



Minutes of a General Meeting held on Tuesday 30th July 2024

Present: Phil Bennett (chair), Fishers: Arthur Geddes, Neil Matheson, Martin Foulis, Ronnie Norquoy, Eoin Sinclair, Sean Denison. Jack Farnham, West of Orkney Windfarm, Christine Rosie, Orkney Fish Producers, Andy Braunston (Minutes).

1: Welcome

Phil welcomed everyone to the meeting particularly Abhinav Chaudhary from the MCA and Jack Farnham from the West of Orkney Wind Farm.

2: Apologies

Apologies were received from Kevin Macdonell (Orkney Fish Producers Organisation), Hannah Fennell (Orkney Fisheries Association), Katie Cubbon (Community Catch Pilot Scheme Co-ordinator) and Andrew Livingston (Marine Directorate Compliance)

3: Minutes of the Meeting held on 30th April 2024

Subject to a correction changing "MCA" to "Marine Directorate" in point 6 and the change of "big renewables companies" to "environmental terrorists" the minutes were accepted as an accurate record.

One of the skippers asked for speedier production of the minutes; Phil stated that there had been an unavoidable delay with the last minutes and agreed that minutes will be out faster in future.

ACTION: Phil to ensure minutes are produced and sent out timeously in future.

4: Matters Arising not otherwise on the Agenda

None

5: West of Orkney Windfarm Presentation

Jack introduced himself. The West of Orkney Windfarm (WOW) is one of four fixed-bottom ScotWind windfarms. WOW will have a generating capacity of 2250MW. The centre of the farm will be 36km (19 nautical miles) to the shore. It will connect to the grid at Spittal in Caithness and onshore planning permission was granted in June 2024. It is hoped that offshore planning permission will be granted by March 2025. There may, in the future, be a link to Flotta. WOW has been engaging with local communities and have started to engage with local fishers.

Construction should start in 2027 with first power being generated in 2029. The project will be constructed in stages. The mean depth to the seabed is 60m. They are following the shallower banks and avoiding deeper waters. Jack noted that the wind speeds are amongst the highest in the UK and the swell height and period between the swells is a challenge. The construction vessels will be huge and look like an oil or gas rig. Jack explained that the WOW is working with EMEC to look at ways to extend the maintenance period in the year. Boats the size of the Hamnavoe will be used to access the turbines to maintain them. 115 technicians, employed for 30 years, operating out of Scrabster, will be needed.

One of the fishermen felt that the Windfarm should be building the deep water quay but Jack noted that operating a multi generation asset wasn't their business. They would, however, be building the maintenance base.

Jack noted they had done a lot of work over the last 2.5 years with the Commercial Fisheries Working Group to look at survey and assessment methods. Post application they have been concerned with survey updates and now they will be looking at fisheries management and mitigation strategies. A seabed survey starts at the end of this week. The next job, a cone penetration test, will involve a probe being pushed into the seabed to undertake tests. In 2025 there will be some boreholes dug near the Caithness shore. Construction won't occur across the entire site simultaneously. During construction, when the cells are being lifted (weighing up to 4,000 tonnes), there will be a safety zone of 500m around those heavy lifts. When the turbines are up in the pre-commissioning stage there is a 50m safety zone. Once the turbines are up and producing power there is no safety zone. The turbines will be at least 1km apart, probably more. The turbines will either be on a monopile driven into the seabed or on a four-legged structure, rather like an oil rig. Construction will be likely in April to October due to weather.

A skipper asked about what information they have around how the turbines will have on the natural movement of living sea life. Jack said that a mathematical model using 25 years of wind experience had informed their assessments. A skirt of crushed stone will protect against scour. The energy taken out of the waves will be very small. Shipping and navigation surveys have looked at the effect on fish and bird life. The skipper also felt that they would have no crab migration. Jack noted that there were concerns about the electromagnetic fields on crabs. Jack explained that cables are ploughed in, laid, and then gravel and sand is pushed back over them. A study by St Abb's looked at the Electromagnetic Field exposure on crabs. Laying cables to 3m below the surface shows the background EMF drops to below the natural background level. Jack thinks that this will mean the EMF shouldn't register with crabs. Buried cables are protected from anchors and trawlers.

Jack noted that some boulders need to be cleared from the seabed in some parts of the site. He noted that the boulders would be moved in consultation with fishers. They may have a boulder plough to push away some of the smaller boulders. This will allow the cable plough to operate. The export cable is ploughed and installed in one run. They wish, however, to minimise boulder removal. In the export cable corridor, they need to clear about a football pitch worth of boulders, and about 4 football pitches worth in the development site.

