



Minutes of a General Meeting held on Tuesday 28 October 2025

Present

Phil Bennett (Chair), Mellisa Thompson (Fisherman representative), Christine Rosie (Orkney Fish Producers Org), Niel Matheson (Fisherman), Tam Marcus (Fisherman), Martin Foulis (Fisherman), Alistair Buchan (Orkney Fisheries Association)

Via Teams: Nina Valentine (Scottish Fishermen's Federation), Paul Gibbons (Maritime and Coastguard Agency).

1: Welcome and Introductions

The Chair thanked everyone for attending and noted Kirsten Leahy would no longer be attending as Nina Valentine was back in post.

The Chair noted that there was no minute taker for the meeting and after attempts to record the meeting through Teams, it was agreed to record the meeting on his mobile phone. (Note recording will be deleted once minutes have been compiled)

2: Apologies

Apologies were received from: Kate Rydzkowski (Orkney Crab), Andrew Livingston, Kevin McDonnell, Nick Norse, Kirsten Cerbule

3: Minutes of the Meeting held on 29th July 2025

These had been circulated and amended following comments sent back to Phil. As no further comments had been received these are now deemed to be an accurate record of the meeting held on 29th July 2025 and will be posted on the RFIG website.

From this point onwards, the minutes are an AI generated summary from the recording made at the meeting. Editing has been limited to the headings, so they align with the agenda.

4: Matters Arising

- Minutes from the MCA District Safety Committee have been distributed as requested.
- Inquiry to Marine Directorate about emergency powers for intervention on Scallop dredging concerns: Confirmed no emergency powers available.
- No other matters arising.

5. Chairs Update

Fish+ In A Good Food Nation

- Involvement suspended:
- Cause: Open letter urging a disregard of recommendations due to panel representation imbalance.
- Impact: Paused initiative risks losing industry voice in national healthy diet promotion for fish.

NatureScot Corporate Plan

Timeline: Final draft to Scottish Ministers by December.

Cross-cutting Risks and Themes Discussed

- Cumulative regulatory load:
- Food security and economy:
- While export share is high, local economic viability and ability to purchase food depend on a profitable sector.
- eNGO influence and FOIs:
- Heavy FOI usage reportedly consuming Marine Directorate bandwidth.
- Mixed funding channels and unclear status of some NGOs discussed; statutory bodies like NatureScot confirmed as government funded.
- Evidence and narrative:
- Need to aggregate solid science and practical knowledge; avoid siloed discussions; maintain parity of scrutiny across sectors (e.g., comparisons to agriculture impacts).
- Strategic alignment concern:
- Repeated theme: Lack of joined-up government across departments; unclear overarching strategy to support fishing while meeting environmental obligations.

Marine and Coastal Restoration events

- Poorly advertised engagement in Stromness; minimal attendance (5 people in 3 hours).
- Feedback sent to organizers: Ineffective outreach; resource waste concerns; draft plan consultation expected in December.

RIFG Network Operational Plan

- Now public on the RIFG website

Inshore MPAs and PMFs Proposals

- Government repositioning after HPMAs:
- Focus: Managing inshore MPAs with targeted protection of 11 most vulnerable PMFs (to bottom-contacting gear).
- Interactive maps online show two differing option layers for Orkney.
- Observations and concerns:

- Designations grouped broadly under MPAs (including SACs, historic areas), giving an impression of near-blanket coverage.
- Evidence gaps cited (e.g., bird entanglement in set nets lacking quantified data; seasonal logic questioned).
- Cumulative regulatory burden and disproportionate focus on fishing versus other sectors (e.g., agriculture) highlighted.
- Risk of displacement and industry attrition stressed; need to safeguard viable fishing routes and local economies.
- Nina reported a productive meeting with SG on inshore MPAs; advocated for proportional protection (not every feature), displacement awareness, and maintaining fishing for food security.
- Acknowledgment that multiple loud stakeholders (NGOs), 2030 targets, and inter-departmental disconnects may constrain outcomes.
- Plan for more one-to-one engagements during consultation; encourage direct industry input.
- Off-shore closures example (e.g., Solan Bank, Cod Box reopen then re-closed, "patches," "fladdens") plus impending windfarms leaving little accessible ground.

Consultation preparedness:

- Anticipate consultation timelines potentially influenced by upcoming elections.
- Encourage individual responses and feeding points to the chair for consolidated submissions.

Creel Limits Scoping Exercise

- Review initiated post-interim measures; creel limits seen as the most popular input control.
- Two RIFG chairs tasked with scoping exercise - initial outreach to fishermen for views.
- Western Isles completed prior limits; Solway Firth recently completed review.
- Local sentiment:
- Desire to avoid getting bogged down in this meeting; plan a dedicated session once more info arrives.
- Caution about unintended consequences (e.g., whale entanglement narratives) and need for proportional, evidence-based approach.

