Fishery Consultation Meeting WIFA/OHRIFG Benbecula 7 January 2025

Present: Cllr “ Tam” MacNeil CNES, Duncan MacInnes WIFA, Iain Kennedy CNES Fishery Officer, Alasdair Macleod Chair OHRIFG and 9 fishers.

The agenda was similar to the one used at other fishery meetings in December.

The top two agenda items were : Interim Shellfish Measures and Call For Evidence.

There was much discussion about the banning of landing berried lobster and crab and, again, although fishers were broadly in favour of management measures to ensure the sustainability of stocks, they were unanimously opposed to this ban due to the reduction in earnings suffered by throwing berried lobsters back into the sea. The view was that this was that reduction in earnings was felt most strongly by skippers of smaller vessels who were unable to diversify. However, one fisher said that buyers were reluctant to buy berried lobsters as had been the case in the past. Also, cheap lobster from Canada had affected the price in the run up to Christmas and the quality of these imported lobster was far inferior to native Scottish or Hebridean lobster.

Fishers were of the opinion that they had already agreed to measures which had helped to sustain stocks like seasonal closures and V notching.

There was support for the restrictions on super crabbers. It was also agreed that pot restrictions would continue: Under 8 metres 800 pots maximum and over 8 metres 1,800 pots maximum. The fishers also said that they had been very happy to work with the St Andrews University Team and were supportive of initiatives like tracker devices.

Crayfish stocks appear to be very healthy and Duncan said that there was £3,800 in funding available to develop new crayfish pots. Fishers were also reminded about the IFG survey monkey project which would be circulated soon

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Present: Duncan MacInnes WIFA, Iain Kennedy CNES, Alasdair Macleod Chair OHRIFG who chaired the meeting and six local fishers. ( The attendance was down due to the treacherous icy conditions on the roads.)

The agenda was the same as the previous evening and, again, most of the time was spent on discussion the Interim Shellfish Measures and Call For Evidence. The feelings of the Barra fishers on the ban on landing berried lobsters was similar to the views expressed in Benbecula.

Again, fishers re-iterated that they had supported measures in the past to enhance shellfish stocks and that there was a limit to what they should be expected to do due to the negative impact on overall income. They were fully supportive of the pot limitations agreed in other areas.

There were complaints that Irish boats were fishing within the 6 mile limit and that Enforcement was not taking a harder line with those fishing illegally. Duncan agreed to follow their complaints up with Enforcement if he was given information about illegal fishing activities.

The fishers present were generally pleased that the Ice Plant at Castlebay was going to be repaired and upgraded but they were not happy about the proposed £100 tonne charge for ice. Iain Kennedy was co-ordinating the project with funding from the Food and Drink/ CNES budget.

The Chairman indicated that the IFG would be circulating a Survey Monkey consultation on the Interim Shellfish Measures soon and he encouraged all fishers to respond.