

Evaluation of Regional Inshore Fisheries Groups



AGRICULTURE, ENVIRONMENT AND MARINE

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Executive Summary

Inshore fishing remains part of the fabric of many coastal towns and villages around Scotland. Regional Inshore Fisheries Groups (RIFGs), in some form, have been part of the framework for inshore fisheries management since 2009. This evaluation asks how well they are working and if they are fit for the future.

Evidence was gathered over the first half of 2024 and involved an online survey and one-to-one interviews both online and in-person in coastal areas. Stakeholders who provided input to the evaluation included inshore fishers, fisheries bodies and associations, environmental groups, and current and past RIFG Chairs.

The RIFG network has changed over the 15 years of operation. They began as pilot 'Inshore Fisheries Groups' (IFGs) in 2009 covering small coastal regions, before being formalised in 2013 covering the whole coastline and islands of Scotland. They were then refreshed in 2016 and 2023. This evaluation covers the last 5 years of operation, however many stakeholders also provided information stretching back to 2009. This information has also been incorporated.

The evidence is presented in ten themes which are separated into four categories:

- The context within which RIFGs operate: System
- What RIFGs do: Remit, Delivery, Monitoring and Reporting
- Who is involved: Leadership, Engagement, Membership
- How RIFGs operate: Power, Resources, Regions

The evaluation found that there is a specific need for clarity around what the RIFGs do and transparency around how they operate. There remains a desire across the majority of stakeholders to have a forum where fishers can feed directly into fisheries management decisions. Stakeholders want to be assured of the process of how information is incorporated into decision making and how to engage in that process. There was an overall understanding from the evidence gathered that stakeholders were aware that the Marine Directorate is under pressure to balance views of a wide range of stakeholders perhaps more than ever before, and therefore there is an increased need that any processes used for inshore management need to be clear and transparent.

The Chair was often noted by respondents as the cornerstone to the success of a RIFG. The most vital characteristics highlighted for a Chair was that they

are knowledgeable about inshore fisheries and empowered to encourage locally led approaches to inshore management.

When asked 'Do you think RIFGs play a role in the future of inshore fisheries management?' there was a mixed response from respondents. Overall, it was clear that incorporating stakeholders' views into fisheries management continues to be a priority for all respondents. A stakeholder group like the RIFGs would be supported by the majority of respondents if the remit was clear and deliverable, and the decision making process for inshore management was understandable and allowed stakeholders to feed in views and ideas.

Key insights emerged from the evaluation. These are presented across 10 themes below.

System: Clarity on the governance landscape of inshore fisheries management will help stakeholders know where to engage and where decisions are taken.

Remit: The remit should be specific, achievable, and measurable. Key elements should include: a Chair-led forum for discussing local issues and potential solutions; ensuring inshore fishers' voices are heard by government; and supporting sustainability of the sector.

Delivery: Tangible deliverables that align with the remit are essential to ensure value and best use of resources.

Monitoring and reporting: Accountability should be delivered via a monitoring and reporting plan and regular published reports.

Leadership: Direction should be set by the Marine Directorate and local leadership provided by regional Chairs. The Marine Directorate should maintain oversight of delivery, with Chairs taking initiative for local projects and enabling the voice of fishers to be heard by government.

Engagement: Chairs should engage with all relevant stakeholders and prioritise regular interactions with inshore fishers. Removing barriers to the involvement of fishers should be a key priority.

Membership: There is strong support for a forum designed for only fishing representatives, however, stakeholders recognise that the marine space is a shared resource so other marine stakeholders should be brought into management discussions. A more formal membership would improve transparency.

Power: Groups should be enabled by the Marine Directorate to achieve their remit including encouraging locally led approaches that have the potential to become legislation.

Resources: Chairs must be knowledgeable about inshore fisheries and empowered to initiate regional ideas and solutions to inshore management. Chairs should have access to science evidence to ensure it is incorporated into local discussions.

Regions: The regions of the Outer Hebrides and Orkney were deemed suitable to have their own RIFGs. Clarity is needed on the role of a RIFG in Shetland owing to the Shetland Islands Regulated Fishery (Scotland) Order 2012. Mainland regions were deemed too large, with the North West RIFG and the North and East Coast RIFG suggested as needing new regional lines drawn.

Introduction

The Inshore Fishing industry in Scotland

The Marine Directorate conducted an evaluation in 2024 to explore the economic, social and broader fisheries management impacts of the network of RIFGs¹. The evaluation has come at a pivotal time for inshore fisheries management with EU Exit and the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 and an upsurge of questions regarding the impact of climate change on the fishing industry. The evaluation therefore sought to understand if RIFGs were still a suitable vehicle for stakeholder engagement in inshore management within this changed context.

The evaluation was conducted in house by a small team of analysts including researchers and economists from the Marine Analytical Unit (MAU) in the Marine Directorate. The review was carried out using an online survey, online and face to face interviews with a range of stakeholders, and a brief review of documents. More detail is available in section 4 of this report.

Scotland's inshore waters extend from the coast out to 12 nautical miles (NM), with a concentration of fishing taking place within 6 NM. Fishing operations have changed over the centuries with developments in boat design and gear technology. The species caught has also changed, as well as there being a decrease in the number of people employed. However, there remains an active fishing industry, the majority of which operate solely in inshore waters.

The number of active Scottish fishing vessels was 2,006 in 2023. The Scottish fleet is dominated by vessels that are 10 metres and under in length with a total of 1,530 vessels falling into this category in 2023, accounting for 76 per cent of the Scottish fleet. These smaller vessels make up the vast majority of the inshore fleet; 1,110 are recorded as landing fish in 2023. These vessels typically contain one or two crew members and fish daily from a single port and do not tend to fish nomadically or seasonally to the same extent as offshore demersal or pelagic vessels.

Inshore fishing is mostly conducted by one of two methods:

- **static gear** fishing which is primarily for crabs, lobster and Nephrops by placing baited pots or creels on the sea bed. Other static gear includes gill nets and lining, which are not as common;
- **mobile gear** fishing involving the towing of gear behind a vessel, such as nets for Nephrops or dredges for scallops.

¹ Please note that the Marine Directorate was called Marine Scotland up until June 2023 and therefore this title is also used when discussing historical matters.

Other inshore fishing methods include hand diving for species such as scallops.

Creel vessels make up the majority of the inshore fleet. In 2023, 790 (71%) of the 10 metre and under vessels which were recorded as landing fish were using creels. There were 138 pelagic vessels, and the remaining vessels were split equally between Nephrop trawl, demersal, and other fishing methods. The 10 metre and under fleet is distributed around the Scottish coast and islands, with 32% in Orkney, Shetland and Stornoway, 38% in the East Coast and 28% in the West Coast.

Shellfish is the main target species for the inshore fleet. These are fished by the creel and Nephrops trawl fleet. In 2023, 10 metre and under Scottish vessels landed £61 million worth of fish and shellfish, accounting for 9% of the value of fish and shellfish landed by all Scottish vessels. The majority of landings by the 10 metre and under fleet was shellfish which was worth £50 million in 2023, accounting for 30% of all shellfish landed.

Fishing continues to play an important role in the local labour market as well as the heritage of many coastal towns around Scotland. In 2023, there were estimated to be 3,793 fishers working on Scottish vessels, 1,510 on the 10 metre and under fleet; and of that, around 1,031 estimated to be working on creel vessels. The total number of fishers represents 0.14% of the total Scottish labour force, however this is up to 3.2% in Shetland, 2.2% in Na h-Eileanan Siar, 1.5% in Orkney, and 1% in Argyll and Bute. The fishing sector accounts for 6% of employment in the marine economy². More fishing data is available in Scottish Sea Fisheries Statistics 2023³.

Using Seafish data and fleet segments, the Scottish under 10 metre fleet had an average fishing income of £56,000 and an average operating profit of £14,000 in 2023⁴. The average GVA of the under 10 metre fleet was £33,000.

Regulatory and policy context

Through devolution, Scottish Ministers are responsible for the regulation of sea fishing around Scotland and within 12 NM of Scotland's coast. In addition, the UK has exclusive rights to fish within 6 NM of its coastline. Fishing by non-UK vessels between 6 and 12 NM is restricted to countries with historic rights relating to specific fisheries.

² [Scotland's Marine Economic Statistics 2022 - gov.scot](https://gov.scot/Information/Statistics/Scotland's-Marine-Economic-Statistics-2022)

³ [Scottish Sea Fisheries Statistics 2023 - gov.scot](https://gov.scot/Information/Statistics/Scottish-Sea-Fisheries-Statistics-2023)

⁴ [Economics of the UK Fishing Fleet 2023 — Seafish](https://seafish.org/industry/economics-of-the-uk-fishing-fleet-2023)

Planning measures related to inshore fisheries are in Scotland's National Marine Plan (NMP) 2015⁵. The NMP includes the following policy: '*Inshore Fisheries Groups (IFGs) should work with all local stakeholders with an interest to agree joint fisheries management measures. These measures should inform and reflect the objectives of regional marine plans.*'⁶ The NMP also includes a vision for Marine Planning Partnerships (MPPs) to work with IFGs and Local Authorities towards '*a more regional model of marine management.*'⁷ The National Marine Plan 2 (NMP2) is under development and a draft version will be subject to public consultation.

The environmental, economic, and social outcomes within the Future Fisheries Management Strategy 2020-2030 (FFM) apply to the inshore sector⁸. In addition, the FFM position on inshore fisheries groups is:

'[Considering the role that sectoral groups play] will also see us strengthening the role of the Regional Inshore Fisheries Groups (RIFGs) so that they are recognised as the main delivery vehicle for local management, and have the right resources in place to deliver improvements and tackle local issues such as gear conflict and fishing effort.'

Within the context of planning and strategy, there are many current policies that are directly or indirectly impacting the operations and future planning of inshore fishers. For example, minimum landing sizes for crab and lobster, trawl net sizing regulations, plans for more monitoring technology placed on inshore vessels, and inshore Marine Protected Areas.

⁵ [Supporting documents - Scotland's National Marine Plan - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](http://www.gov.scot)

⁶ Page 39, Scotlands National Marine PPlan

⁷ Page 40

⁸ [Fisheries management strategy 2020 to 2030: delivery plan - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](http://www.gov.scot)

History of Regional Inshore Fisheries Groups

Overview

The Scottish Government (SG) has taken a voluntary partnership approach to inshore fisheries management, in the form of Inshore Fisheries Groups (IFGs), later renamed as Regional Inshore Fisheries Groups (RIFGs). There have been four phases of these groups.

Phase 1 began in 2009 with the launch of six pilot Inshore Fisheries Groups across six regions. The regions were the South East, the Moray Firth, the North West, the Clyde, the Small Isles and Mull, and the Outer Hebrides. This first phase ran until 2012.

Phase 2 began in 2013 when the groups were formally established. The regional groups were the East Coast, the Moray Firth and North Coast, the North West, the South West, the Outer Hebrides, and Orkney. The second phase ran until 2015.

Phase 3 began in 2016 when there was a refresh of the network and the groups were renamed Regional Inshore Fisheries Groups. The regional groups were the North and East Coast, the West Coast, the Outer Hebrides, and Orkney. The third phase ran until 2022.

Phase 4 began in 2023 when there was a second refresh of the network. The West Coast group was split into the North West and the South West, and a Shetland RIFG was established. The North and East Coast group, and the Outer Hebrides and Orkney groups remained the same.

Phase 1 (2009-2012): Pilots

The SG began a strategic review of inshore fisheries in Scotland in 2002 which culminated in the publication of 'A Strategic Framework for Inshore Fisheries in Scotland' in 2005⁹. The review was led by the Scottish Inshore Fisheries Advisory Group (SIFAG)¹⁰ and noted that the management process at that time was that a review was undertaken every three years to assess

⁹ [A Strategic Framework for Inshore Fisheries in Scotland, 2005. \[ARCHIVED CONTENT\] \(nrscotland.gov.uk\)](https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk)

¹⁰ SIFAG was established in 1999 by the Scottish Fishermen's Federation and the Scottish Executive Environment and Rural Affairs Department to advise Ministers on the development of proposals and their implementation as part of the overall process of determining and applying policy and legislation relating to sea fishing in inshore waters. By 2013, SIFAG responsibilities has been passed to the Fisheries Management and Conservation Group (FMAC).

whether there was a need to revoke, adjust or introduce management measures in inshore waters. A number of limitations was highlighted in the report: the decision makers were distant from the process on the ground and measures introduced were mainly reactive rather than taking a proactive planning approach to manage opportunities.

The 2005 report therefore advised the creation of a network of inshore fisheries groups around Scotland to plan the management of inshore fisheries locally. Groups were to develop local objectives and local management plans to deliver the objectives. In developing the latter, the groups would select appropriate management measures which would be approved by SIFAG and then the SG who would deliver legislation. It was also proposed that the inshore groups could apply for Regulating Orders to implement the plans. A Regulating Order confers on its grantee the right to regulate fishing for a named species in a defined area, for a specified limit of time. Currently Shetland is covered by a Regulating Order.

The review announced that the SG had committed to funding the groups, but consideration would be given to bring together organisations to establish a funding stream for project work. Industry was also expected to contribute a nominal amount to support the costs of the groups, but this would not be the primary income stream.

