

Marine Directorate

Interim Measures Review Event – 5 March 2025 - Edinburgh - Note of Meeting

In May 2024 Marine Directorate applied additional protections to inshore fisheries for crab and lobster, ahead of the peak fishing season, in response to stakeholder concern and scientific advice indicating they are under pressure and being overfished in some areas.

Following implementation of these licence conditions Marine Directorate embarked on a process of monitor and review of their impact, leading towards decisions being made about their future use by the anniversary of their implementation in May 2025.

The Interim Measures Review Event (IMRE) on 5th March was a technical meeting and important component of the review process, bringing together representatives of fishing businesses and seafood buyers with representatives from across Marine Directorate and the Regional Inshore Fisheries Group (RIFG) network. As well as Marine Directorate providing updates on the crab and lobster stock assessments for 2020 – 2023 this event also included an open and inclusive discussion on the social, economic and environmental impacts of the management measures.

During the morning session presentations were given on key matters relating to Interim Measures including the review process, stock assessment updates, the Solway scientific trial and a web-based survey run by the RIFG. Outputs of these presentations are available to download via the RIFG [website](#).

In the afternoon session, the attendees were split into groups for table discussions. These groups were individually Chaired and a note taken of the discussion. Each group was asked their opinion on:

- What works well with the current Interim Measures?
 - Considering social, environmental and economic factors.
- What doesn't work well with the current Interim Measures?
 - Considering social, environmental and economic factors.
- What could be done differently?
 - Are suggestions deliverable?
 - How do suggestions help to protect stocks?
 - Are suggestions measurable?

The key themes for the various aspects of each were then collated and are summarised below:

Prohibition on retention, landing. Offering for sales or consigning berried lobster or brown crab.

Social and economic

- There were split opinions on the scale of financial impacts resulting from the interim measures. Some fishers were already engaged in voluntary berried prohibitions, or saw little impact, others (typically those further south) reported up to 35% reduction in income. Fishers in some areas reported having to return up to 80% of their catch at some times.
- There was some support for retaining the interim measures but providing appropriate support for those areas worst hit.
- Some fishers had been surprised by the percentage of their catch that was berried.
- Areas where no alternative target species or diversification options exist have been hit hardest.
- Fishers in the northeast regarded the last round of minimum landing size increases to have had a bigger impact than interim measures.
- In some areas there is a lack of diversification opportunities, with transboundary issues around quota and access exacerbating this, and a desire for locally managed diversification options.
- Scottish fishing businesses are at a competitive disadvantage regarding boundaries – for examples sea bass fishing in ICES area VIIa.
- A negative consequence of interim measures is that they are encouraging use of more gear.
- Economic impacts are as important as environmental ones.
- Complex and changing regulations imposed by government have impact on the mental health of fishers as well as economic.
- Reduction in catches because of the berried lobster ban has led to less financial resilience for some fishing businesses and inability for single operators to continue. There are also knock-on impacts for support businesses such as provisioners, gear manufacturers, bait suppliers.
- There was general agreement that interim measures are not the only pressure on the fishing industry and that poor weather during peak 2024 season and poor price compared to 2023 have impacted on the situation and temporal landings trends, as well as increasing business costs.

Environmental

- Fishers in general are supportive of conserving the marine environment.
- There was general agreement that the berried lobster ban is effective. Some fishers already adopt it on a voluntary basis.
- Some felt that measures such as the berried lobster ban can have unintended consequences on effort such as purchase of additional fishing vessels and more gear.

- Some noted risks of diversification – for example to whelk – would be less sustainable and there might be unforeseen impacts of increasing effort in new areas.

Data

- There was strong support for the Solway Lobster Trial, for the interactions between industry and government and for the positive example of how fishers can take a lead role in improving the scientific evidence base.
- Some fishers contest that there are insufficient data to support the interim measures and / or that the data was not representative of their area. There was support for improved data collection methods.
- There was strong agreement that an increasing incidence of < minimum landing size lobster bearing eggs represents a gap in the data.
- Non-berried lobsters becoming berried while in tanks onshore could be unfairly seen as a compliance issue.
- There was some concern that impacts of other factors like the weather might negatively impact on evaluation of the data.
- There was strong support for improving comms between Marine Directorate and organisations like Scottish Fisherman's Federation (SFF) and Community Inshore Fisheries Alliance (CIFA) to support and increase fisher-led sampling programmes.
- Some felt there are still issues with stock assessment data, notably the time lag that exists before the impact of changes can be seen.

Alternate Approaches Suggested

- A proportion of the catch should be allowed to be landed berried.
- There should be a maximum landing size for berried female lobster.
- Escape hatches should be issued and made mandatory.
- There could be a seasonal aspect to the ban on landing berried female lobster.
 - A three-month prohibited season.
 - Identify and apply prohibition to the two annual periods when eggs are cast.
 - Landings peak in the autumn.
 - All gear should be lifted during closed season.
- Many regard the amount of gear in the water as being the main problem. There was strong support for an effort-controlled fishery (achieved via creel limits) to better inform policy development, that could make use of:
 - A permit system to control access to inshore waters.
 - Regionalisation was a very strong theme and is seen by most as key to mitigating negative impacts of interim measures.
 - Future technology (like vessel tracking) will make this easier to achieve.

- Gear tagging (like used by the English IFCA) remain popular with some to enforce creel limits.
- Better regulation of unlicensed and / or hobby fishermen would be essential.
- Further minimum landing size changes are not attractive as the market has a preference for 87mm lobster (east coast).
- Some felt that spatial and temporal restrictions either on a voluntary or statutory basis were a good approach. The size restriction in the Solway and the engine power restrictions in the Moray Firth and Firth of Forth were cited as good examples.
- Increased use of v-notching.
- There was minority view that fishers should be offered incentives to accurately populate fishing returns.

Restriction on vessels who have, since 2020, landed more than 200 tonnes of brown crab and lobster within a rolling 12-month period, requiring them to fish out with 6 nautical miles of the Scottish mainland.

Social and Economic

- Some felt unwilling to comment as they did not represent any vessels affected by the supercrabber licence condition.
- There was a generally positive response to government action in 2024 on supercrabbers and the restriction allows inshore fishers to work comfortably and safely.
- Vessels affected by this licence condition tend to move around and so can absorb the economic hit.
- Some felt that the reference period should be adjusted, as there are vessels who had not crossed the 200 tonnes threshold and will now actively work to stay below it while exerting fishing pressure on inshore waters.
- There is some evidence that restriction on supercrabbers in the vicinity of Ullapool has positively impacted on catches by local inshore vessels.
- There was some anecdotal evidence that crab stocks were improving as a result of supercrabber restrictions.
- Some believed the restriction should be on vessel size – as is currently the case in the Solway.
- Vessels from out with Scotland do not contribute to our economy.

Environmental

- There should be a spatial measure alongside the track record of landings as crab are migratory and the measure simply transfers pressure on their stocks to other locations.

- There should be greater separation of the management of crab and lobster as crab stocks appear to be less stable.

Conclusion and next steps

- Thank you to all attendees for what was a very positive and collegiate discussion.
- Association representatives should share this document as well as the presentations with the fishing businesses they represent.
- RIFG Chairs will be making contact in the coming weeks seeking further views and ensuring as many opinions as possible are heard.
- Marine Directorate will have further discussions with stakeholders in the coming weeks and expect to announce next steps for interim measures in quarter 2 of 2025, ahead of the main fishing season.

Marine Directorate – Marine Environment and Communities – March 2025