



Minutes for Shetland Regional Inshore Fisheries Group Meeting

Date: 31-10-2014

Time: 12.00

Location: UHI Shetland Scalloway Campus, Rm F9. Online via Teams

Chair: Hilary Burgess

Attendees: Sheila Keith (SK)- SFA

John Robertson (JR)- SSMO Inshore Coordinator

Barbara Watt (BW)- Marine Directorate

Shaun Fraser (SF)- UHI Shetland

Louise Thomason (LT)- UHI Shetland

Adam Nutt (AN)- Technical Manager MCA

Kirsten Leahy (SL)- SFF

Eleanor Hutcheon

Daniella Dickson (DD)- Business Manager MCA

Minute taker: Kathryn Allan- UHI Shetland

Agenda Items

- **Welcome, apologies, minutes and actions from the previous meeting**

Apologies: Leander Harlow, Alastair Inkster, Sydney Johnson

Minutes- JR had one correction. Minutes approved with corrections for meeting on June 5th 2024

Actions from previous meetings:

- **Ask MD on any plans to introduce chemical testing for berried lobsters-** no plan at this time
- **Ask MD on how future measures covered in consultation in Q4 will impact the SSMO?** no intention that it would impact on what SSMO is doing.

- **Ask MD when under 10m tracker consultation is coming out? What is the timetable?**
Currently delayed expected to be last quarter of the year
- **HB to continue to raise the importance of moving forward with the squid pilot as soon as possible.** Squid pilot project proposal has been published by MD, there is a meeting with Cara Buchan from Marine Directorate tomorrow (1st Nov).

Outline of project -Squid pilot aim to collect data related to bycatch cod, marine species and the impact on the wider environment and gain more information and understanding of squid fishing practices. Monitor fishery from start of June. On board observer sampling. Extent of whitefish bycatch. Fishers measure discard. REM GPS trackers/tally book scheme by haul. Mesh size – vessels can only carry out one type of trawl at a time. Survey spawning grounds – egg production, stock size location and seasonality. Seabed surveys to assess the effects of small mesh trawling. 12 month trial. Start 2025. Limited number of vessels. Stakeholder co management group Identify trial areas, participants, gear, conditions. Approach NatureScot for formal advice. Conduct appropriate assessments- BRIA, SEIA, Islands impacts and alignment with overarching policy. Data protection, terms and conditions.

HB- Are there any points which should be raised?

A local fisher emailed SK with the following comments-

“Has been fishing squid for over 15 years and the closure of the fishery is devastating to their boat and puts pressure on scallop stocks. It is a poor decision by the Scottish Government as squid gear has no bottom contact and the squid stock are not under pressure. If there is a stop on using small mesh on squid are there repercussions on other fisheries? Trial on mud areas mean Shetland wouldn't be part of it. Feels Shetland disadvantaged over other areas.”

HB asked if the data shown on the map within the pilot proposal was correct for Shetland as it only shows one data point? Attendees unanimously agreed that this is not representative of the current fishing activity. They were surprised by the lack of representation for Shetland on the squid proposal. Not sure where MD got their data from. MD should be able to see the sales of squid on the sales documents. It was also noted that groups representing the fishers have been giving MD information on the number of vessels fishing since the closure was first started.

BW was asked if they could contact Cara Buchan before the meeting tomorrow to raise concerns on the data? BW responded that they would be happy to do that.

The pilot data points mainly focuses on Moray Firth which leads to opening squid in designated mud areas which is an issue in Shetland and other areas where mud isn't a prevalent biotope and does not correspond to squid fishing grounds in the isles. It was added that attempts had been raised in the past with MD that Shetland was a good venue for updating the science on squid fishing grounds.

HB asked where it mentions in the pilot proposal “Where data used on total landings of squid is where it is more than 70% of the catch...” is this an issue?

Observers have seen in the past it's a very clean catch, unlikely to find much bycatch amongst it as gear isn't touching the bottom so demersal fish can swim down and avoid the net.

A fisher had previously commented to one attendee - "if they see fish on echosounder there is no point trying for squid as they won't be abundant." However more information from the fishers would be needed. It was noted that if MD wanted more information on impacts to cod when squid fishing, Shetland would be a good place to undertake more research as the fishing grounds overlap.

HB asked what attendees thought about the seabed surveys proposed and it was generally agreed that they would be unnecessary as squid gear does not touch the bottom as it is a mid-water fishery.

HB commented that there was the general impression that the proposal would benefit from more detail. What is success and what is failure? What the results would need to look like to open the fishery and what is the time frame?

There is not much faith in the system. There were concerns raised that more delays were being caused by not having the information to undertake an appropriate pilot.