The groups would cover out to 6 NM. Commercial fishers were to form an 'executive core' and involve other stakeholders (processors, environmental interests, community members, and other marine users) who would be impacted upon by fishing activity. In practice, the structure would have an executive core of fishers and other stakeholders drawn in as experts or additional members.

Following the 2005 review, three pilot inshore fisheries groups (IFGs) were established in January 2009: Outer Hebrides, Clyde, and South East; followed by another three in spring of that year: North West, Mull and Small Islands, and Moray Firth. These were established as a new mechanism for local involvement in management, and the early documentation shows a desire that they would reshape the landscape of inshore fisheries decision making and put fishers at the heart of it.

As advised, each IFG was made up of an Executive Committee and an Advisory Group. The Executive Committee was primarily made up of fishermen's associations with an active membership in the area, and responsible for debating issues and trying to identify mutually-agreed management proposals. The Advisory Group was made up of broader stakeholders who provided wider and specialist guidance. While the membership of each Advisory Group varied between IFG area, groups included those concerned with environmental issues (principally Scottish

Natural Heritage, as then known, Scottish Environment Link and the Scottish Environment Protection Agency).

Each IFG had an independent Chair and a Co-ordinator who were responsible for delivering fisheries management plans (FMPs)¹¹. These plans were delivered to government over the course of 2009-2011 and measures within those plans were consulted on in 2013. The consultation on measures proposed within the FMPs is discussed in the following section.

Also taking place during 2009-2012, the then Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment appointed an independent inquiry into fisheries management which reported in 2010¹². The inquiry reported that 'The earlier lack of enthusiasm and opportunity for effective inshore fisheries management has been redeemed by the decision in 2009 to set up Inshore Fisheries Groups'¹³. However, the panel were concerned that IFGs non-statutory status and 'narrow remit... could limit their influence' when it came to marine spatial planning and therefore could be overshadowed by the then recently established Marine Planning Partnerships. They therefore recommended that IFGs were given powers to implement specific measures within districts and consideration was given to extending their remit to 12 nautical miles. The inquiry also recommended establishing regional fisheries committees to unite all fisheries groups – Fisheries Associations (FAs), merchants, processors, exports, producer organisations, IFGs, local authorities and enterprise boards, and Marine Scotland science, fisheries and compliance departments – to assist Marine Scotland with management plans or strategies.

In January 2012, the SG announced continued support for the IFGs for another three years¹⁴.

Phase 2 (2013-2015): Consultation and first evaluation

Formal establishment, IFMAC, and analytical projects

In 2013, the pilot regions were replaced by six new IFG regions. The regions were: the South West, North West, East Coast, the Outer Hebrides, and the Moray Firth and North Coast, and Orkney Sustainable Fisheries Ltd (OSF) which was recognised by Marine Scotland as the local de facto IFG for

¹¹ Note that these FMPs are different from those under development under the Fisheries Act 2020 which are reports on fisheries stock management.

¹² [Scottish Government, 2010. The Future of Fisheries Management in Scotland: Report of an Independent Panel.](#)

¹³ Scottish Government, 2010. Paragraph 5.15, The Future of Fisheries Management in Scotland: Report of an Independent Panel.

¹⁴ [Scottish Government, 2012. Way ahead for inshore fishing \(nrscotland.gov.uk\)](#)

Orkney¹⁵. OSF was established in 2006 to run the local lobster hatchery and carry out research projects on the local shellfish populations. Shetland operated in 2013, and still does operate, under the Shetland Shellfish Management Organisation and a Regulating Order which came into place in 1999 and gives it the authority to run the commercial shellfish fisheries out to 6NM¹⁶.

The IFGs were organised similarly to the pilot groups¹⁷. Funding was provided by the SG for a Chair, a National Liaison Officer or Outreach Officers, and SG staff time. Meetings were to be held four times a year and sub-groups could be formed to address local issues. In conjunction with the SG, the IFGs were to deal with issues connected to the development of:

- Regional policies and initiatives relating to management and conservation of inshore fisheries, including impacts on the marine environment and the maintenance of sustainable fishing communities
- Measures designed to better conserve and sustainably exploit stocks of shellfish and sea fish (including salmon) in local IFG waters
- Proposals for and approaches to Marine Scotland, Inshore Fisheries Management and Conservation Group (IFMAC), Marine Planning Regions, other IFGs, and others with an interest in the fishery in relation to inshore fisheries management.

In addition, by 2013 the Fisheries Management and Conservation Group (FMAC) had been established¹⁸. FMAC is the co-management stakeholder forum concerned with all issues connected to sea fisheries management. The term 'co-management' may mean different things to different stakeholders. In relation to FMAC, the term 'co-management' does not mean that stakeholders undertake management responsibility, but that 'FMAC members will work together to develop recommendations for Ministers, using their collective knowledge and expertise, seeking input from their members, tasking sub-groups, and delivering consensus wherever possible'¹⁹. However, it was felt that FMAC was not entirely suitable for inshore fisheries management as it focused on issues relating primarily to offshore fisheries sector²⁰. Therefore in September 2013, an inshore FMAC group (IFMAC) was established to allow inshore issues to be addressed by representatives of fishers operating in inshore waters. The group would have no role in managing or supervising the IFGs but would take decisions and, on request, make recommendations to the

¹⁵ [Scottish Regional Inshore Fisheries Groups - historic web page](#)

¹⁶ [History | SSMO](#)

¹⁷ [Inshore Fisheries Groups - Marine Scotland Topic Sheet](#)

¹⁸ [Fisheries Management and Conservation Group webpage \[archived\]](#)

¹⁹ [Fisheries Management and Conservation Group \(FMAC\): terms of reference - gov.scot](#)

²⁰ [IFMAC meeting 25 September 2013 - Meeting papers](#)

Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment on matters connected to inshore management.

One example of IFMAC helping deliver IFG proposals is seen in one of the agenda items at the first IFMAC meeting in September 2013. All IFG FMPs had flagged the need for an evidence base, including data on fishing locations, effort, stock, and the environment. A presentation was given by an IFG Coordinator and a university fisheries research unit about what routes could be taken to improve the evidence. Following this, in September 2014, IFMAC were notified that £1.4 million of funding was approved by the European Fisheries Fund (EFF) for a project which was to be led by Seafish and managed by the Marine Alliance for Science and Technology for Scotland (MASTS)²¹. The project 'Evidence Gathering in Support of Sustainable Scottish Inshore Fisheries' ran from 2014-2015 and comprised 7 work packages for which reports are available²².

Moving forward, in January 2015 a technical report was published by the SG on 'Management of The Scottish Inshore Fisheries; Assessing The Options for Change'²³. The report stemmed from demand from IFGs for more data analysis on inshore matters. The report presented economic analysis carried out by an external consultancy on two inshore policy options: a 0-1NM, and a 0-3NM restriction on the use of mobile gear. The report took a hypothetical approach and therefore there was a level of uncertainty with the outputs. The fishing industry were concerned about this level of uncertainty and how the report could be used. The SG did not take forward new management measures based on the report's findings.

Consultation on proposed fisheries management measures

The FMPs submitted by the six IFG pilots in 2011 were reviewed by the Scottish Government and management measures were ready for consultation in 2013. The consultation on management measures went live on the 15th August and ran until the 13th October 2013.²⁴ The initiatives included in the consultation were those deemed to have the potential for environmental impact. A Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) was published alongside the consultation²⁵. The initiatives assessed focused on sustainability accreditation, management of fish stocks (e.g. minimum sizing), establishing a new fishery, fishery development, and general fisheries management.

²¹ [IFMAC meeting 30 September 2014 - Meeting papers](#)

²² [Sustainable Scottish Inshore Fisheries - MASTS](#)

²³ [Management of The Scottish Inshore Fisheries; Assessing The Options for Change - Technical Reports \(nls.uk\)](#)

²⁴ [Management Proposals of Inshore Fisheries Groups \(www.gov.scot\)](#)

²⁵ [Management Proposals of Inshore Fisheries Groups - Strategic Environmental Assessment - Environmental Report \(www.gov.scot\)](#)

Initiatives varied between regions, with no national initiatives included. The SEA Post Adoption Statement was published in July 2014²⁶.

Further consultations were issued by the Scottish Government on crab and lobster landings into the Outer Hebrides in 2014²⁷ and into Orkney in 2015²⁸. And a further consultation on landing controls for crab and lobster across the rest of the Scottish coast in 2016²⁹. The Scottish Government also implemented Scottish Statutory Instruments to deliver some of the management measures proposed by IFGs³⁰, including but not limited to:

- SSI 28/2015 – The Little Loch Broom Scallops Several Fishery Order 2015
- SSI 30/2015 – The Loch Ewe, Isle of Ewe, Wester Ross, Scallops Several Fishery Order 2015
- SSI 183/2015 – The Outer Hebrides (Landing of Crabs and Lobsters) Order 2015
- SSI 50/2016 - The Orkney Islands (Landing of Crabs and Lobsters) Order 2016

The delivery in this phase of IFGs is important to note. The IFGs generated, through debate and discussion papers, proposals for a consultation and then helped push forward management measures in the inshore space. Again, the causality behind some measures is not completely clear and some measures could have gone ahead without the IFGs support. But it is clear that measures, and pilots, were implemented that had support from discussion and evidence presented by local IFGs. There was also a clear process for IFGs to follow. This included government calls for proposals. These appear vital in galvanising proposals being developed and subsequent change.

In addition to this formal legislative route, IFGs could carry out their own projects and access funding from the SG during this phase. For example, in 2015 the South West IFG ran two projects: a trial introduction of creel escape panels and a lobster v-notching scoping study³¹.

IFG Review and Inshore Strategy

²⁶ [Management Proposals of IFGs: Strategic Environmental Assessment Post Adoption Statement](#)

²⁷ [Consultation on Management Measures on Crabs and Lobster Landings into the Outer Hebrides](#)

²⁸ [Consultation on new Management Measures on Crab and Lobster Landings into Orkney](#)

²⁹ [Consultation on landing controls for the Scottish crab and lobster fisheries](#)

³⁰ [Marine and fisheries licensing: Statutory Instruments](#)

³¹ [West Coast Regional Inshore Fisheries Group - Solway Firth Partnership](#)

IFMAC were notified in March 2015 that IFGs would be reviewed³². Although the SG knew some long standing fisheries management issues had been addressed by IFGs, and there had been progress in developing the evidence base, there was criticism from several key stakeholders that IFGs were nothing more than ‘talking shops’. There was perhaps a growing appreciation that the mechanics of government were slower than the local level desire for change. It is important to note the ambition of the groups, for empowered local fishers and strong delivery. As shown in the previous section, some of this had been delivered. But with the National Marine Plan 1 on the horizon and the need for local engagement, Marine Scotland deemed it a good time to review the network.

Aegir Consultancy Limited were commissioned and the ‘IFG Stocktake: A Review of Inshore Fishery Groups in Scotland’ was presented to Marine Scotland in 2015³³. The review presents the perspectives gathered from 42 responses to a call for views. Views were from fishing associations (with 30 responses), IFG members and co-ordinators, Marine Scotland staff, and other public sector bodies. Respondents were asked about what was working well, suggested improvements and key ingredients to ensure fishing interests could contribute effectively to the management of inshore fisheries, and input into wider marine planning in the longer term.

Key insights emerged from the evaluation across the eight following themes:

- **Structure:** Marine Scotland, in collaboration with inshore stakeholders should revisit the IFG Role and Remit ensuring clarity of purpose, responsibility and expectation.
- **Leadership:** Marine Scotland should seek to better define the Chair’s role in light of any proposed IFG structure. This should include a review of the time allocated to the role as well as IFG support structures. It should be noted that this will have to be considered in light of Marine Planning requirements and any review of inshore boundaries.
- **Promoting good management:** Marine Scotland should consider building the evidence base around Inshore Fisheries learning from other examples of data collection and management frameworks.
- **Boundary change:** When considering the way forward with any IFG structure Marine Scotland should consider that the majority of respondents reported that they would like to see change to the current mainland IFG boundaries.
- **Representative membership:** While a review of Role and Remit is undertaken the membership of IFGs should also be considered particularly engaging with processing as well as Local Authorities and

³² [Papers for IFMAC meeting of 11 March 2015](#)

³³ [The Aegir Consultancy Ltd, 2015. IFG Stocktake A Review of Inshore Fishery Groups in Scotland](#)

local Fisheries Local Action Groups (FLAGs)³⁴ to ensure effective resource use.

- **Value for money and resources:** Marine Scotland should consider the use of shared resources across any IFG network including project and technical support. Integration to funding streams including FLAGs should be considered.
- **Interaction outwith the IFGs:** As marine planning structures become further developed the role of IFGs will be better defined. IFGs should seek to build closer relationships with Local Authorities and science providers to achieve the best value for money across Scotland. Marine Scotland, in consultation with inshore stakeholders, should look to clearly communicate the relationship and role for all of the key participants in inshore management allowing for better understanding and more effective use of limited resources
- **Communication:** Marine Scotland should encourage inshore stakeholder input to shape the programme of an inshore event which is relevant to as many prospective participants as possible. Marine Scotland should articulate a clear set of messages as to the purpose and expected outcomes of any inshore management structure.

