate Planning via Zoom (SB) Andy Braunston (Minutes)

1: Welcome and Introductions

PB welcomed everyone to the meeting and noted that for the first time we have remote access to the meeting available by Zoom. This will, hopefully, make the meetings more accessible to those on the outer isles.

2: Apologies

Apologies were received from Tom Harcus, Sean Dennison, and Martin Foulis

3: Minutes from the Meeting held on 26th September 2023

These were accepted as an accurate record. It was agreed that in future minutes would be sent out to all those in attendance for their comments. Any amendments or corrections, received, would be incorporated into a 'final

draft' which again will be sent out to all participants and the wider RIFG membership. Should no other corrections be received before the date of the next meeting, the minutes will be deemed to have been approved.

4: Matters Arising from the Minutes not otherwise on the Agenda

Questions for MCA

The previous meeting had raised questions for the MCA:

- What activities can under 16 year olds do on boats?
- Clarification needed about the interpretation of MCA inspections
- Guidance is needed on how engines can be converted to green engines.

PB noted the MCA have not responded to an enquiry at the end of last year Christmas and has not chased them since. PB also asked whether it would be beneficial to invite a member (s) from the MCA to attend our next meeting?

AL, however, said he had clarification from the MCA that a scupper height of less than 300mm need not fail an inspection as long as the vessel passes a roll test.

MS noted that the NavSchool had been using hydrogen engines; the only place in the UK which had been doing this. He offered to give PB the details of the three MCA inspectors that are dealing with "future fuel" engines. One of the skippers noted the high cost in converting engines to future fuels.

Another noted there is money available from the Marine Directorate for greener engines - the definition being greener than what is already in place! The grant is up to £40,000.

Scallop Size

Feedback indicated that if locally, Orkney, decided to increase the size that could be landed it would disadvantage local fishermen as others could come, catch smaller scallops and land them elsewhere. It had been recommended this group ask Orkney Islands Council to withdraw the statutory instrument as it is about scallops landed in Orkney whereas it needs to govern the size of scallops caught on boats in Orkney waters. Fishers would welcome an increase in the size of scallops as the produce far more meat. This would, however, need to be nationwide size.

Dredgers

PB had followed up on the request, from the last meeting, about restricting large dredgers fishing in Orkney waters. Contact with Marine Directorate

stated that this would not be possible due to the right to roam. PB met with the previous chair of the OFA, Fiona Matheson, who reported previous efforts to get this applied failed. She stated that the process is costly and likely to fail as the "right to roam" covers all inshore waters.

5: RIFG Chair's Report

PB circulated a written report.

Aside from gaining his Personal Survival Techniques (STCW) certificate (basic sea survival ticket), he has been become involved with helping keeping the RIFG website up to date. PB continues to have one-on-one meetings with Fishermen, as required, and meetings with other stakeholders. He meets at least monthly with his four fellow RIFG chairs, but more often as the demands dictate. He feels the network of chairs is working exceptionally well and information flowing well. The chairs have also drafted a "Scotland's Regional Inshore Fisheries Group Network. Operational Plan 2024" which is hoped to be publish soon,

PB had met with Gillian Martin, the Minister for Energy and the Environment, twice and has the impression that she is interested in, and engaged with, the struggles that fishers have. She is interested in local fishers catching local fish, and traceability from sea to plate, building a local infrastructure with low food miles. She's invited the RIFG to put ideas forward.

All the Chairs attend the Fisheries Management and Conservation (FMAC) subgroup. All these presentations are already on the RIFG website for others to see. The main issues will be covered by Steuart's update but PB again suggested that fishermen look at the RIFG site for all the information.

Jessica Mather, the Marine Litter Officer for Orkney and Shetland is leaving but will be replaced. There has been a lot of lost gear washed up on the Evie shoreline and will need to work together to see solutions to recovering or clearing them.

PB has met with Neil Kermode and with Femke de Boer about the West of Orkney Wind farm. He feels the people behind the wind farm are still in presentation mode but not yet digging into the details. Neil Kermode's team has been passing various loading of power through unused undersea cables, from previous projects, gaging the Electro Magnetic Fields (EMF) the generate.

