

WEST COAST REGIONAL INSHORE FISHERIES GROUP

Position Statement on the Development and Expansion of Marine Aquaculture Facilities in Inshore Coastal Waters

Introduction

This Position Statement provides an overview of the WCRIFG's views on issues concerning marine aquaculture developments within inshore waters. The Position Statement provides a general overview of issues that the WCRIFG wish to avoid from aquaculture developments notwithstanding that in some instances, site specific concerns may arise beyond what has been included below.

Background

The West Coast Regional Inshore Fisheries Group (WCRIFG) was established in April 2016 and its main aim is to improve the management of inshore fisheries out to six nautical miles (12 nautical miles in the Clyde). WCRIFG is non-statutory but works with inshore fisheries industry representatives, statutory bodies, including Marine Scotland and other parties. Having regard to the Marine Scotland Inshore Fisheries Strategy 2012 and the National Marine Plan, the WCRIFG considers matters with the potential to impact upon or otherwise affect inshore fisheries. In particular the WCRIFG seeks to advance, make recommendations and proposals connected to:

- The development and implementation of regional policies and initiatives relating to the management and conservation of inshore fisheries, and impacts on the marine environment so as to ensure a viable fishing industry in the WCRIFG area as well as in Scotland more generally and, the maintenance of sustainable fishing communities;
- The development and implementation of measures designed to better conserve and sustainably exploit stocks of shellfish and sea fish (including salmon) in WCRIFG waters, and to enable local fishermen, as well as other fishermen who rely on WCRIFG waters for their livelihood, and other persons with an interest, to contribute to such development; and,
- The development of proposals for and approaches to Marine Scotland, IFMAC, Marine Planning Regions, local authorities, SEPA, other RIFGs, and others with an interest in the fishery in relation to inshore fisheries management.

Aquaculture

There are ever increasing demands on inshore waters from various activities which individually and collectively have the potential to impact adversely on commercial inshore fishing interests. MPA designations, the growth in off-shore renewable energy as well as engineering activities associated with land based renewable facilities such as sub-sea cables, the Royal Navy, leisure pursuits and aquaculture are some of the activities that can conflict with the inshore sector. There is a belief that the displacement of fishermen has happened because access to traditional historical fishing grounds has been lost to the commercial inshore sector from some of the aforementioned activities. In the worst-case scenario, fishermen have disposed of vessels and left inshore fishing. In some areas of the Scottish west coast, inshore fishing contributes significantly to the economy of small and mainly rural or island communities and increasing pressures from the loss of access to fishing grounds, can lead to micro-economies being significantly adversely affected.

The WCRIFG seeks to work with all parties operating processes or developing structures in coastal waters and welcomes early collaboration. Members believe that discussions at the preliminary pre-planning stages of projects can encourage developers, such as aquaculture companies, to undertake plans in such a way that the final structures minimise impacts on inshore fishing whilst at the same time, allowing the aquaculture facility to proceed.

Many current aquaculture installations, such as fish farms, are in locations that offer shelter from prevailing bad weather conditions. In some instances, developments have occurred in waters that inshore fishermen traditionally accessed during periods of bad weather when they were unable to fish elsewhere. If these safe fishing havens are lost, it can have a negative effect on livelihoods: it may lead to people taking greater risks by fishing in less safe waters in order to remain economically viable or, alternatively, tying up vessels and undergoing financial losses.

Aquaculture facilities may present health & safety risks to inshore commercial fishermen and their vessels as the result of equipment associated with a fish farm, be it floating or submerged, resulting in snagging or other issues. Again, early consultation with local inshore fishermen can avoid issues arising in this regard.

WCRIFG Position

- When proposing the siting of a new aquaculture development or an extension to an existing facility, developers (fish farming companies) should contact the WCRIFG via the Chair at their earliest opportunity and preferably at the pre-planning/pre-licensing stages.
- Aquaculture developers should seek to take cognisance of local inshore fishing concerns and discuss with the WCRIFG how mitigation might be achieved in the context of aquaculture installations or expansions.
- Developers should seek to locate and design proposals in a way that minimises impacts on local inshore commercial fishing interests.

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