Three options were presented: do nothing, disband the network, or make a fundamental change to the structure and operation of the IFG structure. The latter option appears to be the primary recommendation, with a need for a flexible approach recommended and changes according to the thematic discussions below.

Overall, the review looked primarily at the organisational aspects of IFGs, and does not provide many examples of delivery or impact; perhaps this reflects the delay in delivery following the development of FMPs. The review did not evaluate the extent to which fishers feel their views are being heard by government and if the outputs from the groups were being integrated into inshore fisheries management.

In the same year as the IFG review, the Scottish Government published an Inshore Fisheries Strategy in October³⁵. There were six strategy outcomes covering the themes: an updated legislative framework by 2020, an improved evidence base, better governance, responding to our national and international obligations, improved data, and maximising support from European funding.

³⁴ The UK are no longer members of FLAGs following EU Exit. [Map of the Week – Fisheries Local Action Groups \(FLAGs\) - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#)

³⁵ [Scottish Inshore Fisheries Strategy 2015, Scottish Government.](#)

Phase 3 (2016-2022): First refresh

Refresh

Following the 2015 review, the IFGs were renamed 'Regional Inshore Fisheries Groups' or 'RIFGs', as announced in the Spring 2016 network newsletter³⁶. The ambition was to address concerns raised in the review. The number of groups decreased from six to four, as the East Coast and Moray Firth and North Coast groups were merged to form the North and East Coast group and the two groups on the West were also merged. The Outer Hebrides remained the same and the Orkney group continued to function through the Orkney Sustainable Fisheries organisation. The Shetland Shellfish Management Organisation (SSMO) was also recognised as providing an RIFG function for the Shetland Islands.

A new remit was published in 2016, 'Scottish Regional Inshore Fisheries Groups, Outline Structure and Functions' and outlined the following changes which were made to the groups³⁷. RIFGs were to become the main route for engagement between fishers and MPPs. Shetland and Clyde MPPs were granted authority to create Regional Marine Plans in 2016 and 2017 respectively, and Orkney MPP was established in 2020³⁸.

The outline document published in 2016 also emphasised that inshore fisheries management was to retain the 'voluntary partnership approach' of engaging local fishers through the RIFG network. The set up was similar to previous iterations:

- Attendees could include individual fishers as well as those who were members of a fishing association.
- RIFGs were to produce FMPs however it was acknowledged that local circumstances meant that RIFGs would develop outputs at differing rates.
- The organisational structure also remained similar: a Chair, administration support from the SG and a Management Committee of local fishers.
- The Chair could invite other industry partners and was also at liberty to establish an Executive Board, sub committees and work groups.
- Resource was from the SG and approaching other funding partners was encouraged.

36 [Inshore Fisheries Group Newsletter Spring 2016](#)

37 [Scottish RIFGs - Outline Structure and Function. Scottish Government, 2016.](#)

38 [Marine planning in Scotland | NatureScot](#)

In the 2016 refresh, the Marine Directorate also published detailed guidance on the decision making processes of RIFGs³⁹. Again this mentioned the role of FMPs in presenting priorities and management measures to the SG. In 2017, Orkney published their FMP⁴⁰ and the FMPs from the other three were anticipated in the RIFG Spring 2017 newsletter⁴¹. It is not clear if these FMPs were delivered in 2017 or 2018 but there are a few online published examples from later years. The North and East Coast RIFG published an FMP in 2019 which was an update from their 2017 FMP⁴². The West Coast RIFG published a FMP in 2021⁴³. There is likely more FMPs which are now not available to view.

One example of delivery from 2016-2022 was within the West Coast RIFG. There were concerns about the status of the west coast scallop fishery and management proposals were developed. These proposals were investigated through a project with MRAG Ltd consultants and the Scallop Management and Conservation Strategy West Coast Waters report was published in July 2019⁴⁴.

Inshore Fisheries Pilots

The Inshore Fisheries Pilot initiative was launched by Marine Scotland in 2017 and a consultation ran from 30 November 2017 until 22 February 2018 on five proposals⁴⁵. Following the consultation, three of the schemes were taken forward⁴⁶:

- Proposal 2: Mull Crabbing Box - a seasonal restriction on mobile gear fishing
- Proposal 4: Outer Hebrides - a restriction on creel numbers

The Mull crabbing box pilot was launched in October 2018. The project introduced a prohibition on mobile gear fishing and a limit on creel fishing effort in order to protect a brown crab fishery of local impact to Mull fishers in the period 1 October to 31 January. As of 2024, the pilot appeared to be achieving its objectives of reducing gear conflict.

The Outer Hebrides Creel Limitation Pilot (CLP) launched in November 2020, following the Creel Fishing Effort Study⁴⁷. The pilot set creel limits and maximum soak times by vessel length groups. A 2023 review of the pilot

³⁹ [Regional Inshore Fisheries Groups - Decision making Process](#)

⁴⁰ [Orkney Sustainable Fisheries Ltd. - Management Plan 2017](#)

⁴¹ [Regional Inshore Fisheries Groups Newsletter Spring 2017](#)

⁴² [NECRIFG Fisheries Management Plan 2019](#)

⁴³ [WCRIFG Fisheries Management Plan 2021](#)

⁴⁴ [WCRIFG West Coast Scallop Management Final Report](#)

⁴⁵ [Proposed sites to host inshore fisheries pilots 2017: consultation](#)

⁴⁶ [Proposed inshore fisheries pilot host sites 2017: consultation analysis](#)

⁴⁷ [Creel fishing: effort study - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)

reported that 23% of fishers made changes to their fishing operations owing to the pilot, most of whom had reduced their creel numbers⁴⁸.

Future Fisheries Management Strategy 2020-2030

The Future Fisheries Management Strategy was launched in December 2020⁴⁹. The strategy includes inshore waters and reiterated the co-management approach of FMAC, IFMAC and RIFGs. In March 2021, it was announced that the scope of the RIFGs had changed from covering out to 6 NM to covering out to 12 NM.

It should also be highlighted that in 2020 the United Kingdom left the European Union and there was a global pandemic. This shifted a lot of SG and RIFG resources to manage this ensuing changed environment and so goes some way to explain the reduced delivery of RIFGs from 2020-2022.

Phase 4 (2023-2024): Second refresh

A second refresh of RIFGs occurred in 2023, when new Chairs were appointed and a new remit was published⁵⁰. The new refreshed network became operational in May 2023. The West Coast region was split into two (North and South) and for the first time a Shetland RIFG was formed, following requests from stakeholders.

Much of the structure and function of the network remains the same: there is a management committee for each group, a secretary can be appointed and working groups can be formed. Each group is still responsible for developing FMPs. The process of using both voluntary co-management approaches, and statutory means via the Scottish Government still applies.

In April 2024, an Operational Plan for the network was published⁵¹. The plan was developed by the Chairs and includes the following strategic objectives:

- Progressing towards and helping achieve sustainable management of inshore fisheries.
- Responding to planning decisions that affect the industry.
- Understanding and representing the views of fishers in meetings with Government Officials, Ministers, the Fisheries Management and Conservation (FMAC) Group, the Inshore Working Group, and relevant Scottish Marine Planning Partnerships.
- Engaging regularly with fishers at the coast within the RIFG area.

⁴⁸ [Outer Hebrides creel limitation pilot: research and evaluation](#)

⁴⁹ [Future fisheries: management strategy - 2020 to 2030 - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)

⁵⁰ [RIFG Network - Outline Structure and Function.pdf](#)

⁵¹ [RIFG Network plan 2024](#)

There are also seven measurable outputs presented covering engagement, regional plans, responding to consultations and marine license planning applications, and developing six local projects. Having outputs developed by the Chairs appears to be a change from previous arrangements. It also appears a positive change in that the estimation of what can be achieved has been decided by those most closely involved and therefore has higher likelihood of being delivered. The limitations of the network are however noted: no statutory basis, operational authority, nor direct budget.

The work of RIFGs was presented as four cluster: communications, management measures, trialling new technologies, and education. And examples of ongoing projects are provided. Again, the approach taken highlights one of the major advantages of having RIFGs: having a dedicated team of Chairs to engage regularly with the industry and present proposals to government.

An interim progress report was published in November 2024 outlining the activities of the refreshed RIFGs from 1 January to 30 June 2024. Engagement with fishers and other stakeholders has exceeded targets and there are eight projects underway across the four clusters mentioned above.

2024 review

Objectives and Methodology

Overview

Following the latest refresh of the RIFG network in 2023, the Marine Analytical Unit (MAU) was commissioned in late 2023 to gather qualitative evidence to inform the decision making around the future of the network.

The project team consisted of an economist and a social-researcher from the MAU, as well as some additional team support as and when required. The Project Advisory Group was made up of one industry representative, one representative of environmental issues, and the Marine Directorate Inshore Fisheries Policy Team. This group reviewed the methodology, progress reports, and advised on the direction of the project throughout. The FMAC Inshore sub-group were also updated.

This review of RIFGs is the first undertaken in-house by the Marine Directorate, the review in 2015 having been carried out by an external consultant. By delivering the review in-house the Marine Directorate was able to utilize their own expertise and to engage more broadly about current issues.

The primary objectives of the project were:

- To conduct an evaluation of the RIFG network to evaluate how effectively it is working and if it is delivering their objectives.
- To understand whether the RIFG network is fulfilling its role of providing a forum for Scottish inshore fishers' voice to be heard by Government.
- To use the findings to review the current approach and set up and determine if any changes need to be made to deliver on the objectives.

To deliver these objectives, an online survey and online or face-to-face, semi structured depth interviews were carried out. The 2024 review was done as objectively as possible, however the findings are dependent on those who heard and responded to publicity about the research. As such the sample was largely self-selecting and likely to attract those who had some interest in the topic or who had engaged with the RIFGs. However, in order to target those less engaged with RIFGs, the project team travelled to coastal areas to conduct interviews directly with fishers.

Survey

A survey was developed by the project team and asked questions about the remit, organisational set-up, and impact of the RIFGs. (See Annex B for a copy of the survey.) The survey ran from 3 March until 30 April 2024 and attracted 88

responses. The survey was targeted firstly at inshore fishers via fishery offices and Marine Directorate channels. It should be noted that the survey was a relatively small sample compared to the proportion of inshore fisheries stakeholders, and the sample was self-selecting, meaning those with an interest in RIFGs were more likely to respond.

Over 80% of respondents were either fishers or were from an organisation representing the commercial fishing industry. Other respondents were from organisations representing related interests including seafood processing, the third sector or the environment. Respondents were from around the coast and islands of Scotland, with all but one fishery office area represented; 71% of respondents were administered by mainland offices and 16% by Orkney, Shetland or Outer Hebrides offices. Just over 28% of respondents were members of another government run stakeholder group such as FMAC or MPPs.

Survey responses are integrated into the discussion section below alongside evidence gathered from interviews.

Interviews

One to one interviews were carried out between January and July 2024 with three primary groups of stakeholders. Table 1 below shows the groupings and number of interviews for each.

Table 1: Number of interviews by stakeholder group

Stakeholder group	Number of interviews
Inshore fishers	38
Organisations actively engaged in the network either now or in the past (this mainly comprised fishermen’s associations)	16
Current and previous Chairs	7
Other organisations with an interest in the management of inshore fisheries	3
Total	64

Many interviews were carried out on Microsoft Teams but interviews with inshore fishers and some fishing associations were carried out in-person in Spring 2024 in the west and south east coasts of Scotland.

Respondents were recruited using a variety of approaches: through coastal officers, by word of mouth and by intercepting fishers at ports. Participation in the research

was entirely voluntary. Researchers explained what the project was about and that respondents were under no obligation to respond. Respondents were asked to sign a form indicating their agreement to participate and that they understood how their personal data would be handled. Where respondents agreed, interviews were recorded with all data handled securely and confidentially under GDPR. A data protection impact assessment and ethics impact assessment were produced at the start of the project.

A limitation in the interview coverage was that due to time and resource constraints, the project team was not able to travel to the islands nor the North East of Scotland and therefore there is limited representation from the fishing industry in Orkney, Shetland Islands, the Outer Hebrides and North East inshore areas.

Review of minutes and newsletters

Overview

In addition to the survey and interviews, the project team carried out a light/general review of past documentation where they were available. The aim of this evidence gathering was to build a picture of IFG developments and delivery since they began in 2009. Many of these have been referred to in chapter 3 of this report. Chapter 4 looks in more detail at the newsletters and minutes of the IFGs and RIFGs to assess the level of delivery of the groups. These were primarily found online, with some searches done of Marine Directorate files.

From 2009-2014, the groups were still in the early stages of becoming a part of the inshore fisheries management landscape. This period of time included FMPs being developed and a large-scale consultation on measures. Evidence from this time shows the time required for ideas to lead to change. The groups started with enthusiasm and ideas, with well attended regular inshore fishery conferences run by Marine Scotland and regular local meetings. In 2014-2016 the IFGs appear to have initiated a good level of regulatory changes and projects.