PB gave an update on various consultations. He has responded to the additional quota consultation urging quotas to keep local and flexible. Although there was little direct feedback about the Tracking and REM consultation; his main comments in his feedback were about ongoing costs and replacement equipment etc. PB noted there is a current consultation on

Medical Exemptions for Fishers on Vessels of 10m and under. Whilst this appears back to front, as all fishermen were told they needed their medical certificates by the end on November 2023, it is important that fishermen respond. It was agreed that there is still a lot more information required i.e. How long the grandfather rights will continue, what about fishermen with existing medical conditions who gained certificated through grandfather rights etc.

There are also 2 local consultations on tidal projects being proposed, at the Falls of Wallness, by Oceanstar Tidal Project and Seastar Tidal Project.

OIC had received extensive feedback, from Marine Directorate, on their Orkney Marine Plan, indicating it was too large and too complicated. OIC are pushing back as they feel they need that level of detail. As an aside, PB noted a change of personnel in OIC Marine Planning with the retirement of Dr Shona Turnbull and Daniel Morris (Danny) now becoming the Marine Planner. A new graduate planner is being recruited.

The National Marine Plan was last updated in 2015 and is now being renewed. PB noted that in the 134-page document, section 6, 11 pages, was devoted to Sea Fishing. Fisheries are mentioned 188 times in the document. He has been invited to be on a group feeding into the next version of this. This will also be on the RIFG website and PB would like fishermen to give feedback to him.

6. Marine Directorate Update

SB updated the meeting about the Marine Directorate.

Review of the RIFG Network

A light review in 2023 was concerned to bring in new chairs, increase transparency, and to ensure that views of stakeholders were well represented. Part of the review was that there would be a substantial further review of the Network's effectiveness assisted by a steering group. This further review will run from January until June 2024 and will consist of a paper review, interviews, and an online survey. It is hoped the research will help improve the RIFG in the future.

Fisheries Management and Conservation Forum

SB outlined this is a longstanding group for those with material interest in fisheries in Scotland. It's different than the RIFG as it has a wider stakeholder group including conservation groups. The RIFG chairs are present to ensure that a voice from the fishing industry is reflected in the discussion. Stock assessments about crab and lobster are not encouraging but this data dates from 2019. A lot of fishers are saying that there is too much gear in the water.

Recent discussion with the minister focused on this. There is a need to ensure there is a sustainable future for the fishing industry.

SB noted a number of measures the Marine Directorate wishes to engage with fishers about:

- Longer term consultation on a package of measures to improve health of key inshore stocks
- working with our scientists to update evidence base
- consider use of interim measures from this year which would improve these fisheries.

AL noted that SB had mentioned that everyone would know of the contents of the stock assessment report but he felt many people in the room had not seen this. Many people at the meeting agreed they'd not seen this stock assessment. PB highlighted there are presentations on this in the FMAC section of the RIFG website. AL felt it was important everyone had a shared understanding before engaging in consultation.

One of the fishermen wondered what the "package of measures" might consist of? Whilst noting that this would be the subject of discussion with fishers initially, SB highlighted the consultation last year on catching indicated that 85% were in favour of creel limits. However, it was understood that ensuring compliance with input controls would be difficult without vessel tracking. When asked about whether this might include shellfish quotas, SB said that Marine Directorate Fisheries Management Strategy acknowledges that the government is prepared to consider the use of quotas for non-quota-species but any such thing would be subject to full public consultation. Another fisherman noted that there would be no stock or gear problems if part time fishers were banned. He felt there are twice as many part time fishers as there are full time ones. PB observed that various presentations he has seen, stressed the need for more scientific data and for it to be based regionally. They also look at the impact of vessels outwith the inshore fisheries limit of 12 miles and how they affect stock.

AL felt that the stock assessment was something of a bombshell and more background is needed about what the data shows - even though it is understood the crab assessment is lacking data'. SB noted that these are in the public domain. PB gave some headline details from the stock assessment noting the figures are out of date given how long ago the data was collected.

One of the fishermen asked when the review of the MPA happen - it was promised for 2024. He noted that it was meant to have robust science but there's no sign of it yet. He also noted, again, that there's no sense of what the proposed or interim measures might be. SB suggested Marine Scotland wanted ideas from fishers. HF noted that it would be better to have a greater

idea of what diversification might look like before being asked for ideas for interim measures.

SB asked if a national measure for scallop size would be useful; members felt that this would be useful if the national measure went up to Orkney's size.

PB felt a more in-depth discussion at this meeting would be useful but, echoing HF, after more information was available.