Another fisherman noted that crabs can live under smaller boulders. Jack noted that the survey indicates across Stormy Bank that there is sandy gravel. A fisherman asked about the choice of location of the export cable corridors. Jack said it was a mix of onshore and offshore constraints and consultation with fishers in Caithness.

Turning to next steps, Jack noted that assuming the Scottish Government gives consent they will develop a fisheries Management and Mitigation Strategy which will include consultation with fishers.

A skipper asked how much research had been done about moving fishing gear. Jack noted there had been an environmental impact assessment. The skipper was concerned as he knows where other wind farms have had some adverse environmental impacts.

A fisherman asked if a survey had been undertaken around the wind farms at Beatrice to see what effect they have had on the seabed. Jack noted that post construction surveys have been conducted for birds and mammals. The fisherman also pushed about surveys for scallops and other bottom feeding fish.

Fishermen were relieved to hear there is no ban on fishing in the WOW aside from during construction for safety reasons.

One of the fishermen asked if would take place during and after construction. Jack noted this would happen as the government will insist on environmental management plans. They have found Skate but no evidence of eggs so it's not clear if they are breeding in this field.

The fisherman also asked about the effect of drilling fluid on sea life – Jack said the assumption was it should not have any adverse effect.

Jack was thanked for his presentation.

6: Maritime and Coastguard Agency

Before the meeting Abhinav had been asked if surveyors were correctly interpreting the regulations about fire extinguishers on vessels. Abhinav quoted the regulations and said that the attending surveyor should email the relevant regulations if a fisher needed them. He also said that people can email the Aberdeen office¹ to get fuller details if needed. He noted that the regulations on fire extinguishers have not changed in the new code. Equivalence is granted at no charge provided the existing arrangement is not unsafe or unsuitable.

There can be problems if a previous owner has modified a boat – the current owner is responsible for putting things right. Abhinav stressed that if fishers were concerned about the surveys, they were encouraged to drop him an email².

A boat owner noted a concern about the additional cost added for survey purposes. Abhinav noted the cost would come down if changes are like-for-like but whenever there is a change or modification on the vessel the MCA are required to attend outside normal renewal. He stressed that they try and keep the charges as low as possible by, for example, grouping Orkney jobs together so the costs can be shared. He noted, however, some costs are outwith their control but that they are open to representations about costs.

A fisherman asked about why there would be a charge for like-for-like. Abhinav said it depended on the type of material the hull is made of and how, for example, if welding would be done by approved workers. But a like for like would not affect weight so no stability tests would be needed. However, even on a like-for-like checks are needed to ensure that the work has been done safely.

Phil asked about the possibility of training including skippers getting a fundamental understanding of the subject of stability of vessels and how modifications can seriously affect stability. Abhinav thought this would be useful and noted there are some videos of roll tests which shows their importance.

Abhinav answered a range of technical questions on roll tests.

Note: Following the meeting, Abhinav sent the following statement to the Chair: “Update and correction since last meeting, we will be roll testing vessels as a default weather bilge keels or not (except catamarans).”

¹ Following the meeting Abhinav confirmed the following email aberdeen.fishing@mcga.gov.uk

² Following the meeting Abhinav confirmed the following email aberdeen.fishing@mcga.gov.uk

7: RIFG Chair's Report

Phil stated that due to time constraints he would only very briefly go through his report but invited questions, by email, should anyone want clarification on any point. He stated that the period had been quieter than usual and informed the meeting that he had a telephone conversation with the newly appointed Deputy Harbour Master, Bradley Drummond. As Phil asked a lot of specific questions, Bradley had requested Phil send an email with the questions, so that he could respond after gathering information from his staff and colleagues.

ACTION: Fishermen to contact Phil should they have any issues they want Phil to raise with the Harbours department.

8: FMAC Subgroups.

Again, due to the time constraint of the evening, Phil stated he would again be brief in his feedback to the meeting.

Phil had been to two of these subgroups, the Inshore Subgroup and the Scallops Subgroup. It had been announced at both meeting that there was going to be a review of the structure of FMAC to ascertain whether the current group and the subgroups meet the needs of the fishing industry.

The Inshore subgroup was a one agenda meeting and looked at the 'roadmap' [for the improvement of inshore fisheries management] and how it will be taken forward. Phil distributed the Marine Directorate's discussion paper and stated that the minutes of the meeting, which can be found on the RIFG website, gives a sense of the discussions had.