However, the 2015 review highlights that stakeholders had slightly lost faith in the groups. The subsequent refresh should have been a turning point and the RIFG newsletters published after that time do demonstrate activity within the networks, a spattering of RIFG funded projects, but also a shift from RIFGs being the primary delivery partner in a project to working alongside funding partners and other organisations. The busy landscape of fishery and local marine and coastal organisations appears to confuse the unique role of the RIFGs during this time as newsletters focused more on wider industry news than specifically RIFG news. Perhaps this demonstrates the main function of the network shifting from delivery of FMPs (which were still being developed in this time), to a conduit of information across the industry.

Review of newsletters

There were four newsletters accessible from 2014-2018 – Spring 2014, Spring 2016⁵², Spring 2017⁵³, Spring 2018⁵⁴ – and these give regional updates and then cover national issues. Over this time there were regional FMPs and most regions had a couple of special issue groups which supplemented the management committee. The work undertaken by the groups seems to fall into these broad categories:

- Providing information to fishers about current issues in the marine space including government announcements such as changed minimum landing sizes.
- Being the voice of fishers into government on specific matters raised in RIFG meetings, and coordinating consultation responses
- RIFG run projects and information on new proposals such as the inshore fisheries pilots.
- Co-run projects with other groups such as FAs, councils, community groups on funded projects, some of which received funding from the European Maritime & Fisheries Fund (EMFF).
- Developing local management proposals and presenting them to government.

Overall, one major aspect of RIFGs evidenced through the newsletters is the level of engagement between RIFGs and other fisheries groups such as local partnerships and FAs. There seems to have been a good level of partnership working to delivery trials and other initiatives. However, what is less clear is how many of these projects would have happened without the RIFG in place. Also, during this period there appears to have been a good level of funding available to apply for, including EMFF.

Review of minutes

A review of minutes was undertaken to further establish what has been delivered by the groups. Minutes from 2023-2024 were not reviewed owing to the 2023 refresh. Minutes were gathered from the new RIFG website which held minutes from 2019-2024 only. Therefore four years of minutes were reviewed: 2019 to 2022. In this time period there were four RIFGs: North and East Coast, West Coast, Outer Hebrides, and Orkney. There were no minutes from Orkney, as this is when the RIFG functioned through Orkney Sustainable Fisheries. There was a decrease in regular meetings in 2020 and 2021 owing to the Covid-19 pandemic.

⁵² [Inshore Fisheries Group newsletter spring 2016](#)

⁵³ [Regional Inshore Fisheries Groups newsletter spring 2017](#)

⁵⁴ [Regional Inshore Fisheries Groups newsletter spring 2018](#)

The West Coast RIFG (WCRIFG) published minutes from main meetings and three working-groups covering scallops, creel limits and aquaculture. In addition there were three regional sub-groups: Clyde, Mull and Solway. A North West sub-group was also suggested in 2020. From the minutes it's clear the WCRIFG was active in discussing a wide range of issues and in actively seeking solutions. Topics included scallop management, creel limitation measures, aquaculture and producing the FMP. However, it is not clear what solutions and therefore improvements were ultimately delivered as these are minutes only. On a positive note, the Mull crab box restrictions continued, and there was the Clyde Voluntary Creel Measures project.

Meetings of the North and East Coast RIFG (NECRIFG) discussed issues including renewables interactions issues, creel issues, lobster V-notching and berried lobsters, a herring pilot. The main delivery item identified from the minutes was an aid to navigation pilot, although making links and being an advocate for the fishing sector in the renewables sector seems a key part of the role of the group. The FMP was also heavily discussed in 2019, though from 2020 onwards the minutes do not reflect how the plan was delivered.

In regards to the Outer Hebrides RIFG (OHRIFG) there were also numerous minutes and papers from the main meetings and sub-groups. Topics covered at meetings included, but were not limited to: the pot limitation trial, cockle fishery, brown crab tagging, vessel monitoring, consultation on future MPAs, blue fin tuna scientific tagging project and socio-economic impact assessment, and a Sound of Barra Habitats Regulations Assessment.

A point to note in relation to all main regional meetings is the attendance of Marine Directorate officials. These officials were clearly closely involved in the information presented at the meetings and in the discussions. Direct engagement with the industry at regular periods is a positive action however, this could be viewed as a duplication of the role of Chair whose job it is to feed information back to government. There were many and detailed information sessions from Marine Directorate officials at regional IFG meetings outlining new or changing policy, or recent scientific data. It could have been more efficient for these to be at a national level, i.e. the FMAC inshore sub-group established in 2013.

Another point to note that covers most groups is that one of the barriers to progress appears to be reaching consensus, indeed one conclusion of the creel limitation discussion was that each region had varying needs. However, what 'reaching consensus' entails is also a topic of debate amongst respondents and one that does not appear to be clearly answered in RIFG documentation. Another hindrance to change was the Covid-19 pandemic which occurred at a time when the RIFG appears to have been gathering momentum in terms of producing proposals and discussing tangible actions.

Thematic analysis

The survey analysis was conducted first and themes emerged which were then used for the analysis of the interview transcripts. The themes are organised into a logical ordering determined by the project team. There were 10 themes split into four groups.

Group one contains only one theme which is focused on the system, i.e. how the RIFGs fit within a system of other government groups and processes. These other groups and processes include FMAC, the FMAC inshore sub-group, fishery offices, the Marine Directorate inshore fisheries policy team, the legislative process, and MPPs.

Group two covers what the RIFGs do and contains three themes: remit, delivery, and monitoring and reporting.

- Theme two is the remit and includes objectives and overall purpose of the RIFGs and specifically the topics of the voice of fishers and sustainability.
- Theme three is delivery and focuses on the tangible deliverables of RIFGs and what barriers, if any, exist with regards to delivery.
- The last theme of this group, theme four, discusses how RIFG activity and delivery should be monitored and reported to stakeholders.

Group three covers who is involved in the RIFGs and contains three themes: leadership, engagement, and membership.

- Theme five is leadership and focuses on the characteristics of RIFGs leadership in the past, and what the ideal leadership looks like in the future.
- Theme six is on engagement and discusses RIFG chairs' engagement with stakeholders (including hard to reach groups) and engagement by fishers with the RIFGs.
- Theme seven concerns membership and looks at how well the membership arrangements work.

Group four focuses on how RIFGs operate and contains three themes: power, resources, and regions.

- Theme eight covers what power RIFGs have to make effective changes in inshore fisheries management, and if more or less power should be given to the groups.
- Theme nine is on resources and discusses government funding, the chair's time, and broader resources.
- Theme ten concerns the regional boundaries of the individual groups.

Theme 1: The system

Key insight: Clarity on the governance landscape of inshore fisheries management will help stakeholders know where to engage and where decisions are taken.

The first theme concerns the system in which RIFGs operate: the Marine Directorate policy and operations teams, FMAC, and other government organised groups such as MPPs.

Firstly, with regards to governance landscape, some respondents highlighted that they thought that the Scottish Government was under more resource pressure than in previous years and that this was affecting the performance of RIFGs.

Respondents felt that officials appeared not to have the same time or resource available for travel to inshore ports to meet with fishers as in previous years or decades. These issues were acknowledged by respondents as being caused by external factors and shifting government priorities and therefore was not in the control of the inshore policy team. Another key point raised by some respondents was that the trust fishers have in the RIFGs as a mechanism for delivery has been declining since the IFG pilots. One reason given by respondents for this was that the groups had not delivered what the industry had expected.

Some fishers noted that they have direct contact with the Marine Directorate which was greatly appreciated, yet those fishers still stated that an RIFG group was useful. Others noted that their local fishing association was a listening ear and represented them within government and therefore RIFGs were potentially duplicating that role. Fishing associations were raised by many respondents as key players in how Marine Directorate connects and listens to the fishing sector. A few respondents noted that the RIFGs need to work more closely with fishing associations, or that the Marine Directorate needs to build up and focus on good relationships with local fishing associations as these groups are who fishers go to and trust. However, it is also important to note that there are fishers who are not members of associations, and RIFGs can fill this gap by providing a link to government.

A few respondents also noted that they were uncertain about the direction that the Scottish Government wanted to take fisheries management and they felt that this could be partly contributing to fewer people entering the sector or less investment by current fishers.

Secondly, in terms of Marine Planning Partnerships, there were a few comments raised. A few respondents were not clear how RIFGs work alongside the partnerships and where the boundaries lie in terms of management of the inshore waters.

Thirdly, respondents mentioned FMAC, and one point raised was that fishers voices could successfully be fed into government at FMAC. One suggestion was that there was too much decided at a national level, and therefore a regional FMAC

style gathering is needed. Some respondents felt that this forum, alongside fishing associations strong links with Marine Directorate, means that an RIFG is surplus to their requirements.

Some respondents noted that the involvement at FMAC in recent times of some eNGOs has meant that some fishers feel unable to speak openly about management issues and that the group is therefore no longer suitable for open discussion on regional fisheries management. On the other hand, some felt that the inclusion of wider stakeholders i.e. environmental groups is good as it helps deliver the sustainability part of the RIFG remit.

Theme 2: Remit

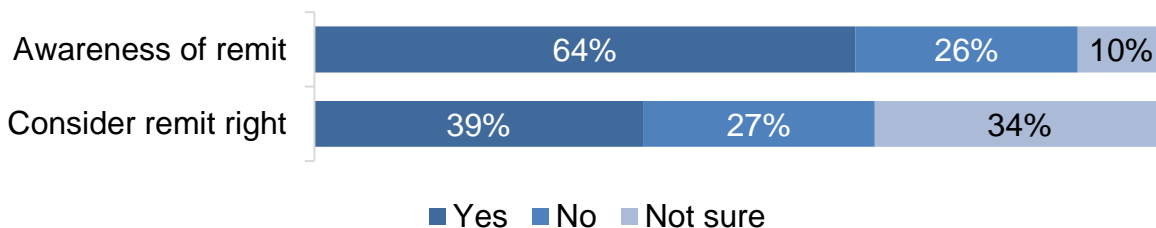
Key insight: The remit should be specific, achievable, and measurable. Key elements should include: a Chair-led forum for discussing local issues and potential solutions; ensuring inshore fishers' voices are heard by government; and encouraging the groups to support the sustainability of the sector.

The term remit is used in an overarching sense to mean the objectives, purpose, and overall expectations of activity that stakeholders should expect from RIFGs. The remit of RIFGs has slightly morphed over the years as discussed in section 3 of this report. They began as the route to create and deliver local FMPs. From 2016 onwards they were reduced in scale and remit. FMPs were produced in most instances but delivery uncertain from the available documents.

During engagement for this project, respondents were provided with the 2023 remit: a) 'To improve the sustainable management of inshore fisheries and', b) 'to give commercial inshore fishers a voice in wider marine management developments.'

Survey respondents were asked if they were aware of the remit and if they think the current remit is the right one for a government initiated stakeholder group which concerns inshore fisheries management. The majority of respondents were aware of the remit. 39% thought the remit was the right one, but only 27% thought it was not the right remit, leaving the remaining 34% of respondents unsure.

Graph 1: Survey questions 11 and 12: Were you aware of the remit of the RIFGs? Do you think the current remit is the right remit for a government initiated stakeholder group which concerns inshore fisheries management?



In both the survey and the interview, comments provided by respondents noted the dependency of the remit on other themes, for example, the remit sounds appropriate but how can the remit be **delivered** when RIFGs do not have **power**. Or, the interpretation of the remit depends on how much the **chair** had a grasp of the industry and is able to demonstrate a strong working relationship with fishers.

In many comments there was a general agreement that the remit was about right, but there were comments on what lay underneath the brief definition. A primary issue raised concerning the remit was that it needs to be clarified. Many respondents recalled the pilot phase and later years when there was a clear remit to produce FMPs. These including producing management measures, suggesting pilots and other new schemes to improve stocks and support the local industry. However, many also noted that the current remit had been diluted, or neglected due it not being delivered upon fully. Therefore many respondents called for clarity on the full scope of the RIFGs remit, and linked to that was, for some, the desire for more locally managed fisheries taking account of local issues. More on the latter issue is covered under the theme of 'Power'.

The first part of the remit '*To improve the sustainable management of inshore fisheries*' attracted many comments. Sustainability was of high importance to most respondents and this was viewed as a priority for RIFGs. However, it was clear from the survey comments and the interviews that sustainability means different things to different stakeholders. For fishers, sustainability often means being able to make a living from fishing for the next 5-10 years, and perhaps be able to pass the business on to the next generation. To do so, they appreciate this means not putting too much pressure on stocks. Sustainability of local communities and services were also noted by some as important for fisheries stakeholders. However, there was consensus among fishers that they wanted sustainable fishing and wanted, broadly, to support measures to achieve sustainability.

increasing stock levels to historic levels or to achieve Good Environmental Status. Sustainability also drew in other marine aspects for example, to protect marine habitats from the impacts of fishing.

Therefore, there was a call for the Marine Directorate to define what sustainability meant, so that stakeholders could be clear on what they were to be discussing and working to achieve. However, there was general consensus that RIFGs in the current form had little ability to influence the sustainable management of inshore fisheries, primarily owing to not having power to implement local rules. FMPs were mentioned by a few respondents, noting that these should be produced at a regional or even local level and include short, medium and long term objectives for inshore fisheries management. Some noted there had been attempts to produce these in the past with some positive impacts noted (more on this under the 'Impact' theme).

