



Minutes of a General Meeting held on Tuesday 28th January 2025

Present

Phil Bennett, Chair, Andrew Livingston (Marine Directorate), Christine Rosie, (Orkney Fish Producers Organisation), Dave Gentle (Fisher), Hannah Fennell (Orkney Fisheries Association), Martin Foulis (Fisher), Ivan James (Fisher), Nick Nourse (Fisher), Kirsten Leahy (Scottish Fishermen's Federation), Katy MacDonald (Maritime & Coastguard Agency), Andy Braunston (Minutes).

1 Welcome & Introductions

Phil welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced Katy MacDonald the MCA's Principal Marine Surveyor based at the Aberdeen office.

2 Apologies

Kevin McDonnel, Ronnie Norquoy, Tam Harcus

3 Minutes of the meeting held on 22nd October 2024

These were accepted as an accurate record.

4 Matters Arising not Otherwise on the Agenda

None

5 Maritime & Coastguard Agency

Phil noted there had been no technical questions sent through but asked if there were any general questions For Katy. Martin asked about Roll Tests for vessels with bilge keels. Katy confirmed that all vessels will be Roll Tests except catamarans which will have an offset roll test.

Phil asked Katy if the MCA had anything to share with the meeting. Katy raised two points from the Marine Office:

- MCA Surveyors will be in Orkney on weeks starting 24th February, 10th March, & 28th April, each time for a week. Inspection slots are available in the March and April weeks. There is a possibility of going to the outer isles if fishers there group together.
- Katy noted that there are issues with some change of owners where details have been updated on the UK SR. This can cause a slight problem if the details haven't been updated when surveys are done.

6 National Creel Boat Survey

Phil checked the fishers present were aware of the survey, being run by the RIFG Network, and encouraged people to complete the survey. Phil noted that over 168 responses had been submitted so far with Orkney being at approximately 20% of active fishermen.

Hannah asked when the national consultation will happen. Phil said he had been invited to a meeting on 5th March which seemed to be the start of the consultation process.

7 Improving Communication with other Marine Users

Phil noted we'd invited the West of Orkney Windfarm to speak to the group, Thistle Wind Partners are starting a process of consultation on areas they wish to develop. They have already done a Shipping and Navigation Assessment which gave an overview of the patterns of shipping in their site

which covered freight, ferries, and tankers but the fishing vessels were pelagic fishing rather than inshore fishing. Phil noted that when developers are looking at navigation issues, they aren't getting all the details of where fishermen are working. Phil wondered if it would be good, therefore, to invite Thistle to come to the RIFG to raise our profile with them and to know what they are up to. The meeting felt the area they were going to work in was not one where the members fished and it would be better for them to do a drop in session and work through the Orkney Fisheries Association.

Phil noted he'd facilitated a conversation with a fisherman and Neil Kermod, Managing Director of the European Marine Energy Centre (EMEC), and how this had been a very useful discussion. Neil had commented on how useful the conversation had been for him and offered to come to the RIFG to talk and discuss. Ivan noted they had a lot of sea space where very little seemed to be happening and was surprised they were asking for more. There was no real feeling either way from the meeting about this.

Action: Phil to monitor and return to this subject if needed

Orkney Island Council's Marine Department had offered to come and speak about the Regional Marine Plan. Phil felt they were also lacking detail about where fishermen fish. Martin had gone to a drop-in session and felt they were more interested in telling people what they were doing rather than gain information from the fishers. There were no strong feelings on this other than some doubt as the value of consultations.

Action: Phil to monitor and return to this subject if needed

Phil wondered about inviting Kate Rydzkowski (stainability at Orkney Crab) along about the community catch scheme. Andrew suggested people approach Phil directly about their feelings on this. Martin wondered if it was a bit too soon but if there was a definite outcome to discuss which would be useful.

Action: Phil to speak to Kate and offer an invite if / when there is an outcome to the trial.

Phil noted there is not much communication with the OIC Harbour authority but there is a lot of issues about the poor state of piers and slips on the isles. Fishers had said to Phil that communication with the Harbour dept was patchy. Dave felt that the Harbours Dept were not willing to listen to fishers; Phil felt that most fishers felt the same. Dave felt that the Harbours Dept were more interested in cruise liners than fishers and noted there was no

consultation about the new quay at Hatston. Nick felt it would be useful to get someone down to discuss as things couldn't get worse. Martin felt they needed to learn to speak with more respect to fishers. The meeting agreed it would be good to ask the Harbour Dept to send someone along.

Phil asked if people had been to the SSEN sessions and noted that all the discussion was all about cabling over land. Ivan noted that they won't give details in advance for fear of compensation claims. Phil contrasted the care that the West of Orkney had taken about their routes, burying cables, and environmental impact assessment with the knowledge currently on display with SSEN. The depth of cable burying seems to change from 8cm to 1.5m and they don't seem to have factored in the effect of EMF on stock movements. The meeting felt this should be raised with SSEN. Martin noted that the Shetland Link cable was the same with no details on EMF.