RIFG and OFA Collaboration

- Regular meeting now set between the the Chair of the RIFG Chair and the Head of OFA

Proposed meeting Association of IFCAs

- RIFG Chairs to meet Association of IFCAs early in the new year; inform SG discussions on regional management.

Changes to the Marine Directorate – Inshore Fisheries Team

- Personnel shifts in SG Inshore Fisheries Policy Team: Chloe (mat leave), Helen Downie (mat leave); Catriona Millar joined; Ellen Huis now leading on inshore policy, Martin McDonald (leading on RIFG engagement); Stuart Bell now leading on IFMI.

Engagement with Cabinet Secretary and Ministers

- RIFG Chairs & Cabinet Secretary meeting:
- Only one available date; local chair unable to attend; issues will be coordinated with fellow chairs and submitted.
- Ask: Submit priority points to feed into Cabinet Secretary discussion; aim for consistent, common industry messaging alongside other channels.
- Ministerial forums:
- Inquiry whether the upcoming meeting includes only fisheries/allied services (confirmed), not other government programs.
- Emphasis on reinforcing shared messages across forums for maximum impact.

Meeting with MCA Directorate

- Upcoming meeting with the UK Technical Maritime Services Director (MCA) and Assistant Director North visiting (targeting 21st Jan).
- Agenda: Address headline issues (accessibility, consistency, surveyor availability, cost/logistics to Orkney), and broader technical challenges.
- Request: Members to submit key themes/issues ahead of the meeting.
- Perception shift: Indication MCA recognizes reputational issues and is seeking to improve stakeholder accessibility and regulatory clarity (Aberdeen technical manager reviewing to simplify overly layered requirements).

6. MCA (Maritime and Coastguard Agency)

MCA local update (Paul):

- Vessel standards locally good; no incidents since last meeting; surveys progressing well (9m+).
- New Code ("150 code") under review; feedback currently via federations; more info expected around the 21st visit.

7. Scallop Fisheries

Local and broader context:

- NGO narratives challenged; Shetland's MSC status defended; attempts to remove it failed.
- Concerns about calls for a 3-mile limit labelled non-evidence-based; potential severe impacts on fleets and processors if imposed.
- Physical environment context (Atlantic swell, west side) cited to question generalized seabed protection claims.

Evidence to highlight:

- Referenced research (Marie Fenton) indicating scallop dredging revisits a small fraction of seabed at multi-year intervals (indicative of natural rotational behaviour), supporting arguments against broad displacement and overstatement of impact.

Risk management:

- Recognize NGO marketing power (e.g., Blue Planet imagery); counter with peer-reviewed evidence and consistent industry messaging.

8. Regional Inshore Fisheries Management Options and Update

Push for regional management:

- Rationale: One-size-fits-all top-down approach not working across diverse areas.
- Exploration: Comparing Scottish options with England's IFCA model (locally tailored governance combining councils, science, enforcement).
- Next steps: Chairs to meet Association of IFCAs early in the new year; inform SG discussions on regional management.

Shetland Regulating Order learnings:

- Strengths and limits: Works to a degree but is shellfish-only; limited entry leads to stagnation; cannot manage mixed fisheries like wrasse; funding model relies on strong whitefish sector not present in Orkney.

IFME (Inshore Fisheries Management/Improvement Programme):

- Status: SG still considering evidence from call-for-evidence (late last year); little detail yet.

9. Any Other Business

2 Marine Information Notices (MINs) received:

MIN 722 (M+F): Clarification of the Basic Health and Safety and Safety Awareness Training Requirements for Fishers.:

- Applicability: Primarily affects new entrants; those who completed Safety Awareness before 1 July 2024 generally unaffected.

MIN 727 (M+F): Marine office and customer service telephone number changes

- Office numbers changed; legacy numbers still work; mobiles unchanged.
- Aberdeen's Number: 01224 369 000

10. Next Meeting

- Next meeting targeted due on **Tuesday 27th January 2026**; preference expressed for current venue (**St Magnus Centre**) over the Nav school.
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11. Close

- Phil thanked everyone for attending and formally closed the meeting.

Action Points		By Whom
1	Send key MCA issues/themes to the chair ahead of the meeting on 21st (i.e. surveyor availability, costs, consistency and interpretation of regulations by surveyors).	All
2	Re-circulate links to interactive MPA/PMF maps and any documents on the "11 most vulnerable PMFs."	Chair
3	Issues and challenges for inshore fishing to be raised with the chair in preparation of the Chair's network meeting with the Cabinet Secretary	All
4	Schedule a dedicated session on creel limits once further details are received from the review.	Chair
5	Group: Arrange meeting with Association of IFCA's early in the new year; document applicable lessons for Orkney's regional model.	Chair
6	Share relevant evidence (e.g., scallop dredge spatial/temporal distribution studies) to support balanced policy discussions.	All
7	Monitor and share updates on safety training requirement clarifications for new entrants.	All
8	Confirm and book the preferred venue for the January meeting; circulate date hold.	Chair