Quite a few respondents mentioned the use of science and that the sustainability part of the remit would only work with up to date science incorporated into decision-making. Some fishers noted that Marine Directorate science data should be used in conjunction with local knowledge. In previous iterations of the RIFGs there was far more close working with Marine Directorate fisheries scientists and this enabled quick responses to local issues. Supermarkets' increasing demands for fish sourced in environmentally sustainable ways was also noted as a driver of implementing more sustainable ways of fishing.

The second part of the remit '*to give commercial inshore fishers a voice in wider marine management developments*' was also noted as very important by the fishing community and other stakeholders. The voice of fishers was a key theme throughout both the survey and interviews and it was clear that many fishers wanted to know that there is a way they can communicate views to the government. This part of the remit was of special importance to fishers who are not members of a local fishing association. For some respondents who were members of a fishing association, they found that the association was the voice to government and a RIFG was duplicating that role. However, a number in the fishing industry noted that the RIFG was needed in addition to fishing associations to provide a local voice that had more of a direct ear of the government that an fishing association may do.

While many stakeholders supported a space for fishers' voices to be heard, many fishers noted that it was not very useful unless they were listened to and actions taken. One respondent noted that '*... the communication is going up but the actions aren't coming down*'. The question was raised by a number of respondents as to whether the government had been listening to RIFGs in recent years. Again, many recalled the early years of RIFGs and the ambition of co-management, and that over the year that initial trust had been eroded as fishers felt decisions are made by government without fully incorporating fishers' perspectives. The term co-management possibly leads to confusion here, as stakeholders may see that as taking a more active role in management than an alternative term, for example 'co-production'.

Consensus and membership were other aspects of comments concerning fishers' voices. Who was in the meetings and who had the loudest voice could have great influence over what was fed back from an RIFG to government. More on membership is found under the 'membership' theme.

The chairs were noted as being pivotal to this second part of the remit. Chairs are the voice of fishers to other marine stakeholders as well as the government. They also act as a conduit, passing on information from the government to fishers. Many fishers noted being on mailing lists and even if they did not attend RIFG meetings these would receive emails on government news or other marine news. This two way communication between government and fishers was seen as valuable by most respondents, especially the role of chairs distilling policy documents or

consultations into key messages for fishers. Others noted that their fishing association did this job, and that if this was all that RIFG did, it was not required.

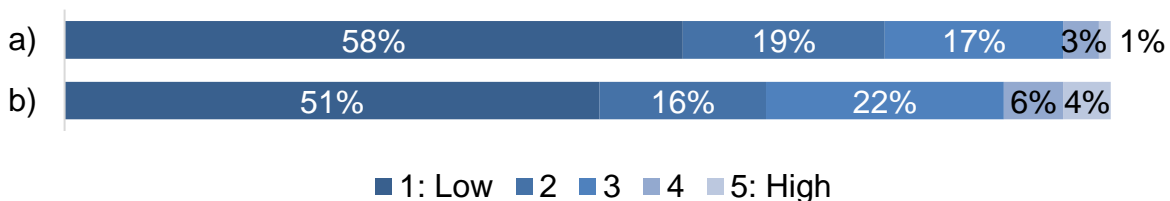
Theme 3: Delivery

Key insight: Tangible deliverables that align with the remit are essential to ensure value and best use of resources.

This section should be viewed in conjunction with the review of documents as recorded in section 3 and where there is discussion of what RIFGs delivered.

The survey asked respondents if, in their view, their local RIFG contributed to the remit: a) *‘improving the sustainable management of inshore fisheries’* and b) *‘giving commercial inshore fishers a voice in wider marine management developments’* in the past five years. Where 1 was low and 5 was high. 77% of survey respondents think their local RIFG has made a low or fairly low contribution to the first half of the remit, and 67% thought the same for the second half. So there were marginally more respondents who thought the ‘voice’ part of the remit had been delivered in their area. There was also a notable proportion of respondents who were unsure.

Graph 2: Survey questions 14-17: ‘In your view, has your local RIFG contributed to a) ‘improving the sustainable management of inshore fisheries’ and b) ‘giving commercial inshore fishers a voice in wider marine management developments’ in the past 5 years? Where 1 means a low contribution, and 5 means a high contribution.



The time period asked about in the survey was 5 years however in the survey comments and in the interviews some respondents referred to the IFG pilot launched in 2009. A good number of respondents noted the positive benefits felt in the early days of the groups, enthusiasm for new projects and better engagement with government. The majority of respondents were unsure about what management measures delivered in the past 15 years were directly linked to RIFG activity. However, a good number of respondents mentioned projects or development of proposals that they felt would not have happened without the RIFGs. These included the following (dates were not always provided):

- Crab and lobster interim management measures (2024)
- The Outer Hebrides creel limitation pilot (2020-2022)
- Razorfish pilot (2018-present)

- Management of the handline mackerel fishery
- Increase in crab and lobster landing size
- Being the voice of fishers to the aquaculture and renewables sectors
- Improving fishers' perspectives on what sustainable means
- Tuna quota and Bluefin tuna tagging protocol
- Sustainable eel group
- Clyde creel limit
- Brown crab research
- Voluntary measures for spawning in Gairloch and Clyde

Some respondents felt that the RIFGs have been successful in providing a voice for fishers into government over the years, and that this has been appreciated. A few noted that from 2009 to around 2014 there was activity and tangible outputs for example, new government regulations and pilots being approved. However, there remained a general feeling amongst respondents of government inaction. Respondents noted several reasons including the length of time required for the legislative cycle and general government processes, the Chair lacking training on the fishing sector and how to navigate government processes, duplication of work with fishing associations, the government not taking decisions, RIFGs being restricted due to lack of power and resource, and the lack of requirements for the RIFGs to deliver. Another point raised under delivery of the 'voice' part of the remit was membership. Some respondents mentioned the competing voices in the groups (both from within and outside of the industry) and therefore it is tricky for the government to hear a balanced voice.

A few respondents mentioned ongoing challenges in the inshore sector that they felt the RIFGs should have taken action on, some of which are longstanding issues with no clear solution, including:

- High creel numbers putting pressure on stocks
- Clyde cod seasonal closure
- Additional science surveys
- Introducing a spurdog quota
- An Orkney regulating order
- Improving sustainability of the sector
- Improving the reputation of fishers
- Illegal and unlicensed fishing
- Different crab and lobster landing sizes around Scotland
- Banning berried lobsters

Theme 4: Monitoring and reporting

Key insight: Accountability should be delivered via a monitoring and reporting plan and regular published reports.

Closely linked with 'Delivery', the next theme concerns the monitoring and reporting of RIFGs activity in regards to their remit. A minority of respondents raised monitoring and reporting, however these were deemed significant enough topics to amount to a theme. Those who mentioned monitoring and reporting noted a lack of reporting of outputs from the RIFGs and therefore a lack of knowledge amongst stakeholders as to what the RIFGs are delivering. Section 3 of this report shows that there has been an effort to publish minutes and, at times, newsletters of the RIFGs' work. The desk review highlighted that there was not a consistent approach to demonstrate the value of the network to stakeholders.

Therefore, as raised by respondents, there has been a gap in reporting and a lack of a monitoring and evaluation strategy sitting alongside the RIFG remit. Respondents noted that these products would enable stakeholders to see how government funds were being used and how the groups are serving the industry and wider marine users. Another benefit raised would be the ability to distinguish between what is attributable to the RIFG or what would have occurred anyway without the network. An example of this is the Outer Hebrides creel limitation pilot which a few respondents thought would have gone ahead without the RIFG but with a similar locally organised network. Nonetheless, the RIFG does appear to provide the appropriate framework for such a project to receive government support. In 2024, the Chairs sought to fill some of this gap by producing a Progress Report in November 2024.⁵⁵

Theme 5: Leadership

Key insight: Direction should be set by the Marine Directorate and local leadership provided by regional Chairs. The Marine Directorate should maintain oversight of delivery, with Chairs taking initiative for local projects and enabling the voice of fishers to be heard by government.

Almost half of respondents raised issues relating to how the groups were led, both by chairs but also more broadly the guidance they receive from the Marine Directorate. Firstly, respondents felt that the direction for RIFGs should sit with the Marine Directorate and that RIFG chairs should not relinquish the remit to focus on issues less directly concerning fisheries management. Some noted that they felt the Marine Directorate has taken a step away from setting a specific direction for RIFGs to take and therefore some chairs were apt to not follow the expected remit. Respondents noted that this has worked in some cases with the chair being able to devote time and attention to specific issues. On the other hand, other respondents noted that this has led to some chairs focusing too much effort on one fishing

⁵⁵ [Progress Report June 2024 - RIFG](#)

sector's concerns over another. Respondents were therefore keen to see more oversight of the groups from the Marine Directorate to ensure chairs stay within slightly tighter topical boundaries.

Others highlighted that the leadership required extended beyond RIFGs to the wider fisheries objectives of government, i.e. specific inshore objectives which are clearly presented to the industry. For example, in relation to the remit, there needs to be clarity from the Marine Directorate on the definition of sustainability. Overall, respondents want the government to set out a long term vision for inshore fishing which they feel is not currently clear.

Secondly, the role of a Chair's leadership was raised. Some respondents noted that there have been good Chairs who have listened well and led the RIFG to develop balanced regional proposals. Other respondents noted that different Chairs carry out different activities and therefore respondents felt that there was not always a consistent direction set by Chairs. Respondents noted looking at other RIFGs outside of their region and seeing Chairs carrying out their role differently, and therefore there was doubt cast on how Chairs were leading the network as a whole.

One respondent mentioned that Chairs can have a key role in 'persuading, influencing, convincing' stakeholders towards sustainability. That said, there were also questions asked by respondents about how much Chairs can actually influence RIFG delivery in their local region with some noting they were powerless owing to holding no legislative power, leading to some Chairs not setting the direction for their group where they possibly could have, i.e. promoting voluntary measures of pilot proposals.

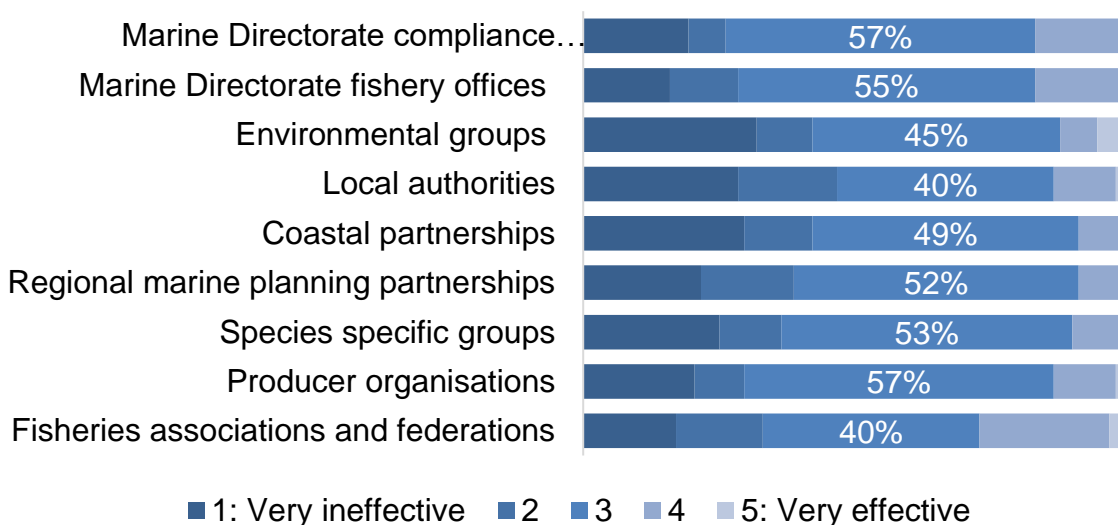
Some respondents noted that a key aspect of Chair leadership was impartiality between different fishing sectors, and that fishing knowledge was key to being trusted to chair an RIFG. More discussion on the Chair is covered under Theme 10: Resource.

Theme 6: Engagement

Key insight: Chairs should engage with all relevant stakeholders and prioritise regular interactions with inshore fishers. Removing barriers to the involvement of fishers should be a key priority.

The theme of engagement is also in two parts, engagement by Chairs with stakeholders and engagement by fishers with the RIFGs. Survey respondents were asked to what extent they think RIFGs engage effectively with relevant organisations, where 1 was least effective and 5 was most effective. On average, 50% of respondents gave a neutral response to each organisation listed. So there was a lack of knowledge concerning Chair engagement even amongst the fairly engaged group who responded to the survey.

Graph 3: Survey question 24: ‘To what extent do you think RIFGs engage effectively with relevant organisations?’ Where 1 is very ineffective, 2 is ineffective, 3 is neutral, 4 is effective, and 5 is very effective.’



From the survey, RIFGs are engaging most effectively with fishing associations and federations (28%), Marine Directorate fishery offices and compliance operations staff (17%). RIFGs are engaging least effectively with Local Authorities (47%), environmental groups and coastal partnerships (42%). From interviews, there was clear evidence that the Chairs had reached out to many stakeholders including fishing associations and regional coastal or marine related groups. However, the engagement levels varied across groups.

