

## **Outer Hebrides Regional IFG Executive Committee Meeting**

**1030 – 1330 1 February 2019**

**Committee Room 2, CNES, Stornoway**

### **Draft Minutes**

#### **Present**

|                  |  |
|------------------|--|
| Donald Nicholson | Chairman                                     |
| Duncan MacInnes  | Admin Support                                |
| Angus Campbell   | WIFA   |
| Angie Campbell   | WIFA   |
| Ronnie MacNeil   | WIFA   |
| Donald W MacLeod | WIFA   |
| Elaine Whyte     | Clyde Fishermen's Association Tel/c          |
| Femke de Boer    | Scottish White Fish Producers Tel/c          |
| Iain Gatt        | Scottish Pelagic Fishermen's Association V/c |
| Anne McLay       | Marine Scotland v/c                          |
| Lynda Blackadder | Marine Scotland Science v/c                  |
| Iain Gatt        | Scottish Pelagic Fishermen's v/c             |
| Donald Morrison  | Marine Scotland Compliance                   |
| Jo Holbrook      | Marine Scotland Compliance                   |
| Roddy MacMinn    | Scottish Natural Heritage                    |
| Charlie Main     | Scottish Natural Heritage                    |
| Alasdair MacLeod | Comhairle Nan Eilean Siar                    |
| Ruth Nicolson    | MacDuff Shellfish                            |

#### **Apologies**

|                  |                            |
|------------------|----------------------------|
| Finlay MacDonald | WIFA                       |
| Ali MacNeil      | WIFA                       |
| Pete Middleton   | Comhairle nan Eilean Siar  |
| Ally Young       | Marine Scotland Compliance |
| Andrew Brown     | MacDuff Shellfish          |

#### **1. Welcome and Introductions**

Donald Nicolson welcomed everyone to the meeting and gave a special welcome to Diane Buchanan, Marine Scotland, who was attending her first meeting as Head of the Inshore Fisheries Team.

#### **2. Minutes of meeting 21 September 2018 and matters arising**

The minutes of the Executive Committee of 21 September 2018 were approved by Donald Morrison and seconded by Alasdair MacLeod

Both Sheigra and Northern Star had provided daily returns on spurdog catches during September and November. Due to poor fishing the Northern Star owners arranged for the EU crew to return home until after New Year and no further returns were made. They had expected some quota allocation to have been offered to their PO based on their previous returns but none had been issued. No further data returns were completed after New year.

The spurdog avoidance scheme had not progressed as planned due to vessels not fulfilling their requirements to complete returns of spurdog for each day fished. Clearly, for the project to succeed skippers must be fully committed to completing daily returns from September until at least March through their PO. Further discussions would be held with Marine Scotland to ascertain why participating vessels had not been offered a quota allocation.

Meeting has been held in Harris to discuss cockle harvesting, whilst SNH had been in contact with gatherers in Barra, with further Ministerial correspondence having been received from Barra interests.

Tags had been issued to 8 of the 10 vessels for participating in the brown crab tagging project being coordinated by Orkney Fisheries Association.

Chairman has written to Marine Scotland with regards to the use of large meshed monofilament nets within 6 miles. The response from Marine Scotland had been circulated to members.

Chairman and D MacInnes had attended meeting with local fishermen to discuss the projects being considered for FLAG funding and there had been negative feedback on trialing longlining due to interaction with birds during the shooting operations. Industry had concluded that it would not be appropriate to pursue that trial but had been very supportive for trialing fish traps. There had been further support for more Scottish involvement in scientific tagging with Exeter University.

A representative from Marine Biopolymers had met with fishermen in the Uists to discuss their future plans for mechanical kelp extraction, there had been no support from local fishermen towards the project as it was viewed as having significant negative impact on productive inshore shallow shellfish grounds that had served smaller local vessels for the previous 40 years.