7 Proposed New Training Requirements

MS noted that each contracting state to the International Maritime Convention has their own requirements for training within a wider, worldwide, framework. MS noted that the Marine and Coastguard Agency (MCA) are not yet able to answer all the questions that we have. MS handed out some slides from an information session he had attended to try and give an overview of new training requirements.

Seafish will no longer be managing fishers' training. The database of fishers' training that Seafish maintain will be passed to the MCA.

The basic training will change to the International Convention's Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers (STCW) Personal Survival Techniques, First Aid and Fire Fighting. There will also be a two day course on emergency procedures, prevention of pollution and prevention of shipboard accidents. Much of this is what the Nav School teach already. The Nav School is registered with the MCA but MS wonders how smaller training institutions will cope with the requirement to register. If a fisher has the old basic training there is no need to do the new. It is not yet clear if there will be a 5 year fresher course but there is a reasonable chance that the sea survival course will need to be refreshed. HF noted that the Scottish Fishermen's Federation is very firm that grandparenting rights for previous training is to be honoured.

MS noted that under 7m skippers will have to undertake a stability course. It will be voluntary to start with but mandatory within 3-5 years.

Crews on a vessel landing abroad who require a STCW F certificate can exchange Seafish Certificates to the MCA to get the STCW F.

The Seafish voluntary scheme for 7m-16.4m Skipper Certificates will be replaced with an MCA mandatory scheme. Grandfather rights for all existing skippers will be given.

Certificates of Competency - Seafish Gold Certificate holders can convert to this. New Skippers will be required to study and pass MCA exams in Stability,

Navigation and Safety Management and to have had 1 year of sea time. HF noted that it has yet to be resolved that these are to be free of charge and that it's yet to be resolved if people have to apply or if they will be automatic.

MS further noted the fishing qualifications needed for over 16.5m saying he'd send this to PB to pass on.

8. RIFG Website

PB noted that many documents of interest are now appearing on the website; particularly consultations and reports. He asked that Fishermen take the time to look at the site and make suggestions to any other content they would find helpful.

9. Marine Protected Area (MPA) and Special Protected Area (SPA) Management

PB and HF attended a meeting with Marine Scotland on 11th January which was billed as a "MPA and PMF Management Update" although there was a document in circulation that referred to "Stakeholder Information Meetings". Subsequent to the meeting, PB had received a document "to aid discussion" which had not been shared before. The document appears to be an abbreviated copy of the one circulating between fishermen.

PB noted that restrictions on the use set nets and pelagic long lines to "reduce or mitigate pressures" on MPAs and SPAs could affect fishers in Orkney badly; there is a fear, amongst fishermen, that this would mean that all forms of fishing being eventually banned. Other fishermen had communicated with PB saying that birds and humans can thrive together but these measures will grievously affect fishing. HF noted that the paper is confusing but did note options to reduce pressures from long lines - e.g. avoiding bird breeding seasons.

It was noted, by a fisherman, that the MPA review needs to happen first with some robust science before bans/restrictions are introduced. AL noted that the RIFG need to constantly push for robust science to feed into these discussions. AL further suggested the group find out if this is a pre-consultation exercise or if this is the consultation. PB felt this was a pre-consultation. AL suggested that the ideas about robust science must be the response to the pre-consultation stage. AL suggested that RIFG ask for definitions of "long line" and "pelagic long line" so that it is clear what is being consulted on. AL further suggested the RIFG ask what technical measures would be required to permit the use of long lines. The fisherman pointed out that for many species the breeding season is the same as the fishing season. PB pointed out that another fisherman had raised this as well. It was stated that fishermen could not understand why the government wanted to destroy an industry. In general,

the group expressed distrust and unease with the figures cited in the consultation paper.

PB, in summarising, noted that we need local robust scientific evidence, greater clarity in definitions and which mitigations are acceptable. PB also asked for any specific feedback which he could use in his responses.

10 Medication Exemption Consultation

PB noted that a Medication Exemption is available if a fisher has worked on a vessel of no more than 10m for 4 weeks or more between 30th November 2022 and 29th November 2023. It was, however, unclear of how long this exemption will last for or if one has to register a current certificate to get grandfather rights. PB will seek greater clarification.

11. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

12. Date of Next Meeting

Tuesday 30th April 2024. 7.30pm

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