Most survey comments concerning the view that there was a lack of engagement carried out by Chairs were provided by individual skippers. It is important to highlight that the Chairs cover large geographical regions covering many harbours, and fishers are at harbour at varying points in a day. Survey respondents noted engagement as the main change they wanted to happen to the groups, with the majority of respondents saying that RIFGs need to engage more with local fishers. There were not many suggestions provided on how Chairs should best engage. Some fishers suggested a bigger presence at local harbours. The majority of organisations engaged in this review knew the Chairs by name and some had meetings or phone calls with them.

Similarly, many fishers spoken to at harbours by the research team had not directly heard from a Chair, unless they had been on an email list for some time. This is not necessarily a reflection on the Chairs who may engage via fisher representatives. When speaking to Chairs themselves, they noted that previous contact lists were not always made available to them by previous Chairs, or the Marine Directorate. Therefore, reaching out to such a dispersed group of stakeholders is tricky. Chairs and some organisations did note a concerted effort by Chairs to engage across the industry.

In terms of fishers engaging with RIFGs, some fisher respondents reported that they had at one point in the past been engaged but had lost faith that anything would be delivered so had stopped being engaged. Chairs noted similar feedback from some of their engagement with fishers. Some respondents linked this reduced engagement to a lack of trust in RIFGs or in the Marine Directorate which had emerged after not seeing expected deliverables.

Reasons for lower levels of engagement amongst fishers included that some respondents noted trusting the fishing associations to be their voice to government, or because their fishing association was either discouraging or encouraging engagement with the RIFG. There is also a group of fishers, and this emerged primarily from the fieldwork, who simply want to go out and fish and not engage in groups or go to meetings. Time was noted as a barrier to engagement as well as the cost of travelling to in-person meetings or that locations were difficult or time consuming to get to given the wide areas each Chair is covering.

Theme 7: Membership

Key insight: There is strong support for a forum designed for only fishing representatives, however, stakeholders recognise that the marine space is a shared resource so other marine stakeholders should be brought into management discussions. A more formal membership would improve transparency.

In the current iteration of RIFGs there is no formal membership as there is no need to sign up or formally join the RIFG group, and no subscription is payable to participate, and yet it was one of the most contentious issues raised in this review. In previous iterations there were slightly more formalised groups, but in 2024, membership is loosely defined in this review as those who come along to RIFG meetings. At the moment, meeting attendees are primarily members of the fishing community. Participation by some may be fleeting and transitory. Non-fisheries stakeholders may engage with the Chair outwith meetings.

Respondents were specifically asked about membership and this theme attracted many comments. In the survey, 56% of respondents agreed with the statement 'Membership should be fishers and fishers representatives only'. In the comments provided, there was a majority who reiterated that point, but also a good number who wanted to expand membership to include scientists, academics, or even all other relevant stakeholders.

In the interviews, the strongest point raised was also that membership should remain fishers only as they need a safe space to talk and discuss issues. Most fishers and many of the chairs felt quite strongly that the meetings should be for fishers only as there was a need for fishers to have a private space to discuss local issues.

Also some non-fisheries organisations felt that a fishers only forum was important too, as long as other organisations were brought in before final decisions were taken by government. Several respondents from the fishing industry specifically said that they thought eNGOs should not be at RIFG meetings. A number said that they would be “shouted down” by eNGOs at meetings and that would put them off attending. They also noted that eNGOs are members of FMAC and therefore have a ready forum to engage in fisheries management. A few of the non-fisheries organisations engaged in the project agreed that fishers need a space for themselves to speak. A few respondents (fishers and chairs) felt that it was particularly important to attract fishers who are not currently part of any fishing association to the RIFG meetings as there was no other way for them to have their voice heard. The RIFG played an important role for those fishers.

Conversely, some respondents felt the membership should be expanded. Whilst some eNGOs recognised the need for fishers to have their own space they felt that if the RIFG becomes the place where decisions are made then the participation should be broader than just the fishing industry, as the decisions relate to a public good. The point of when to engage non-fishing stakeholders appears integral, with many respondents noting that all stakeholders should be engaged at some point or at some level, as long as it does not cancel the fisher specific forum. One suggestion was for a public sector environmental organisation to act as a trusted partner to unite fisheries and environmental stakeholders. A couple of respondents noted that the meetings would benefit from having seafood processors present. In some cases processors attend but not always. Having fisheries officers attending some RIFG meetings was also regarded as being a bonus.

Another point raised was that even amongst fisheries stakeholders, the membership criteria needed to ensure balance across fishery types. Some noted that meetings might be dominated by the bigger boats or those from bigger companies. Therefore it was raised that the remit for the groups had to ensure a balance of voices across the inshore sector. Some respondents mentioned the competition for marine space, and therefore they wanted a place where these issues could be discussed in a balanced way. Respondents noted that this would of course require a strong Chair to manage competing views. There was also a number of respondents who noted membership needed to be clarified as the current RIFG membership was not clear.

Theme 8: Power

Key insight: Groups should be enabled by the Marine Directorate to achieve their remit including encouraging locally led approaches that have the potential to become legislation.

RIFGs are non-statutory which means that they do not have the authority to implement legislation on behalf of the Scottish Government. They cannot set local fisheries management regulations. The original ambitions of IFGs were to devolve

some level of regional power to the groups, although this did not fully transpire. Indeed, one fisher who had been involved with RIFGs in previous years, responded saying that he had believed that the original RIFGs would have decision making power but that it did not come to fruition after the pilot period. Currently, fishing in inshore waters continues to be managed through regulations and licence variations which are decided by the Marine Directorate through consultation with stakeholders.

From the survey, 38% of respondents think that RIFGs should become statutory groups, and 29% think they should continue to be non-statutory; leaving a substantial group who are unsure. There was no clear regional distribution of responses. Note that 'non statutory' was not defined in the survey and therefore there may be differing views on what this means.

A small majority of fishers were more supportive of RIFGs becoming statutory compared to fishers against. A small majority of fishing organisations were against RIFGs becoming statutory instead of those who were in support. Third sector organisation were more likely to be in favour of RIFGs becoming statutory. Few reasons were provided in the survey comments, although limited power was mentioned as a the second top drawback of the groups as they currently stand (after membership issues), i.e. the groups not being able to implement local management measures. Those unsure either way mainly mentioned that clarity on the remit was needed before deciding if they should have more power.

From interviews, discussions more often used the broader term 'power', however the definition was broadly similar: the ability of RIFGs to implement management measures for local areas. There were a few respondents that strongly thought there should be more power to make regional or local regulations. Again, the discussion on power touched on other themes, mainly remit and the system, but respondents doubted that action would be taken and that Marine Directorate would give power to a local management group.

Overall, there were mixed views from respondents on whether there should be greater statutory powers for RIFGs. A few of those who were opposed to RIFGs becoming statutory bodies provided reasons. It was noted that an additional tier of legislation could confuse the governance landscape, and that more power is not required if RIFGs can make proposals to government that can become legislation. A few compared the idea of additional powers with the Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority (IFCA) model in England who regulate regionally. This was the viewpoint of one of the eNGOs who also felt that there are benefits from combining fisheries management with wider marine management. However, some noted that having regional regulations could result in inconvenience and confusion for fishers that work across regions.

In addition, a few respondents noted that in order to grant more power, the remit and membership of the groups would need further clarification. One of the Chairs said that the groups should be able to reach solutions through negotiation even without having legislative power. Having the right people on board who can drive through decisions would be sufficient. Another respondent noted that the current regions are too large for local measures as there are varying local issues.

Contrastingly, a number of respondents felt that it is important for RIFGS to have more power, that RIFGs cannot fulfil their remit without power and that having more power would result in greater interest and engagement from fishers. They believed that it would be good for local areas to have more control over what happens in their own waters, and actions could be taken quicker than currently felt. As one respondent summarised 'Giving IFGs powers to actually introduce local fisheries management by local fishermen should be high up the agenda'. Local knowledge was also cited as a reason for more power, with those working in the areas understanding what measures were best.

A few respondents noted barriers to RIFGs being given more power. For example, the additional resource that would be required from government. There was a recognition amongst some that even if more power was needed, it would be very difficult and expensive to restructure the system to allow it and it would not therefore offer a quick solution to the current challenges. A few respondents questioned whether the government wanted to devolve more power, and therefore whether it was worth discussing. One respondent also felt that government used the RIFG to instruct fishers, rather than using meetings as a forum for decision making.

Challenges around reaching consensus were also raised. If more power was given to RIFGs, working in committees to reach decisions remains difficult owing to varying views. There is the risk that the voice of the smaller fishing associations with fewer members are drowned out by the bigger more influential players. As one fisher put it 'you'd just get the people that shout the loudest getting what they want to the detriment of everyone else'. Noted also was the risk of enforcing management measures without proper consultation with the industry

Ultimately, the main issue raised under this theme was what was the best route for RIFGs to deliver. If giving RIFGs additional power resulted in more delivery that was a strong reason to support it, however, there may be other routes to delivery that do not require additional power. In theory the negotiated approach should work but quite a few respondents noted that they think things do not make progress when they get to the Marine Directorate.

Theme 9: Resource

Key insight: Chairs must be knowledgeable about inshore fisheries and empowered to initiate regional ideas and solutions to improve inshore management. Chairs should have access to science evidence to ensure it is incorporated into local discussions.

Resources available to the RIFGs fall under four main categories: government resources which includes paying the Chairs and discretionary project funding, the resource of the Chair themselves and their skills, scientific evidence, and stakeholder time. The topic of the Chairs was raised the most often under this theme. It was clear that most respondents felt that a skilled Chair was paramount to delivery.

Firstly, on government resources, this was mentioned but only by a few respondents, perhaps due to lack of knowledge about what fundings was available. From the survey, more respondents think that the current funding arrangements are not appropriate for the functioning of the RIFGs (41%), than those who think that current arrangements are appropriate (12%). The remaining 46% gave a neutral response and from the comments provided on this theme, it was generally felt that clarification of the remit and the deliver issues had to be addressed before determining funding requirements. This would be so that stakeholders know what the resource would be going towards. From the interviews, many of the respondents who were fishers did not comment on resourcing issues and indicated in some occasions that this was because they felt they did not have sufficient knowledge about how RIFGs were financed.

In the comments that were raised about government funding, a few respondents, primarily Chairs, acknowledged that resource was a potential limitation and that with more money they could do more. They felt that a small fund or budget to be helpful to deliver projects such as piloting new ideas locally. Some fishers who had been involved in the earlier RIFGs felt that a lack of funding had led to the original RIFG not delivering as planned, with one fisher saying 'good management costs [money]'. It was lamented that the RIFGs do not have any other sources of funding other than what the government provides as some felt that they not in a position to apply for grants. However, it should be noted that in the past some RIFGs have applied for grants, with some Chairs more active than others in pursuing grants.

Another issue concerning government resource, mentioned also under the theme 'System', was the perceived decrease by stakeholders of time and finance Marine Directorate staff have to travel and attend meetings. Respondents noted that although a government representative was not always necessary at all RIFG meetings, it was useful to have a government (either policy or science) representative to attend meetings on specific topics. Clarity was requested on if government would attend any future RIFG, or replacement, group. Fishers felt that more was expected from the Chairs to step into the gap and be the voice of the

Marine Directorate at meetings. There was a desire amongst some fishers to have fisheries policy leads visit local ports, on perhaps an annual visit. On the other hand, some felt the Chair stood effectively in that gap.

A few respondents felt that the funding level was fine as the remit did not require a large fund (in addition to the Chair's salary). Instead, many respondents noted that it was the work of the Chair that makes the difference between delivery and stagnation in an RIFG. One respondent, from a non-fisheries organisation, mentioned that RIFGs should be funded by the fishers themselves as they are the main beneficiaries of the stakeholder discussions and the natural resource they are discussing.

Secondly, a common point of agreement amongst respondents was that a good Chair is a pivotal resource for the success of RIFGs. Characteristics noted included that they must have knowledge and understanding of the inshore fishing sector and what the job entails. Some past and current Chairs have come into the RIFG role from other sectors and therefore there was a point raised by them and others that a more detailed induction process covering the functioning and history of the fishing industry would be helpful.

The Chair also must be neutral, so they cannot have a vested interest in a particular fishing sector but should also have good connections and networks across the sector. They should also be skilled at building rapport with all stakeholders. Other skills noted as important were the ability to facilitate meetings where there was varying and contrasting perspectives, and an ability to speak out in public. Listening was noted as very important and being able to understand stakeholders points of view. This would also include negotiation skills and assisting stakeholders to reach a consensus. Although the definition of 'consensus' could also vary across stakeholders. Chairs should also be able to relay different views on to government.

Overall, strong leadership and the ability of Chairs to get things done were important to respondents. It was noted that it is not just about being nice; fishers need to have confidence that the Chair will take action following meetings. Depending on respondents experience of RIFGs, some felt confident in Chairs taking action but others did not; however, all agreed this was important. Most Chairs felt that they had sufficient time in their contract to do the job, although one Chair felt that they are not allocated enough time. The example given was where two days a week is allocated. One Chair acknowledged that he felt like he worked alone the majority of the time which was deemed difficult when starting in the role, especially in regards to building relationships across the sector and travelling across a wide region. To note, some RIFGs have historically brought in additional support for administration work. In recent years this has happened infrequently, but remains an option available to Chairs.