Ronnie MacNeil had been supportive of fitting a camera to his electro fishing gear in Broad Bay, so that additional information could be gained with regards to size of razors being discarded in the Bay. Other species in the Bay would be of interest to Marine Scotland, however, a more expensive rig would have to be fitted to encompass future requirements. Ronnie did indicate that they would be supportive of assisting in any way possible to gather better information with regards to razor stocks and other species within the Bay.

### **3. Chairman's Report**

Chairman had attended several meetings since the previous meeting.

Inshore Fisheries Conference which had been well organised with more input from industry organisations

Local FLAG meetings had approved several projects with likelihood of budgets being fully committed.

The annual quotas meeting in Edinburgh had positive outcomes for the West Coast with additional nephrops quota being proposed and a TAC for whiting and cod which would be managed by Government to ensure that vessels would be allocated similar volumes to that previously operated through the by-catch allowance. Careful monitoring would be taken that vessels did not target either of those species.

A meeting had been held in Harris to discuss future of fish farming with SEPA proposing tighter controls on industry

A further stakeholder meeting with CNES to discuss more local engagement in Asset Management of inshore waters with Crown Estate. A pilot was likely to be agreed for the Outer Hebrides, with Galson Estate and CNES working in partnership within a geographical area to the West and North of Lewis.

Chairman had attended another meeting which had discussed offshore wind development although nothing had been finalised for the Outer Hebrides region. Vessels would have to provide plotter and data information of areas worked to ensure that future development could be zoned to areas of least importance to the fishing industry.

### **4. Pilot Pot Limitation Project**

Diane Buchanan said that Marine Scotland was keen to progress the pilot pot limitation pilot project. Marine Scotland was supportive of project as it was initially developed by local industry in designing local management measures to satisfy local needs.

Local representatives had visited Northumberland where a pot limitation scheme was operational and where strict enforcement of tags had resulted in many pots being confiscated and destroyed. Similar pot tagging schemes were operational in other regions and seemed to control effort although requiring significant enforcement time.

The northern boundary had been shifted to Lat 58N, whilst the southern boundary had been amended to coincide with the current seasonal creel prohibition to the West of Barra. The Eastern boundary reflected the dividing line separating the Outer Hebrides Regional IFG from the West Coast Regional IFG.

Based on completed FISH 1 Forms an estimated 150 static gear vessels operated within the identified geographical area. This would require a significant amount of tags and create administrative issues, for monitoring each vessel. In addition, owners of vessels who had entered into enforceable financial commitments would have to be included within the project.

Funding would have to be identified to cover administrative support for the project. Pete did indicate that if all expression of interests submitted progressed to approval stages then the local FLAG budget would be fully committed.

Members agreed that a Sub Group should meet to take the project forward, with the Sub Group consisting of Marine Scotland, Policy, Compliance and Science along with CNES, Chairman and geographical industry representatives.

**Action: Meeting of the Pot Limitation Sub Group Sub Group to be arranged**

## **5. Cockle Fishery Update**

Members were supportive of improved management measures to be considered, in addition to the current MLS of 30mm, to ensure a better well managed, sustainable and profitable cockle fishery for the future.

Concerns had been raised at both Seilibost and Barra with regards to over exploitation and declining stocks, although random enforcement checks at Harris had never seen under-sized cockles being retained by gatherers.

Following previous discussions at meetings it had been agreed that the beaches that presented most potential for commercial economic return, avoiding any interaction with environmental designations, where the beaches at Seilibost in Harris, North and South Ford in Uist and Cockle Strand in Barra.

Based on current prices of £4,000 per tonne it was highly likely that a future sustainable fishery in the region of £1M could be sustainably harvested from the 4 beaches being surveyed.

Donald Morrison indicated that their current IT systems could not accommodate non vessel landings, whilst group returns used to be made for cockles under the previous system. All the cockle buyers were registered under the registration buyers and sellers schemes.

