



RIFG meeting minutes

Date: 05-06-24

Time: 12.30

Location: In Person UHI Scalloway, Room F8 and Online via Teams

Chair: Hilary Burgess

Attendees: Eleanor Hutcheon (EH)- UHI Shetland

Sheila Keith (SK)- SFA

John Robertson (JR)- SSMO Inshore Coordinator

Callum MacGregor (MD)

Mark Berry (MB) -MD

Nina Valentine- (NV) -SFF

Alastair Cooper (AC)- SSMO Chair

Chevonne Angus (CA)- UHI Shetland

Leonard Johnson (LJ) Fishing Forward

Alastair Inkster (AI) Fishing Forward Chair

Agenda Items

1. Welcome, apologies, minutes and actions from the previous meeting

Apologies: Kathryn Allan, Beth Mouat, Leander Harlow, Adam Nutt

Minutes- Noted that two fishers at the last meeting joined via Teams anonymously.

ACTION – to take advice on whether we would ask online meeting members to sign in with a name.

minutes approved

Actions from previous meeting:

- **Combining Shetland inshore data with MD Data.** Has been some communication between Shaun Fraser and Dr Coby Needle to be continued by UHI. Action closed
- **Shetland RIFG to contribute input to lend-a lab kit contents.** Work so far has been on an aquaculture lab. Action carried forward.
- **SFA request for more input to Marine Science and Innovation Strategy** – waiting on feedback from MD science yet. Ongoing.
- **Links with Anstruther Fishing Museum** – HB has met remotely with Julia Branch Scottish Fisheries Museum learning and engagement officer. Advised on improvements to be made to school materials.

2. Marine Directorate Policy Discussion

Prohibition on Landing of Berried lobster

- SSMO are supportive of the measure and speed of introduction. This complements the SSMO ban which was introduced in 2022. Increases the scope of the ban in Shetland to 12nm which closes a potential loophole.
- Group would like to see clarity on enforcement measures as soon as possible. Currently enforcement will be based on visual inspection. SSMO understands chemical tests to detect scrubbing now used for prosecutions in England.

ACTION – Ask MD on any plans to introduce chemical testing for berried lobsters

- Trucks are not wanting berried lobsters that have been scrubbed before sale, as they do not travel well.
- The majority of fishers are doing the right thing. Important for MD enforcement to have the resources and tools that they need. Need industry buy in and assistance.
- NV raised the scientific trial on the Solway Firth. Concern about other areas where evidence base may be incomplete. Concern from other group members about reputational damage and eNGO back lash resulting from the Solway Firth trial.

Consultation following interim measures

ACTION – Ask MD on how future measures covered in consultation in Q4 will impact the SSMO? Would future regulations, sit above the SSMO regulations?

- Discussion on the difficulties of assessing creel numbers.
- SSMO would like to see action taken on unmarked creels.

Remote Electronic Monitoring

- Discussion around how REM is being introduced
- JR ‘non active’ scallop dredgers not being entitled to SG funded REM kits (value £4-5,000) but they are still entitled to dredges under SSMO licenses.
- JR Has been a problem with winch sensors on smaller boats picking up vibrations. Replacement hydraulic sensors seem to be more robust and accurate.

ACTION – Ask MD when the under 10m tracker consultation is coming out? What is the timetable

Inshore Squid Survey

- SK Shetland Squid fishery needs to be sorted ASAP
- Issue has been raised repeatedly and MD been given a lot of evidence
- SK Any earnings for fishers from the pilot will not compensate from the years of lost fishing.
- HB feed back from Kerrie Campbell is that more resource is to be allocated to this in the next couple of weeks enabling the pilot to move forward.
- SK is a member of Squid Pilot Project Board
- HB has forwarded Shetland Inshore Fish Survey results to Kerrie Campbell
- CA has put Shaun in contact with Kerrie Campbell
- HB would encourage Shetland boats to sign up to pilot

Action – HB to continue to raise the importance of moving forward with the pilot as soon as possible.