Action: PB to speak to Orkney Harbours

8 Priorities for Orkney

Fishermen had previously expressed that succession and recruitment into the industry was the priority issue for Orkney, along with the need for up-to-date science and data. Also, the issues of the 'spatial squeeze' and the need for increased compliance were priorities. Phil noted that there was a growing theme coming out of the current online survey, (on the effects of the Interim measures), for stronger, more active compliance.

Phil asked whether these priorities changed, what are the priorities for today. Hannah said that for years every consultation with government is clear what fishers need but that they don't listen, so it seems we continue to have the same conversation. Phil reiterated the need to keep pushing the Orkney agenda at every opportunity so that our voice is heard in future planning.

9 Scallop Fisheries

Phil noted that there are 28 divers working from 6 boats now.

Concerns had been expressed in the industry about the short notice closure of ICES area 7d, which had been "signed off" by Scottish Government despite the "disproportionate impact on Scottish vessels". Phil stated he would like to keep scallop fishing as a regular agenda item. Andrew asked if there was Scallop dive fishing representation on FMAC scallop Subgroup.

Phil stated that he is now a sitting member of the FMAC Scallops subgroup along with various fishing industry organisations and associations.

Dave noted that dredgers turn off equipment before going into protected areas, and the fines are not stiff enough to deter. Nick noted that, in theory, newer REM equipment can't be turned off so should be more effective. Andrew outlined the monitoring systems (cameras, winch sensors etc) that commercial scallop dredgers have to use.

Nick noted he'd put a submission into the Council's Marine Plan. He felt the Council wanted to restrict dredging and promote diving which was a good thing. He wondered if RIFG could support that policy. He noted in the last 15 years there's been less conflict between local dredgers and divers, but one local dredging vessel is now specifically targeting areas which are frequently dived which is affecting the scallop divers badly.

Nick noted the language in the draft NMP2 puts less of a responsibility of decision makers to ensure an ecosystem-based approach to the management of fishing which ensures sustainability, resilient fish stocks, avoids damage to fragile habitats and improves protection of the seabed. Nick stated that it seems that this sort of language has been removed completely from the NMP2. He and Phil agreed to talk separately about this. Phil felt that the drop-in sessions had been heavily focused on how the NMP2 team are going about the consultation rather than outcome at this time.

Hannah Fennell stated that there would be no support for blanket measures which would ban one form of fishing. Previously proposed management measures which included input/output controls were more suitable, and that management should not penalise a particular gear type. Hannah felt it was important not to divide the fishing community but work together. Dave felt that dredgers badly affected creel fishing too. Nick felt the previous dredgers who were Orkney based knew where the divers worked and avoided those areas but this has changed. Hannah felt it was possible to get the different parts of the industry working together. Andrew outlined that it was hard to get the police to act if a dredger had taken gear from a fishing ground due to issues in proving to the criminal standard malicious intent but stated that it was important to report all instances of gear conflict to the Marine Directorate, in order for a true picture of the issue to be known.

Action: Phil to meet with Nick Norse to continue discussions about the Local Marine Plan.

10 Any Other Business

Martin felt we often were distracted from RIFG matters and wondered if we need the MCA to be involved. Phil said this was because fishers were struggling to contact the MCA and so approached them to be involved as a point of contact. However, if the meeting didn't want them then they didn't have to come. Martin felt that if they weren't here the meetings would be shorter!

Kristen Leahy asked about the maps that Phil had shared and he will send them to her.

- Phil stated that he had received various communication from fishermen, not present at today's meeting, and would share a summary of them, with those present, for consideration and comment.
- Fishermen felt that the interim measures were not working as the 'scrubbing of berried hens' was occurring in most areas.
- There were issues raised about buyers not getting checked, especially velvet crab and wrasse fishing was a 'free for all' with some fishers working far more gear than allowed. It is alleged that some velvet buyers are boasting they never see a fisheries officer.
- There was movement of stock, both ways, over the England / Scotland border avoiding current rules and undersized crab is processed in Scotland and Orkney.
- Whilst it was stated nothing was being done about unmarked gear, Andrew noted that the legislation, The Marking of Creels (Scotland) Order 2020, only applies to licenced fishing boats therefore nothing can be done about unlicensed hobby fishermen. It would need for a commercial boat to be witnessed hauling (unmarked) creels for any action to be taken. It would also be difficult to prove hobby fishermen catching in excess of the limits under The Shellfish (Restrictions on Taking by Unlicensed Fishing Boats) (Scotland) Order 2017 unless the catch is seen being landed.

Action: Phil to send Kristen Leahy the Nash Maritime Shipping and Navigation assessment produced on on behalf of Thistle Wind Partners (TWP).

11 Dates of Next Meetings

Phil stated that the next meeting will be 7pm Tuesday 29th April but also noted the following dates of Tuesday 29th July and Tuesday 28th October.

As the July meeting is due during the Nav School Summer break, Phil suggested trying the St Magnus Centre in Kirkwall. Those present agreed that this would be an interesting trial as it is in a more central location within Orkney.

Action: Phil to book the St Magnus Centre for the July meeting.

12 Close

Phil thanked everyone for coming, their contributions and formally closed the meeting.