Pete did indicate that FLAG funding could be available for undertaking a cockle survey of the 4 beaches but that at least 3 quotes would have to be obtained. Outer Hebrides Fisheries Trust that had completed the previous survey in 2014 had indicated that they would be interested in tendering.

Approach to be made to other possible local contractors to ascertain their interest in tendering for survey work at the 4 beaches.

Members agreed that based on survey results the following management measures could be considered for further public consultation:

- Harvest ration of 20% - 25% of cockles larger than 30mm
- Cockle harvesting to be prohibited between 1800 Friday and 0600 Monday
- Cockle harvesting to be prohibited each day on all beaches between 1800 and 0600
- IT systems in Marine Scotland to be enhanced to allow entry for cockle landings

As the OHRIFG was not a constituted organization, a local organization would have to be identified to prepare and submit a funding application to the local FLAG.

**Action: FLAG application to be prepared for cockle surveys at 4 Outer Hebrides beaches**

## **6. Brown Crab Tagging**

Nine vessels had agreed to participate in the brown crab tagging project, with geographical coverage throughout the Western Isles. Tags had been issued to the participating vessels, with some having already provided details of released tagged crab.

Details of those would be provided to Orkney Fisheries Association who were coordinating the overall project over a few years. Other regions in Scotland were also involved in the project and it was hoped that results from the project would give improved information on the movements of brown crab. Previous tagged crab has shown a westerly movement from Orkney towards Butt of Lewis and into the Minches.

An update would be provided once additional captures were being recorded.

## **7. Local Gear Conflict Issues**

An increase in local gear interaction over the winter period, was reported at local meetings held in Uist, Harris and Lewis.

Interaction to the East of the Uists had occurred when scallop fishery had opened on 1 November. High brown crab prices had resulted in more crab gear being set on the grounds, with vessels still leaving prawn pots on

grounds. An additional nomadic scalloper had arrived in the area and was alleged to have caused significant damage to crab gear.

There has been similar damage reported between the Lochs area in Lewis and Sound of Harris with increased scallop activity in that area due to scallopers being displaced from Wester Ross MPA due to prohibition on scallop dredging within a large area offshore where they used to fish. Local skippers in that area are requesting that all scallopers should be fitted with an Anchor Lab sensor device so that the culprits can be identified and identified, vessels should then be responsible for replacing gear. There had been consensus that persistent offenders should have licences withdrawn from fishing in areas where they cause damage to gear.

Similar incidents had been reported from Stornoway North to Tuimpean Head, with the same nomadic dredger alleged to be causing damage in that area. an area that used to be safe from scallop dredging during that seasonal period of the year.

In addition, large vivier crabbers were now moving into inshore grounds due to poor returns on offshore grounds, with this causing additional problems in the area to the East of the Butt of Lewis, by setting gear over small inshore vessels.

The local industry was supportive of a size limit of 15 metres being imposed on static gear vivier vessels operating inside 6 mile. Those larger viviers crabbers had been built to fish the more offshore grounds and were now creating additional problems for inshore vessels that were already restricted to their area of operations.

Prawn trawl activity in the Tolsta Square area had changed significantly over the last 2-3 years with little or no activity in that area from November until January. This being the period of the year when spurdog catches are higher in that area resulting in prawn trawlers avoiding the area. This had resulted in static gear vessels having set prawn pots in this area due to lack of mobile during the period of higher spurdog catches. Conflict was likely to increase in this area from February onwards as trawling activity would resume following dispersal of spurdog from grounds.

Members noted the increased interaction in gear conflict during the winter period. It was further noted that some static gear had been advertised for sale on Facebook, with the gear for sale having allegedly being gear that had been towed up by scallop vessels.

## **8. Sound of Barra SAC**

Chairman introduced Charlie Main, the new project officer for the Outer Hebrides MarPAMM project. Charlie gave a brief overview of the project which had a Steering Group with representatives from SNH, Marine Scotland, Comhairle Nan Eilean Siar, WWF and UHI. Charlie had previously been involved in the project which eradicated rats from the Shiant Isles.