Changes to role of MD officials in RIFG group meetings (standing attendance of MD officials at RIFG meetings will not be the norm)

- Perception that MD pulling back from RIFG commitments when previously members had thought MD was committed to strengthening rather than undermining the groups. Giving the wrong signal. Step backwards.
- Loss of direct access to government
- There was better access to government 5-6 years ago
- Having Stuart Bell present at meetings enabled some questions to be answered immediately and took the heat out of them. Sometimes he couldn't answer but sometimes he could and that was it dealt with
- Writing down issues – they may be corrupted, and delay over a few weeks issues may be festering. Things can be taken out of context.
- Not possible now to go onto MD website and find out who is responsible, and who to contact for which area of work.
- Shetland is different with 3 existing organisations feeding into government. There is a need to re-assess how these groups feed into government.

ACTION – Feed- back views to MD

Labelling fish boxes at point of landing not at point of sale

- AI Would like to see a quota tracking system but impossible as long as unlabelled boxes are landed.
- AI Only sampling 8-10% of what's landed
- MB Same sampling system used for local and foreign boats
- AI Concern that foreign boats landing in England might have been taking in drugs. Would like to see precautionary presence of drugs detection dogs at the piers.

Box labelling action raised at first meeting of Shetland RIFG group and MD responded by letter

3. Update from the MCA from Adam Nutt

Postponed owing to 'period of sensitivity' in the run up to the July 24 election. Carried forward to next meeting.

4. Update from the SSMO Alastair Cooper and John Robertson

- Shellfish sector doing OK at the moment – the weather has been better and the velvets have started moving about and being caught.
- Main issues around funding. Hope to run SSMO office out of fees from fishers. Problem with this is the Shellfish Act 1967 which requires that all license holders are treated equally. This may mean that it is not possible for SSMO to charge license holders in proportion to the value of their licenses. This requires further guidance from MD. Facing the need to make a decision this year the SSMO has gone back to a flat fee to avoid the possibility of legal challenge.
- The cost of these fees is unique to Shetland fishers however it gives access to a sustainable fishery which can be marketed as such. The accreditation gives some increased access to market and increased value per kg.
- SSMO are concerned about challenges from eNGOs to the MSC accreditation process. This would seem to be contrary to the goals of the eNGOs as the SSMO is a leader in sustainable fisheries. Counter argument is that eNGOs are fundamentally against dredging which pits them against a sustainable accreditation for a scallop fishery.
- Funding for science is difficult. SIC currently will not provide funding for the scallop survey. CA Getting funding for routine science is very difficult – easier for a project which is new and innovative.
- SSMO would like gain status as a statutory consultee for planning applications

5. Update from the SFA Sheila Keith

Main concerns from their members are;

- Spatial Squeeze. Fishers are being forced to shift operations suffer impacts to their livelihoods. This represents an era of 'Sea Clearances' which can be compared to 'Highland Clearances' of the past.
- AI Must not underestimate the ongoing stress spatial squeeze is causing fishers.
- The local Marine Plan would need to take into account fishing grounds especially scallop grounds.
- Super (large) salmon farms are covering scallop grounds.
- AC Shetland Regional Marine Plan has been waiting for 3 years for adoption. HB heard from Simon Pallant – they continue to engage with MD staff on making amendments to get it in a position for adoption but 2 senior staff members in SG have left which is likely to cause further delay. AC The Shetland marine plan identifies fishing areas but it would need to identify hot spots for fishing so when it comes to applications for planning these hot spots can be identified.
- AC Examples of a contested area -Scottish Sea Farms developments, Fish Holm, where there is a sheltered scallop fishery, a power cable to come across from Yell and

a maerl bed to be protected at Lunna Holm. There has also been wave recording east of Whalsay.

