Outer Hebrides WIFA/OHRIFG Fishery Consultation Meeting

Harris Hotel Tarbert 19 December 2024 7-11 pm.

Eight fishers present and Secretary of WIFA and Chair of OHRIFG.

There was a hefty agenda but the bulk of the meeting was spent discussing the Interim Shellfish Measures introduced in May 24 and the forthcoming Call For Evidence. Main outcomes of the meeting.

1. Although the fishers present had previously accepted the ban on berried lobster and crab, most said that it was definitely having an impact on single manned boats asap to twenty percent of catch was berried hen lobsters and returning them to the sea was having a detrimental impact on annual income. One fisher stated that he might have to give up fishing and return to the Offshore Renewable sector where he had worked previously.
2. Fishers with larger vessels could switch to prawns so this ban had a less detrimental effect on them financially.
3. All fishers agreed that lobster stocks in their area were healthier than they had been for years and this was as a result of previous measures introduced including V notching, seasonal closures and reduction in pot numbers.
4. Two fishers said that buyers were no longer buying berried lobsters as there was no market demand for them. Also, quite often hen lobsters had no berries when put into storage ponds but then started producing eggs after being in the ponds for a period of time.
5. Unanimous agreement that pot limits for vessels under 8 metres would be 800 pots and over 8 metres would be 1,800 pots.
6. Catch App devised by St Andrews University Team highly regarded by fishers who used them. Acceptance that tracker devices on boats are here to stay and will become the norm.
7. Call For Evidence: Individual submission by fishers and also submission by WIFA and OHRIFG.
8. A number of other subjects were discussed including Future Designations, PMF’s, Presentation on Entanglement Project and CNES Marine Projects.

Outer Hebrides WIFA/OHRIFG Fishery Consultation Meeting

Church of Scotland Hall, Stornoway 21/12/24 10.30-1pm

Eight fishers present along with Duncan MacInnes WIFA Secretary and Iain Kennedy CNES Fishery Officer. The meeting was chaired by the Chair of OHRIFG.

The agenda was the same as for the Harris meeting on 19/12 and the main items of discussion were the Interim Shellfish Measures and Call For Evidence. The main outcomes of the meeting were as follows.

1. Although fishers were generally in favour of the ISMs, one fisher was vehemently opposed to the ban on berried lobsters due to the negative income on his income. All present agreed that restrictions had to be placed on the “ super crabbers” and they couldn’t be allowed free reign in inshore waters. Agreement on pot limitation similar to pot numbers agreed in Harris.
2. There were intense discussions about the recording of brown crab landings in Stornoway as fishers said this did not tally with their landings.
3. Two fishers stated that they considered the crab stocks on the eastern side of the island the healthiest they had seen for years.
4. One experienced fisher who fishes from Kebock Head to Scalpay said that he had noticed a huge improvement on the size and numbers of crabs he was catching in the last 2-3 years. He recently had 33 crabs in one pot and could, on a good day, land over 2ts. Another fisher said he was catching around 20ts in a good month.
5. Fishers also noted a large increase in crayfish although on the small side but it was a good sign that sticks were healthy.
6. Duncan MacInnes provided landings for brown crab and lobster in 2022 and 2023 which indicated very healthy stocks. In 2022 brown crab of 502ts landed valued at £1.187million. In 2023 the value was £1.422 million with 621ts caught, highest total since 2019. In 2022 there were 158ts of lobster landed valued at £1.947 million. In 2023 this went up to 181ts with a value of £2.382 million—highest tonnage in last 16 years.
7. A variety of other matters were discussed briefly but the unanimous view expressed by fishers present was that a “ One size fits all” National policy was not suitable for the Outer Hebrides and a regional management fishery plan was the best option for the OH area.