ACTION- HB to raise feedback at the meeting although other attendees have also been invited and will also raise their concerns. HB to provide summary of meeting at next RIFG meeting.

Later in the meeting BW commented that they had spoken to Cara Buchan who confirmed that the pilot proposal is at an early stage and wanted to reassure the group that Shetland will not be forgotten. Data on the squid fishery in Shetland was taken from VMS data not from landings as yet as a preliminary.

Attendees were appalled that VMS was being used as not a representative due to the small boats fishing squid in Shetland not having VMS fitted.

- **HB feedback to MD views on changes to role of MD officials in RIFG group meetings (standing attendance of MD officials at RIFG meetings will not be the norm)**
No change in position
- **Introduce some evening meetings for Shetland RIFG**
Try an online only evening meeting in January
HB to follow up RIFG project funding application and EH and HB to trial the VR headsets in the community
Update given as an agenda item later in meeting. Funding has been achieved for both of these projects.
- **Update on Shetland Juvenile Fish Study- SF & LT**

SF began by stressing how valuable and unique this data set is and to keep in mind that the results are preliminary in nature, final results will be released later in the project.

LT then went on to present slides detailing the project and the results so far. SF has provided a summary for the purpose of these minutes-

Louise Thomason presented preliminary findings from the RIFG funded project "*Investigating the age structure, population dynamics, and nursery habitats of commercial fish species in Shetland's inshore areas*". This project uses data from the Shetland Inshore Fish Survey (SIFS) to model the age structure

of commercial fish populations in local nearshore waters. The focus has been on characterising the population dynamics of haddock, cod, whiting and plaice. Initial results indicate several key nearshore areas that have been used consistently as nursery habitats and that support recruitment to nearby fishing grounds. Work is ongoing to incorporate the 2024 survey data and to finalise the results for a project report that will be published in the new year.

SK- good to see this survey going ahead each year. If struggling with funding get in touch with SFA as they may be able to offer support.

Questions-

- Have we got any further submitting to ICES etc? SF- working on the legal sign off with CEFA's and MD. Science is ready to go.
- There are a lot of development applications for cables and kelp farms. How can we better make the case on how important the areas are for fishing?

ACTION- SF and SK to have a meeting to discuss this further

- What is the timescale for a final report to go out more widely? SF- draft in December and polished by Jan/Feb.

HB- Thanked Louise on hard work analysing results and clearly presenting them. Keen to make public as the project highlights some important results.

There were further comments on the interconnectivity between nursery grounds and adult abundancies shown in the results. Current government policy comes from an ecological standpoint but there is a need for them to also consider the economic standpoint which this data could help show.

Cable people may argue that it shows there are no negative impacts from putting in pipelines and may even help make nursery grounds. SF- survey not completely on top of pipelines/cables so it may be hard for them to use the data from this survey to show this. Other attendees commented that there are other issues around electromagnetic fields that can affect species.

- **Update on VR and Education projects- EH**

HB- Funding has been secured for 5 VR headsets and an underwater 360 dive camera. However, these cannot be purchased yet owing to delays in the SG payment system.

- **Fisheries Heritage Care home VR project**

EH and HB visited 3 care homes across Shetland.

They took along photos and artifacts from museums in Shetland and Anstruther to spark conversation and reminisce. Then used the VR headsets to look at 2 videos, 1 of sailing around Lerwick Harbour and another underwater film from the Blue Planet series with sea turtles.

All positive feedback from residents, day care clients and care home staff.

The plan is to roll out to other care homes, using own videos using the 360 camera. Shetland museum have also given permission to allow the use their audio to go along with the videos.

- **Shetland Science Fair**

This will be the first science fair since 2009. UHI Shetland will be taking along a few different activities. One of which has been funded by the Royal Society of Biology to enable EH and HB to run an environmental DNA workshop using eel conservation as a scenario. Participants will be undertaking mock lab tests to identify if eels are present in 3 example locations. This is being simulated using water samples laced with glitter (the eDNA) which they will filter using coffee filters. These are then analysed under a microscope where they will be able to identify the presence/absence of eel DNA as well as some invasive species surprises! They are expecting 250 participants, of which 130 will take part in the eDNA workshop.

- **SAMS lend a lab activity for marine sciences**

EH now has some marine science lend-a-lab kits for primary schools in Shetland which look at-

- Ecological niches- create your perfect animal
- Ecosystem Jenga- what are the effects of removing one aspect of the ecosystem
- Pollution- follows on from oil spill activity

Questions- JR do you need more videos?

Yes, would like fisherman to volunteer to take the 360 camera out with them and film their fishing activities. Also need underwater footage.

HB- footage of maerl beds would be good for the school activity on spatial planning scenario.