- AC Large aquaculture projects are putting pressure on other areas. More co-ordinated approach is needed. Inshore SIC councillors must give a works license which is an opportunity for fishing industry to input the process. SSMO as a regulatory body should be able to be listed as a statutory consultee.
- Aquaculture moving into offshore sites
- AI It may be illegal to deny fishers access to their traditional fishing grounds. (legal work has been done in this area by Australia's indigenous people on their rights to natural resources)
- Need for co-ordinated effort in Shetland across the community, SIC and seafood industries to achieve independent scientific monitoring of impacts of offshore wind developments.

6. Update from Compliance

No further issues to put forward

7. Issues from Shetland Fishermen-Hilary Burgess

- Fishers continue to be angry regarding large boats trawling close inshore with foreign crew. CA – this is an issue which people are increasingly speaking about as these large boats are very visible from shore.

ACTION – continue to raise this as an ongoing and serious issue with MD. Fishers should phone Lerwick Fishery Office with concerns.

- AI has had requests from fishers that the Shetland RIFG meeting can be held in the evening to make it easier for fishers to access. HB – meeting had been arranged at lunchtimes as a compromise between what is easy for fishers and being able to get relevant officials from MD to the meeting. Happy to move to evening meetings if that can work in OK. JR – SSMO alternates evening and afternoon meetings.

ACTION – introduce some evening meetings for Shetland RIFG

8. Shetland RIFG Project update and discussion on future project options

- **Inshore fisheries survey-** CA Shetland Inshore Fisheries Survey 2023 has been completed and results are available online <https://pure.uhi.ac.uk/en/publications/shetland-inshore-fish-survey-sifs-2023-summary-of-catch-rates-siz>
- **RIFG projects pending** – Desk based study investigating the age structure, population dynamics and nursery habitats of commercial fish species in Shetland's inshore areas. Project not successful in gaining funding in 2023/4 cycle. Hope to hear in next couple of weeks if re-application for funding in 2024/5 has been successful.
- **Shetland Marine Virtual Reality Outreach Project**

Purchase of VR headsets and a 360 camera with dive case. Application for RIFG project funding likely to be unsuccessful. Possibility of funding from other sources for example lottery application process requires additional information from project partners. Will be carrying out a trial visit to Fernlea care home in Whalsay with the VR headsets and some fishing heritage objects. Have also made initial contact with the Shetland dive club about taking some local 360 dive footage which could be played through the headsets.

Camera and case approx. £1000. VR headsets x5 £5,000 and software to transfer the footage to headsets £800

ACTION- HB to follow up RIFG project funding application and EH and HB to trial the VR headsets in the community

- **Schools Outreach Project**

HB has visited a Junior High School and held a fishing themed lesson with S2 and S3 classes. This included a quiz based around sustainable fishing in Shetland, a discussion on careers in fishing and marine science and a role play based negotiation exercise on a marine contested area theme. The class went down very well with the pupils. HB reported initial thoughts from the young people from the careers discussion and will provide a full report when the project is completed.

ACTION- HB to continue to work with EH on VR outreach projects including assisting with fishing themed activities at the Schools Science Fair.

9. Just Transition Commission Visit

Commissioners visited Shetland 15th May. Independent advisory body with a remit to provide scrutiny and advice to the SG to ensure Scotland has a fair and resilient transition to net zero. They held a round table for the marine environment attended by SK and HB. SK gave a very strong presentation giving the commissioners a strong understanding on the impact of offshore wind developments on the Shetland fishing grounds. SK also emphasised the importance of the fishing industry in Shetland. The Just Transition Commission Report should be out in the next couple of months. This is advisory only.

10. AOCB

Discussion around visit of 'Ghost Fishing' group to Shetland

- Seemed to be a low key visit relative to 2023
- There is an opportunity to reduce the stigma of lost gear amongst fishers
- There is an opportunity to increase engagement with Ghost Fishing around pre-visit publicity to look for notifications.
- Also issues nationally around recycling facilities for fishing gear. In Shetland they are used as fuel for the waste heat plant.
- KIMO does a lot of work locally
- Discussion around ways to reduce isolation and stress amongst fishermen

11. Date of next meeting

Propose to hold in early October