From interviews with the Chairs, it became clear that some had expected more day-to-day support from the Marine Directorate, and were not anticipating the level of autonomy that came with the role. Again, resource pressures across government were mentioned in this context, however it has been the approach of government to allow Chairs to make their own connections across industry, given they are not government employees. Some Chairs newly instated in 2023 noted that it had taken longer than expected to learn about the sector and their role and therefore they would have benefited from a more extensive induction period; perhaps a reflection of the complexity of that landscape for new entrants to the sector.

The third sub-topic under 'Resource' is that of scientific evidence. Quite a few respondents, both fishers and organisations, mentioned the importance of scientific information such as stock assessments for informing management measures. Some fishers felt that there was a mismatch between stock assessments and what they are seeing "on the ground". Some fishers stated that their knowledge about fish stocks should be considered alongside science evidence. Again, there was a view that in previous years there was closer working with Marine Directorate Science and other providers of scientific evidence and there was interest from some in resuming this engagement again. In earlier years there had been, for example, the presence of public or other environmental organisations at RIFG meetings but this was dependent on staff time.

The fourth and last sub-theme raised under 'Resource' was fishers' time. Some fishers noted that attending meetings was using their own time and they were not able to claim expenses such as travel and subsistence costs; whereas, it was felt that other participants such as those from representative organisations or NGOs were there as part of their job and therefore being paid to be there.

Theme 10: Regions

Key insight: The regions of the Outer Hebrides and Orkney were deemed suitable to have their own RIFGs. Clarity is needed on the role of a RIFG in Shetland owing to the Shetland Islands Regulated Fishery (Scotland) Order 2012. Mainland regions were deemed too large, with the North West RIFG and the North and East Coast RIFG specifically suggested as needing new regional lines drawn.

There are three mainland and three island RIFGs in the current network. In the survey, 40% of respondents were content with the current regional set up, and 33% were not content. The remaining respondents were not sure either way. Overall in both the survey and interviews it was noted that a regional approach worked well due to the variations between areas especially between east and west coast.

However, a key issue noted was that there is a disparity in the size of the geographic areas. Orkney, Shetland, and the Outer Hebrides have their own groups which are relatively small compared with the mainland groups but some respondents noted that this worked as they are discrete island entities. From the

limited number of interviews there was some suggestion that the Shetland RIFG is not required owing to the management authority already present there. Although it should be noted that SSMO covers 0-6NM and the RIFG covers 0-12NM (prior to 2021 the RIFG network covered 0-6NM); there is also an active fishing association in Shetland.

In regards to the three mainland RIFGs, several respondents noted that the North and East Coast RIFG region is a very large area for one Chair to cover. The West Coast RIFG was split into two RIFGs in the 2023 refresh, and a number of respondents recognised this split as an improvement. Although some respondents, including Chairs, felt the South West RIFG and North West RIFG were still large regions when considering the geography and fisheries. For example, one respondent noted that getting from Kyle of Lochalsh to Mallaig is only 15 miles as the crow flies but 115 miles by road (if you cannot get the ferry and travel via Skye). The dispersed geography means that the feasibility of all the fishers from one RIFG area attending the same in-person meeting is difficult, resulting in the Chair carrying out multiple such meetings. However, some Chairs did mention being able to move some stakeholder meetings to online. As well as travel, there was noted to be variations in fishing practices, gear types and issues faced by fishers along the coast. Owing to the large coverage, a Chair was more likely not to be able to hear and address all issues raised along the coast. In addition, reaching consensus across such large areas was deemed difficult.

Suggestions for alternative mainland regions included using regions linked to fishery office levels. A couple of respondents remembered that smaller local sub-groups of the RIFG had been utilised in earlier years. These sub-groups had a representative who reported to the regional RIFG and respondents noted that this model could still work. This point is reflected in section 3 of this report where sub-groups were a prominent part of RIFGs.

Others felt that the current set up with the six areas was a reasonable way to do it. One chair described it as “ a reasonable compromise”. The importance of the RIFG chairs being relatively near where the fishers in their area fish was also highlighted so that they could get to know the fishers in their area and build up a working relationship with the locals.

Should RIFGs continue in the future?

Both survey respondents and the majority of interviewees were asked ‘Do you think RIFGs play a role in the future of inshore fisheries management?’ In the survey, just over half (52%) of respondents think they should continue. In the comments, many respondents added the caveat that they would support RIFGs in the future only with the changes suggested throughout the survey being implemented, primarily: the voice of fishers being heard by government, the remit being clearer, and observable deliverables. Around one third (34%) of respondents were unsure if RIFGs should continue, this reflects the comments provided that reflect an uncertainty around the

purpose of the groups and what ability they have to deliver better inshore management. Just 14% of respondents think the groups should not continue, as they feel RIFGs have not worked.

In the interviews, there was a similar mixed response with general support for some sort of stakeholder group who developed proposals for inshore fisheries management. There was again reiteration that the groups had the potential to work, as some had done in the early days, but that they did need improved.

Overall, it was clear that incorporating stakeholders' views into fisheries management continues to be a priority for all respondents, and the question is how best to do so.

Conclusion

The evaluation of RIFGs sought to understand if the network was still fit for purpose in 2024 and going forward. The purpose of RIFGs, as set out by the Scottish Government, is to improve the sustainable management of inshore fisheries and to give commercial inshore fishers a voice in wider marine management developments. The evaluation looked primarily at the 5 year period between 2019-2023. However, the history of the groups stretches back to the IFG pilots in 2009, and the scope of the project therefore shifted to incorporate this longer term view.

A desk review of the IFG and RIFG networks revealed an active organisation of regional meetings, sub-groups, discussion papers, and proposals put forward to government in the years following the pilot until around 2019. In some cases, this regional work resulted in pilot schemes and new regulations. As the years progressed however, it was clear that for more complex or longstanding management issues, the network still did not enable the progress that some fishers, and wider stakeholders, expected. Therefore a level of discontent emerged owing to the view that delivery from the groups had slowed down.

The 2024 evaluation aimed to delve into these issues and to understand how well the groups are delivering the remit and what is not working. The project team put stakeholder insight at the heart of the evaluation process through carrying out a survey and interviews. What emerged from this process were ten key themes across four categories. The evidence gathered was examined under each theme and key insights brought out.

The broader governance landscape was of interest to respondents, notably how RIFGs engage with the government inshore policy team and FMAC. The information flows and decision making process were deemed by respondents to not be clear enough. The remit and delivery of the remit were raised often by respondents. There was broad agreement with the two parts of the current remit, but respondents required clarity over the specific terminology used and how they can expect to see it delivered in practice. Tangible deliverables as well as transparent reporting was important to respondents.

The people involved in RIFGs was also raised often by respondents. A Chair with a good understanding of inshore fishing and the stakeholder landscape was noted as key to the success of an RIFG. However, respondents were also clear that they wanted clearer direction to be set by the Scottish Government so that stakeholders knew what to expect from Chairs. Engagement with stakeholders should be a key priority of Chairs, but direct engagement with the Marine Directorate was still desired, especially in discussing potential changes to management measures and new scientific information.

Membership was discussed at length with respondents. There was general support for a forum where fishers alone can discuss local management. But, environmental stakeholders were also deemed important in providing additional evidence and the Chairs or the Marine Directorate were seen as the ones expected to engage directly with these groups.

Among most respondents, there was not an appetite for additional regulatory power or additional funding to be given to RIFGs. Instead, the soft powers of a Chair influencing government and enabling local initiatives were deemed suitable to deliver local change. The question of the regional boundary lines for RIFGs garnered some comments, mainly highlighting the variations in fishing experience around the coast of Scotland meaning smaller regions could be beneficial. The island regions appeared to be suitable in scope for an RIFG to function; however, there remains a question about the remit of the Shetland group.

Overall, the evaluation found a network that has for years been a key tool for government to hear from fishers, and a tool for industry to feed into government decision making. There is a sense that the RIFGs have drifted away from the specific remit that they started with in 2009 when Fisheries Management Plans were expected regularly. Instead the groups have become more responsive to specific regional issues. There is the potential that by reshaping the RIFG model, they could become more useful once again.

Overall, key insights emerged from the evaluation. These are presented across the 10 themes:

System: Clarity on the governance landscape of inshore fisheries management will help stakeholders know where to engage and where decisions are taken.

Remit: The remit should be specific, achievable, and measurable. Key elements should include: a Chair-led forum for discussing local issues and potential solutions; ensuring inshore fishers' voices are heard by government; and supporting sustainability of the sector.

Delivery: Tangible deliverables that align with the remit are essential to ensure value and best use of resources.

Monitoring and reporting: Accountability should be delivered via a monitoring and reporting plan and regular published reports.

Leadership: Direction should be set by the Marine Directorate and local leadership provided by regional Chairs. The Marine Directorate should maintain oversight of delivery, with Chairs taking initiative for local projects and enabling the voice of fishers to be heard by government.

Engagement: Chairs should engage with all relevant stakeholders and prioritise regular interactions with inshore fishers. Removing barriers to the involvement of fishers should be a key priority.

Membership: There is strong support for a forum designed for only fishing representatives, however, stakeholders recognise that the marine space is a shared resource so other marine stakeholders should be brought into management discussions. A more formal membership would improve transparency.

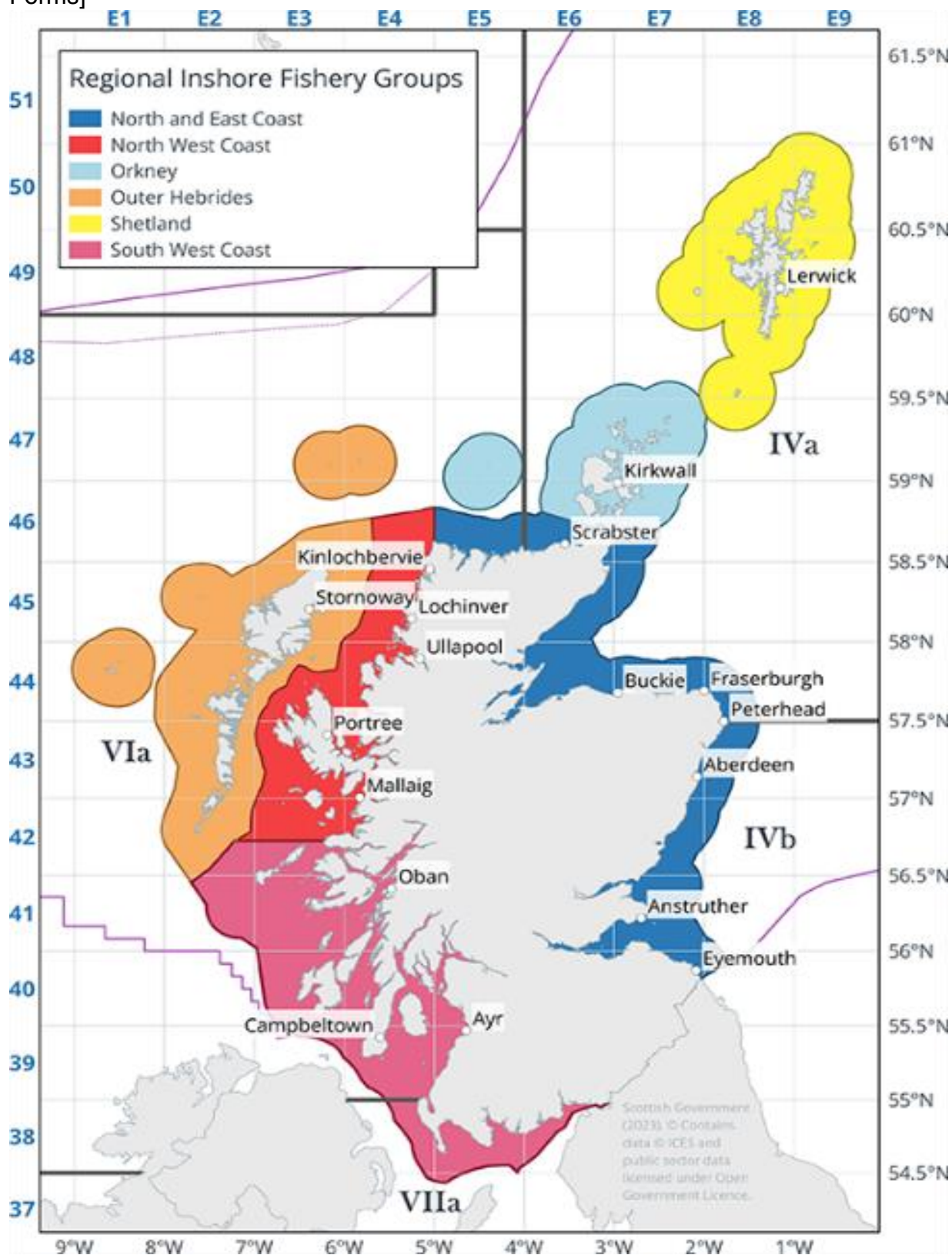
Power: Groups should be enabled by the Marine Directorate to achieve their remit including encouraging locally led approaches that have the potential to become legislation.

Resources: Chairs must be knowledgeable about inshore fisheries and empowered to initiate regional ideas and solutions to inshore management. Chairs should have access to science evidence to ensure it is incorporated into local discussions.

