

## **Regional Inshore Fisheries Groups – Decision Making Process**

### **1 Introduction**

- 1.1 Marine Scotland in April 2016 implemented a network of Regional Inshore Fisheries Groups (RIFGs) to improve industry engagement in the process of managing Scotland's inshore fisheries. The background, structure and functions of these groups can be found on the Scottish Government website at [www.gov.scot/Topics/marine/Sea-Fisheries/InshoreFisheries/rifgs](http://www.gov.scot/Topics/marine/Sea-Fisheries/InshoreFisheries/rifgs).
- 1.2 The formation of such groups has allowed individual fishermen greater opportunities to become involved at a local level through the formation of sub-groups within each region. Such local engagement has also been improved with the RIFG Chairs available to convene meetings at the coast and in response to the collective views of local fishermen. The introduction of Marine Planning Partnerships will roll out throughout Scotland in the future and it is considered important that RIFGs and the associated fishing interests have their views represented through the agreement of their own regional fisheries management plans.
- 1.3 While such improved engagement at a local level has been welcomed the question has been raised as to how the views of stakeholders can ultimately lead to the introduction of measures to improve local fisheries management which Marine Scotland may ultimately need to enact. The following outlines the mechanics of how this process will operate.
- 1.4 It should be noted that engagement with the RIFGs is open to all licensed fishermen on a voluntary basis. Marine Scotland considers that all fishermen should use this opportunity but accepts that some individuals may not wish to contribute. However, the opportunity will be maintained and fishermen are encouraged to make their views known at either local or regional meetings.

### **2 Structure and Function of RIFGs**

- 2.1 The independent RIFG Chair is appointed by Marine Scotland to engage fishermen and to facilitate their input at meetings either at a regional or local level. The RIFG Management Committee is expected to bring forward a Fisheries Management Plan for the region which can be broken down to define important local issues or those issues directly influencing a Scottish Marine Region Marine Planning Partnership (MPP) in determining spatial management arrangements.
- 2.2 Discussions within the RIFG Management Committee should recognise issues brought forward by fishermen either at a regional or local level with no party having the ability to veto proposals. The RIFG Chair will seek to discuss and arrive at a position of consensus on the RIFG adopting any proposal. If this is unable to be achieved the position arrived at will be noted indicating any differences of opinions. Where representatives require action to be taken on any issue (based on consensus or otherwise) the RIFG Chair can determine to put the case to Marine Scotland. Such a decision will be taken on the basis of the

Chair considering the level of discussion, agreement of relevant parties and the ability to identify the issue and possible solutions.

- 2.3 Marine Scotland in considering any proposals where statutory interventions are required or access rights may be impacted will consider the level of discussion entered into at the local or regional group meetings and the degree of consensus achieved. If it is judged that further consideration should be given by the RIFG to the issue it will be advised accordingly. This does not preclude any group from taking any fisheries management proposal directly to Marine Scotland. However, the acceptance of proposals will depend on the degree of discussion entered into at the RIFG level and whether it is judged consensus should be required to be achieved amongst impacted stakeholders.
- 2.4 Where Marine Scotland accepts that the RIFG has reached consensus on a proposal or has made as much progress as seems possible and there is a requirement for a statutory intervention to initiate the management measure, it will seek to undertake a full public consultation in line with its statutory responsibilities. Resultant findings will be reported as advice to the appropriate Scottish Government Minister and acted upon accordingly.
- 2.5 Fisheries management proposals and actions to be included in the RIFG Fisheries Management Plan should be the subject of agreement by the RIFG Management Committee. It is for the RIFG to present a cohesive picture of agreed priorities and management interventions required or able to be delivered either on a voluntary basis or through seeking Marine Scotland or other legislators' introduction of statutory measures. Any local management issues identified or resolved by sub-groups (regional sub-committee or local working group as defined in the Background, Structures and Functions documents as noted above) of the RIFG would be expected to gain the consensus of the RIFG management committee to be identified within the RIFG Fisheries Management Plan. If the proposals of the sub-group do not achieve consensus at the RIFG Management Committee they should be referred to Marine Scotland. Guidance will be given by Marine Scotland to the RIFG Management Committee as to whether further efforts should be sought to reach consensus.
- 2.6 Any Marine Planning Partnership would expect to be able to call on the evidence and advice presented within a Fisheries Management Plan as a first point of reference. If such information is found to be lacking there is the ability for the MPP to seek alternative ways of securing such information upon which they may make spatial management decisions which may impact the fishing industry.