The Scallop subgroup had not met since March 2023 as it had been waiting for the new Scallop stock assessment to come. A lot of discussion has been around the remote electronic monitoring that Scallop fishers are now required to have on their boats.

One of the fishermen asked about the 6-mile limit for the largest creel vessels and Phil responded that this was a topic discussed at the inshore subgroup. The fishermen also felt the problem was the East Coast of with lots of part-time fishers catching lobster who don't know what they are doing leaving their gear in the water, for long periods of time, which causes harm. He noted that Fisheries Officers are not checking the buyers.

Another Fisherman noted the fact the minister in Holyrood had said that there hadn't been time to assess the impact on inshore fishers of the 6-mile limit and so her protestations that she wanted the industry to flourish were unbelievable.

9: Community Catch Update

Katies update was distributed to all present, but this was not discussed due to time restraints

10: Measures to Improve Inshore Fisheries in Scotland – Next Steps?

Phil had electronically distributed Marine Directorate's discussion paper to all ORIFG members and had printed out copies for those in attendance.

Phil noted that this paper needs careful consideration and that fishermen could get a fuller flavour of the current discussions, from the minutes of the FMAC Inshore Subgroup, which can be found on the RIFG website.

ACTION: PB to consider holding an online discussion meeting to look at this subject

11 Any Other Business

11a: Orkney Islands Regional Marine Plan: Consultation Draft.

Orkney's Draft Local Marine Plan had now been signed off by Scottish Government and the OIC will be starting a 12 week consultation on Thursday [1st August]. The process of getting the plan signed off was described as "challenging and frustrating" and, although much of the plan remains intact, obligating words had been removed and there had been a watering down. In most cases the word "should" is used rather than "must".

As the document is 149 pages long, Phil only distributed printed copies of the 'Commercial Fishing' section of the Draft Plan, and he stated that the entire document and other related documents will be on the council's web site.

Phil noted that all other Sector Policies (except Sector Policy 6: Zero carbon fuels, and oil and gas transition) state that "... development and/or activities should avoid, minimise and/or appropriately mitigate significant adverse impacts on: ... other coastal and marine users including, but not limited to, commercial fishing...". Again, Phil noted that the word used is 'should' not 'must'.

A local fisherman noted that no fishing organisations to feed into this plan. Another fisherman queried why the RIFG hadn't been consulted. [The plan was originally drafted before Phil came into post and, therefore, he cannot respond to this.]

Due to time constraints of the meeting, Phil advised fishermen to look at the full document, and other related documents, when they are published.

ACTION: PB to post these documents on the RIFG website when they are published.

11b: Development of the EMEC test sites

A skipper asked about the expansion of EMEC's site at Billia Croo which he believed is becoming a danger to shipping. He felt they need to clear up the mess they've made before they are given any more seabed.

11c: Marine Protected Areas (MPAs)

A skipper wondered if the Marine Protected Area (MPA) legislation is moving forward following the consultations and suggestions that the use of Gill Nets [and long lines] would be prohibited in these areas. Phil responded that to his knowledge there had been no advancement of the idea of restricting the use of Gill nets in these areas. He also noted that he had not had any further engagement or information from Marine Directorate Conservation, it had all gone very quiet.

It was also noted, by a fisherman, that environmentalists wanted to increase the size of protected areas to compensate for the fact that Wind Farms are getting bigger. Phil stated that it is his understanding that MPAs areas etc are already designated, and Marine Directorate Conservation are looking to improve the management of these areas rather than introduce new areas. Environmental organisations may 'want' more protected areas, but the fishing industry needs to stand firm and challenge any such push.

It was also noted that many people can have parts of the sea reserved for them but that fishers needed this too.

11d: One of the skippers said that he had spoken to the East of Orkney Windfarm. He noted that he doesn't often fish there very often but the decisions about fishing access hadn't yet been made but had gained advice about how compensation might work if access is inhibited, or gear must be moved.

12: Date of Next Meeting

The next proposed date is Tuesday 22nd October at 7.30pm

13: Close

Phil called the meeting to a close and thanked Jack and Abhinav for giving up their time to join the meeting, and hoped everyone, found these contributions useful. Phil also thanked all everyone else for coming along tonight and the contributions they made.

Contact details for Phil Bennett (ORIFG Chair)



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<https://rifg.scot/>