HB- Fishing videos could be used at other events such as careers events.

- **Adam Nutt- MCA**

AN wanted to attend to introduce himself. Hopes to be able to attend future meeting and be able to advise on safety and answer members questions.

HB and others welcomed AN to the meetings and appreciate the offer to attend future meetings. SK noted however, that although there is an awareness that access to MCA for inshore fisherman is limited, the RIFG might not be the best route to build those interactions due to the number of fishers who attend RIFG meetings. AN is interested to find out what they can do to engage better with fishers.

Question- SK asked for clarity on how under 10m fishers evidence that they do not require a medical?

ACTION- AD to take forward.

Marine Directorate Policy

- RIFG draft review has been delivered. External steering group to see in next couple of weeks. Will be out before the end of the year.
- Electronic tracking and monitoring consultation report due before the end of the year.
- A stake holders workshop reviewing interim measures is planned for Q1 2025.
- Local inshore fisheries management expect to be a call for evidence Q4 24
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- **Update from the SSMO- JR**

Weather has hampered fishing during summer and especially during October.

During the summer the SSMO were mainly dealing with 2 issues-

- Working through the MSC re-accreditation. Beth Mouat from UHI Shetland was fundamental in achieving this. Will need to wait until the end of the year to see if they are successful in re-accrediting the king scallop and brown crab fisheries although early indications are positive.
- Reaction to 11 seaweed farm applications in Yell Sound. This is a big area for scallop, creel and buckie fishing. They have put in strong objections on behalf of their license holders. They are aware that the Natural Heritage team at SIC also put in strong objections. The applicant has currently withdrawn their application to deal with points raised but are likely to resubmit at which time the SSMO will go through the objection process again after consulting with license holders.

- **Update from the SFA- SK**

Kept on evidencing impacts on grounds fishers rely upon. This has included issues with marine debris from aquaculture, applications for super salmon sites and cabling applications from both SSE distribution and transmission. Continuing to gather inshore plotter data to evidence the impacts of spatial squeeze. The kelp farm applications, initiated fishers to provide data which has been very useful in highlighting the spatial squeeze.

Continuing to look at how Scallop REM can be used. JR is looking at data sharing with Scottish Government so they can create one overlapping picture. They are also looking into whether there is an option for Shetland to have its own system to map out shellfish grounds and protect them from expanding aquaculture as we have largest numbers of salmon and mussels cultivated here for the whole of Scotland and it is the only area with a growing inshore fishing industry.

Inshore MPA consultation expected at the end of the year but likely to be delayed. Fishers will need to respond in such a fashion that they will be listened to. JR and SK will be working together to ensure this happens.

- **Update from Compliance- BW**

They have been very busy focusing on pelagic season so not much to update. Inshore fishers have been falling behind on statutory returns documents. These will be being chased as it is a licence condition. Likely to be more updates at next meeting.

- **Issues from Shetland Fishermen**

Current concerns raised by members of fisheries organisations have been noted within the specific agenda items within these minutes.

HB- nothing received from fishers to her as RIFG chair.

- **Visits and reports**
- **Just transmission commission report.** Happy they took on board comments provided by the industry including the need for it to be a just transition which inshore fishers don't feel it is. Would like to have seen more emphasis on impacts on economics rather than details on community benefit schemes. Pleased that they picked up comments made around using the SOTEAG model for offshore wind- SK is working with RSPB over concerns of impacts from

offshore wind. Do not understand the conflict that the SIC has stated they have on making sure that economic activity is protected as well as enabling new activities.

- **RSPB centre for good relations visit-** SSMO provided some strong feedback on the need to review promotional material to ensure it was more balanced towards the needs of the fishing industry and not merely RSPB views. They need to reconsider their bias, cannot gather info from respondents with the bias they had and still have a fair report at the end. There were conversations on how there are tensions in communities and different views in individual groups.
- **Scottish Entanglement Alliance workshop-** This will be held in Shetland on 21st Jan with a focus on use of negatively buoyant rope. It is to be an invite only event to include a small group of fishers for a hands-on in-person event. HB noted the disappointment that there had been over the lack of free rope available for trial by Shetland fishers. Would have been an incentive to attract fishers to the workshop.

It was also noted that scale of the entanglement problem isn't as big here as it is on the west coast due to different fishing gear and methods, but it is still positive to have conversations with them and fishers.

There are some concerns that there is an unspoken desire to bring in legislation to force the use of negatively buoyant rope but that could be long way in future and possibly different in Shetland.

Action- HB to find a suitable venue. JR to put out invites.

- **AOCB**

None.

- **Date of next meeting**

Online only meeting in January. Meeting date and time options to follow.