Regions: The regions of the Outer Hebrides and Orkney were deemed suitable to have their own RIFGs. Clarity is needed on the role of a RIFG in Shetland owing to the Shetland Islands Regulated Fishery (Scotland) Order 2012. Mainland regions were deemed too large, with the North West RIFG and the North and East Coast RIFG suggested as needing new regional lines drawn.

Annex A: Survey script for RIFG review

Evaluation of Regional Inshore Fisheries Groups (RIFGs) [Survey script for Microsoft Forms]



We want to hear from individuals and organisations involved in the inshore fishing industry in Scotland. Your views will be used to evaluate Regional Inshore Fisheries Groups (RIFGs) and for researchers to make recommendations on their future.

RIFGs were established in 2009 with the purpose of giving inshore fishers a voice in inshore fisheries management. Each RIFG is chaired by an individual appointed by the Scottish Government, but the groups are independent of Government. There are six RIFGs in Scotland: North East, North West, South West, Orkney, Shetland, and Outer Hebrides.

The survey will look into the impact of RIFGs, their remit and organisation, as well as the future. The survey is conducted by the Marine Analytical Unit, a group of social researchers, economists, and data analysts based in the Marine Directorate of the Scottish Government.

Closing date: 30th April 2024

Estimated completion time: 12-15 minutes

How we will use your data:

Your responses will be analysed by researchers in the Marine Analytical Unit and the findings used to produce an evaluation of the RIFG network. Your individual responses will not be published in the evaluation report and we will aim to remove any information which could personally identify you.

In addition, we are looking to build a database of fishers who are willing to be contacted for occasional research conducted by the Marine Analytical Unit. This is entirely voluntary and does not affect your involvement in the RIFG evaluation. If you are a fisher and consent to be included in the database, at the end of this survey you will be asked to provide a name, vessel grouping, email address, and phone number. If we contact you, you can choose if you want to participate in that specific project or not, and you can ask to be removed from the database at any time in the future. You would not be asked to participate any more than twice in any given year. Your involvement in the database would be valuable to ensure fisher's perspectives are incorporated into evidence.

The completed questionnaire and any personal data that you provide will be held in strictest confidence, and will be securely stored in the Scottish Government document management system and deleted after 5 years. With regard to the database of contacts, at the end of five years we will contact you to ask if you are willing to remain on the database for another period of time or if you wish to be removed from it. Again, this will be entirely voluntary. The data will be processed by the Scottish Government. There is the possibility some data will be processed by a third party for transcription purposes only.

For more information, please contact the Marine Analytical Unit at MarineAnalyticalUnit@gov.scot

If you have concerns about how your personal data is being processed and handled please contact the Scottish Government Data Protection Officer at DataProtectionOfficer@gov.scot

Section 1 – Data Protection and consent

1. I have read and understood the information provided in the 'How we will use your data' section above and I consent to my responses being used for the purposes outlined.
 - Yes
 - No

2. I understand that any information I give will be treated confidentially and securely, in accordance with the terms of the Data Protection Act.
 - Yes
 - No

Section 2 – About you

3. What is your role in relation to the inshore fisheries sector in Scotland? Please tick one box:
 - Fisherman – skipper and boat owner
 - Fisherman – skipper, do not own boat
 - Fisherman – crew
 - Boat owner – do not fish
 - Organisation representing the commercial fishing industry
 - Organisation representing relevant interests outside of the commercial fishing industry
 - Seafood processing / other ancillary seafood sector
 - Other third sector organisation
 - Public sector

4. What fishery office are you administered by?
 - _____
 - N/a

5. Of the six RIFGs, which one are you most closely associated with?
 - North and East Coast
 - North West Coast
 - Orkney
 - Outer Hebrides
 - Shetland
 - South West Coast
 - All
 - Not sure

6. Are you a member of any government initiated stakeholder groups that relate to the fishing or marine industry in Scotland? Please tick all that apply.
- Fisheries Management and Conservation Group (FMAC)
 - Marine Planning Partnership
 - Other (please specific)
 - None
7. Please specify which other government initiated stakeholder groups that relate to the fishing or marine industry in Scotland are you a member of?

Section 3 – Your engagement with the RIFGs

8. Are you aware of Regional Inshore Fisheries Groups?
- Yes
 - No
9. Have you been involved with the Regional Inshore Fisheries Groups in the past 5 years? i.e. attended a meeting, received email updated, spoken to a RIFG Chair.
- Yes
 - No
10. How have you been involved in the RIFGs in the past 5 years? Please select all that apply.
- I was a RIFG Chair prior to 2023
 - I've attended one meeting in the past 5 years
 - I've attended two or more meetings in the past 5 years
 - I receive email or verbal updates about the RIFG
 - Worked to a voluntary agreement established by an RIFG
 - Other
 - Not relevant

Section 4 – Theme 1: Remit

Since January 2023, the RIFG remit is:

- a) 'To improve the sustainable management of inshore fisheries and',
- b) 'to give commercial inshore fishers a voice in wider marine management developments.'

11. Were you aware of the remit of the RIFGs?
- Yes
 - No
 - Not sure
12. Do you think the current remit is the right remit for a government initiated stakeholder group which concerns inshore fisheries management?
- Yes
 - No
 - Not sure

13. Please explain your answer.

14. In your view, has your local RIFG contributed to a) **'improving the sustainable management of inshore fisheries'** in the past 5 years? Please indicate using the below scale, where 1 means a low contribution, and 5 means a high contribution.

15. Please explain your answer and give examples where possible.

16. In your view, has your local RIFG contributed to b) **'giving commercial inshore fishers a voice in wider marine management developments'**? Please indicate using the below scale, where 1 means a low contribution, and 5 means a high contribution.

17. Please explain your answer and give examples where possible.

Section 5 – Theme 2: Overall impact

18. In your view, what impact have RIFGs had on inshore fisheries management? Please indicate using the below scale, where 1 star means a low or no positive impact, and 5 stars means a high positive impact.

19. In your view, what are the main benefits of the RIFG network in its current form?

20. In your view, what are the main drawbacks of the RIFG network in its current form?

21. In your view, what are the main changes that need to happen, if any, to make the RIFG network more effective?

Section 6: Theme 3: Organisation

The current organisational arrangement of the RIFGS are as follows:

- RIFGs are non-statutory groups, this means that RIFGs are not established in legislation and therefore their role is not fixed and they cannot implement legal binding regulations.
- RIFGs are organised into 6 geographic regions
- Membership includes fishers or organisations which directly represent fishers
- RIFGs are led by a chair person funded by the Scottish Government and a limited amount of funds for discreet projects; some groups win funding from other organisations.

22. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements. Please use the scale of 1 to 5 below where 1 is strongly disagree, 2 is disagree, 3 is neutral, 4 is agree, and 5 is strongly agree.

	1	2	3	4	5
RIFGs should continue as non-statutory groups					
RIFGs should continue to be organised by the current 6 regions					
Membership should be made up of fishers and fishers representative bodies only					
RIFGs funding arrangements are appropriate for the functioning of the RIFGs					

23. Please share the reasoning for your answers to the previous question.

24. To what extent do you think RIFGs engage effectively with relevant organisations? Please use the scale of 1-5 below where 1 is very ineffective, 2 is ineffective, 3 is neutral, 4 is effective, and 5 is very effective.

	1	2	3	4	5
Fisheries associations and federations					
Producer organisations					
Species specific groups					
Regional marine planning partnerships					
Coastal partnership					
Local authorities					
Environmental groups					
Marine Directorate fishery offices					
Marine directorate compliance operations staff					

25. Please share the reasoning for your answers to the previous question.

Section 7 – Theme 4: Future

26. Do you think RIFGs play a role in the future of inshore fisheries management?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

27. Please explain your answer.

28. What do you think is the best forum for the views of inshore fishers to be heard by the Scottish Government?

29. If RIFGs are to continue for the foreseeable future, what do you think should be the top priorities of the RIFGs in the next 5 years? Please select what you think are the top two priorities.

- Providing the forum for fishers to engage with Government about the management of inshore fisheries
- Developing localised management approaches
- Working towards recovery of key inshore stocks
- Trialling new technologies and new approaches
- Promoting fishing as an attractive career
- Working with fishers to mitigate gear conflict
- Working with the Marine Directorate to support Compliance initiatives.

30. Please use this space to write any further views you have on the RIFG network which you do not think have been captured in the survey.

Annex B: Glossary

Creel – A "lobster pot" or type of trap used to fish for shellfish such as crab, lobster, and Nephrops

CLP – Creel Limitation Pilot

Demersal fishing – Pulling your net on or near the seafloor

Dredge – Dragging something over the seabed and stirring up the bottom to collect shellfish (typically scallops)

EFF – European Fisheries Fund

eNGOs – Environmental non-profit organization that operates independently of any government

FFM – Future Fisheries Management Strategy 2020-2030

FA – Fisheries Associations: Trade bodies representing fishers

Fishery – A fishery is an activity leading to harvesting of fish defined by the species caught, gear, sea area and species or group of species under a given management regime

Fishery Officer – Marine Scotland colleagues who check the landings and collect the data from fishing boats

Fishery Offices – Where fishery officers work (see fishery officer)

Fleet – Collection of boats arranged either by location (e.g. Scottish vs English fleet), size (e.g. the inshore fleet, the over 10 m fleet), or gear used (e.g. the creel fleet)

FMAC – Fisheries Management and Conservation Group

FMPs – Fisheries Management Plans developed by IFGs/RIFGs. Note that these are different from FMPs under development under the Fisheries Act 2020.

Gear – The type of equipment people use to fish (e.g. net or creel)

GES – Good Environmental Status

GVA – Gross Value Added

Inshore – Within 6 nm (nautical miles) of the coast

IFCA – Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority

IFGs – Inshore Fisheries Groups

IFMAC – Inshore Fisheries Management and Conservation Group

Inshore fleet – Smaller boats (generally defined as under 10 m). They traditionally fish for shorter periods of time than the bigger boats.

Landing – When fishers come back to the harbour after fishing and take their catch ashore to sell/transport

Landings – The amount of fish caught (can be measured by weight or value)

Licences – Boats need a licence to fish certain species such as shellfish, cod etc.

MAU – Marine Analytical Unit: a group of analysts (economists, social researchers, statisticians, data scientists) based in the Marine Directorate

MD – Marine Directorate of the Scottish Government

Mobile gear – Gear that moves/ is pulled along (e.g. net)

MPA – Marine Protected Area: There are three types of MPA in Scotland: 1) Demonstration and research to test novel approaches to marine management; 2) Historic to protect marine wrecks and artefacts; 3) Nature conservation to protect biodiversity. The term can also be used generically to describe any marine protected area.

MPP Marine Planning Partnerships: groups made up of marine stakeholders who reflect marine interests in their region with some delegated marine planning powers and who develop, and oversee the implementation of, regional marine plans.

NECRIFG – North and East Coast RIFG

Nephrops – The Latin name for the group of species known as Norway lobster, prawn or langoustine. A type of shellfish that can be caught by net or creel

NMP – National Marine Plan

OHRIFG – Outer Hebrides RIFG

OSF – Orkney Sustainable Fisheries Ltd

PO – Producer Organisation that help boats buy/lease/sell their quota among other things

Quota – The weight of fish that fishing boats are allowed to catch. Only some fish are "quota species", and not all boats have quota. An individual fishing quota (IQ or IFQ) is an allocation to a nation, individual (a person or a legal entity (e.g., a company)) of a right [privilege] to harvest a certain amount of fish in a certain period of time. It is also often

expressed as an individual share of an aggregate quota, or Quota changes from year to year, depending on stock assessments

Razorfish – Or ‘razor clams’ are marine bivalve molluscs commonly found around the coast of Europe, inhabiting sediments from fine sand to soft mud in the intertidal and sub-tidal areas

RIFGs – Regional Inshore Fisheries Groups

SEA – Strategic Environmental Assessment

Seafish – A public body that produces economic and employment data for fisheries

SG – Scottish Government

SIFAG – Scottish Inshore Fisheries Advisory Group

SSI – Scottish Statutory Instrument

SSMO – Shetland Shellfish Management Organisation

Static gear – Gear that does not move on the seabed. It gets put down and stays in one place. Examples include creels, pots, and traps.

Stock – The amount of a particular species. It is calculated annually by scientists and is used to work out how much quota everyone gets so we can fish more sustainably.

TAC – Total allowable catch: a catch limit set for a particular fishery, generally for a year or a fishing season. TACs are usually expressed in tonnes of live-weight equivalent, but are sometimes set in terms of numbers of fish

Trawl – A method of fishing that involves pulling a fishing net through the water behind one or more boats (a type of mobile fishing).

V-notching – Fishers voluntarily marking egg-bearing females with a ‘notch’ in the tail fin

WCRIFG – West Coast RIFG

How to access background or source data

The data collected for this social research publication:

- are available in more detail through Scottish Neighbourhood Statistics
- are available via an alternative route <specify or delete this text>
- may be made available on request, subject to consideration of legal and ethical factors. Please contact MarineAnalyticalUnit@gov.scot for further information.
- cannot be made available by Scottish Government for further analysis as Scottish Government is not the data controller.



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