Charlie was supportive of more local engagement amongst stakeholders in being involved in the future management of designated sites taking into consideration the conservation objectives of the sites.

As regards the Sound of Barra, Alasdair Allan, MSP, had arranged for Mairi Gougeon, Environment Minister, to visit Kallin Shellfish where the possible impact of future restrictions on scallop dredge activity on the business was discussed. Marine Scotland intend to consult on management measures for the Sound of Barra in summer 2019. Directors at Kallin Shellfish had clearly stated that they would make employees redundant if the Sound of Barra was closed to scallop dredging and that would result in employees that have worked there for 12 years losing their jobs.

Some of the management measures considered at the meeting were as follows:

- Continuation of the current seasonal opening 1 May until 23 August
- All vessels fitted with Anchor Lab or similar winch monitoring systems
- Marine Scotland identify lat/long of area features to be avoided
- More detailed assessment made of sediment dispersal
- Summer opening coincides with slackest tides and least sediment dispersal
- Storms, strong tides and nature create more sediment dispersal than fishing activity, scallops had not returned to the areas North of Stornoway for several years followed the severe storm of 2005
- The Beast from the East demonstrated the huge destruction that Nature inflicts on the seabed, evident last year with large quantities of seaweed in the Sound of Barra when area opened on 1 May
- Anchor Lab systems retain exact tracks of contact with seabed. any vessel operating within closed zone should have licence permanently withdrawn for area
- An additional weekend ban be introduced for the area
- New measures should not be introduced without full consideration of any adverse economic impact on community following the Islands (Scotland) Bill

Roddy McMinn stressed that the MarPAMM project offered more local stakeholder engagement and was keen to arrange for a local meeting with stakeholders once management measures for the Sound of Barra was announced in the summer.

**Action: Meeting with local stakeholders to be arranged for future management of the Sound of Barra SAC**

## **9. White Fish Jigging Project**

Following the decision to withdraw the proposal to pilot long lining in the Butt of Lewis area, due to problems reported by fishermen that had previously worked on an auto-liner, the decision was made instead to support other selective methods which would suit small inshore vessels.

A local skipper was now applying for funding from the local FLAG to fund a commercial operation for white fish jigging in the inshore waters off the Butt of Lewis where good catches of high-quality white fish are caught by sea anglers.

The application had been considered as an expression of interest and had now been progressed to a full application and if approved the skipper would be ready for fishing in early summer. Jigging machines for targeting white fish are being used successfully in many other countries and this highly selective method if successful could become an attractive alternative seasonal fishery to take effort away from shellfish in inshore waters.

Members welcomed the initiative from a local skipper to develop selective fishing methods which would be discard free and should be promoted widely if approved and proved to be successful.

## **10. Wrasse Fishery**

Marine Scotland had introduced voluntary management measures for the long term sustainability of the wrasse fishery as follows:

- A closure from 1 December until 1 May each year
- Introduction of minimum landing sizes for each different species
- Total weights of wrasse caught to be reported on Fish 1 Forms
- Only specific wrasse traps to be used to target fishery
- Vessels not to exceed 250 traps

- Traps not to be hauled in water temperatures in excess of 17C
- Annual audits to be completed by receiving farming company and suppliers
- Further research to be undertaken to identify spawning areas ensuring protection of caught species during peak breeding activity

Members noted that local skippers had good working relations with salmon companies, with number of vessels participating in the vessel being constant with good geographical coverage throughout the Outer Hebrides.

## **11. Vessel Monitoring Systems**

Representatives from the Scottish scallop sector had met with Mr Fergus Ewing, Cabinet Secretary, Jim Watson and Diane Buchanan in Edinburgh on 31 January 2019.

Diane explained that the purpose of the meeting was to consider the way forward for installing an appropriate monitoring system aboard all scallopers in Scotland, to ensure that Marine Scotland would be confident of where and when scallopers worked and that vessels did not operate within closed areas and avoided specific features. Scallop vessels were considered as high risk of causing damage to features which required protection and it was considered essential that those group of vessels were the first to have appropriate VMS systems installed.

A budget of £1.5 M, supported by EMFF funding, was available to install monitoring systems aboard all vessels in Scotland.

The Scottish scallops fleet consisted of 90 vessels, 20 of which are currently fitted with cameras and winch monitoring system, 30 under 12 metre vessels which have no VMS, with the remaining 40 vessels fitted with VMS which illustrates where vessels are every 2 hours, although can't determine whether gear is deployed or not.

The 20 vessels fitted with cameras accepted that option enabled the carriage of beam bars which could be fitted with more than 8 dredges. They could fish with 10 or 12 dredges per side in the more offshore areas and reduce to 8 dredges per side when fishing in inshore waters. The camera monitored their hauling operations to ensure that they were not in breach of dredge numbers in inshore waters.

Representatives of inshore scallopers had piloted the Anchor Lab winch sensor systems, in partnership with Marine Scotland Compliance, the system had been used to manage a dredge mussel fishery in Denmark. Skippers who had used the system were confident that such a system was fit for purpose for informing agencies where and when vessels fished and could be used to

avoid features. Installation costs of such a system was in the region of £2,000 per vessel, with estimated operating costs of £20 per month.

Other monitoring systems were being piloted for low risk static gear vessels under the SIFIDS project, with costs per unit being in the region of £70 -£90. Further add on features could be added to such monitors with electronic tags indicating numbers of pots going through a hauling system.

The Anchor Lab system was currently used to monitor activities as part of the pilot project in the razor fish fishery. All feedback to date on the system from that fishery had been positive.

Representatives of the smaller fleet sector stressed the need for any system to being proportionate to the needs of each segment of the fleet and not to overburden smaller vessels with too much equipment.

Anchor Lab system had also been used aboard static gear vessels fishing west of Benbecula and feedback from that vessel had been positive in identifying when fishing was hauling gear and when vessel was steaming.

Diane said that Marine Scotland would issue a consultation paper shortly on their proposed way forward for installing a proportionate vessel monitoring system aboard all scallopers in Scotland.

Members welcomed the initiative to install proportionate VMS systems aboard all vessels, as the information gained would be useful in mapping out grounds that are of most economic importance to industry, also ensuring that features which required protection were being avoided by vessels.

## **12. Scallops and Nephrops MSC Accreditation**

Donald Nicholson, Chairman, had communication from other IFGs with regards to MSC Accreditation for West Coast Scallops and West Coast Nephrops.

Previous experience with MSC North Minch Prawn trawl fisheries fronted by Youngs Bluecrest had seen the stock being accredited for several years prior to being withdrawn due to requirement to have West Coast nephrops managed by functional units. Industry had not supported functional units being used on the West Coast to manage the fishery and it was decided not to pursue the MSC accreditation any further.

Members concluded that there was no role for the OHRIFG becoming involved in the accreditation of either West Coast nephrops and scallops.

### **13. Outer Hebrides FLAG Update**

Pete updated members on uptake of Outer Hebrides FLAG projects with 7 projects costing over £1.16M with a grant awarded being an estimated £260,000, having been approved. The majority of projects had supported marine tourism with the rest supporting harbour infrastructure.

A further 6 expressions of interest had been approved for total costs of £320,000 with possible grant awards in excess of £230,000 leaving around £65,000 grant remaining.

A further number of expressions of interest were being considered and those if approved would result in the total budget being fully committed. Those expressions of interest included cockle surveys, fish traps and further blue fin tuna scientific tagging.

Members welcomed that good projects had been identified that would benefit the local community covering a wide range of activities in support of the local marine sectors.

### **14. Date of Next Meeting**

Chairman thanked everyone for their attendance and noted the next meeting would be in summer 2019 and closed meeting at 1330.

