



## RIFG meeting minutes

**Date:** 04-09-2025

**Time:** 18.30- 19.40

**Location:** Online via Teams

**Chair:** Hilary Burgess

**Attendees:** Beth Mouat- UHI Shetland

Alastair Cooper (AC)- SSMO

John Robertson (JR)- SSMO Inshore Coordinator

Daniel Lawson (DL)- SFA

Adam Nutt (AN)- MCA

Davy Porter (DP)

Eleanor Hutcheon (EH)- UHI Shetland

Shaun Fraser (SF)- UHI Shetland

Leander Harlow- UHI Shetland

**Minute taker:** Kathryn Allan

## Agenda Items

### 1. Welcome, apologies, minutes and actions from the previous meeting

**Apologies:** Sheila Keith- SFA

**Minutes:** No changes- minutes approved

**Actions from previous meetings:**

- **To continue to follow development of Squid Pilot-** see update later in these minutes
- **To continue to obtain fishing footage for VR to extend the available material-** HB passed her thanks on to the SSMO and SFA for enabling links with fishers. Further discussion in project update of these minutes.

- **Scottish Entanglement venue-** meeting went ahead and was successful- results due to be presented on 1<sup>st</sup> Oct at an evening workshop possible location to be Islesburgh Community Centre but this is TBC.

## 2. Update from Marine Directorate

### Update from Hilary Burgess

**Squid pilot-** No updates from Marine Directorate on the Squid fishing pilot. Advice from NatureScot was due in mid- July but this was delayed until beginning August which rolled to the end of August. Latest update was that there would be a review of the advice and provide an update in September. There is the potential that there will need to be a Habitats Regulations Appraisal and marine plan assessment. NatureScot are to attend next squid pilot stakeholder meeting. The SFA had also had no further update at this time.

It was commented that there seems to be limited drive or urgency from Marine Directorate and they do not seem to acknowledge the seasonality of the squid fishery in Shetland. However, it was acknowledged that the delay may also be in part due to other organisations.

Unsure how this can be moved forward but HB suggested regular meetings of the squid pilot stakeholder group could be helpful to keep the momentum going.

**Inshore MPA consultations-** Planned for November this year.

**Remote Electronic Monitoring-** in the final stages of the procurement stage. Due to be sent to the cabinet Secretary in the next few months.

**Inshore Fisheries Management Improvement Plan-** call for evidence complete and due to be consulted on Q1 next year. Majority supportive of regional management, favoured Scottish marine region, need for appropriate resource and data to inform decision making, favoured need for creel limits. 100 responses, 52 individuals and 48 organisations. 3 from Shetland.

**Marine fund Scotland-** was greatly oversubscribed so is likely to be closed to new applications within financial year 25/26.

**RIFG changes-** contracts are to be renewed at the end September. Mark Griffin has stepped down. SW, NW and north are now covered by Alastair Hamilton until the end of September 2026. Phil Bennet remains to cover Orkney, Alasdair Macleod for the Outer Hebrides and Jen Mouat now covers the East coast.

The RIFG review found that 52% of respondents think RIFGs should continue but comments included the desirability of; clearer remit, clearer reporting, consistency across Chairs, areas too large and the role of RIFG in Shetland being less clear due to the Regulating Order.

HB it is important for fishers and organisations in Shetland to provide input on what they would like the remit of the RIFG in Shetland to be going forward.

**Interim Measures-** Interim Measures will be continued for 2025-2026

**RIFG Chairs project work-** HB undertaking a project to coordinate engagement on existing and potential crab, lobster and nephrops creel limits around the Scottish coast depending on factors such region, vessel size, creel type and target species.

Projects being undertaken by other RIFG Chairs include investigating potential improvements to RIFG website and communications, updating the operational plan, fisheries interactions with MPAs and renewables.

**NMP2 Consultation-** NMP2 Planning Position Statement consultation report published which concludes that the planned consultation on the draft NMP2 has been postponed to give the NMP team more time to look into PPS consultation responses in more detail.

It was raised that the fishing organisations speak for their members and as such their one response will be on behalf of hundreds of fishers. However, fishers cannot be expected to submit individual responses due to the volume of consultations taking place and that the remit of organisations is to respond on their behalf.

**ACTION- HB to provide feedback to Marine Directorate on the above matter**

**Update from Lynda Blackadder (emailed to chair prior to the meeting)**

- RV surveys for scallops (Shetland, East coast, West coast) completed successfully and Clyde planned for October.
- Scallop stock assessment results were shared with industry last year and will be published shortly (clearing approval process with publisher). Work is underway to prepare data for updating assessments (utilising data up to 2024).
- The ICES scallop assessment WG (WGScallop) is being hosted in Edinburgh this year (October).
- Crab and lobster assessments were presented to stakeholders earlier this year. One staff member is on maternity leave, but the plan is to progress with publication of the stock assessments.
- Nephrops surveys completed with staff working up the data for the ICES stock assessment.
- Staff are working on data collation and reporting for the razor clam and wrasse fisheries.

### **3. Update from the SSMO**

SSMO is considering options to increase the minimum landing size (which is currently lower in Shetland than the rest of Scotland) and implement gear changes to reduce the number of small scallops being caught.

There was a change in the way creel closures for velvets were implemented this year with fishers choosing when to take a 4- week closure period as opposed to a fixed closure dates set by the SSMO. This allows fishers to stop fishing when they start seeing high numbers of soft crabs in the location they fish. It is possible that the impacts of climate change are

making soft periods less predictable, making it harder to set appropriate fixed closed periods. The response from fishers has been positive. There may be a requirement to extend the closed period next year dependant on the results of a review.

The Shetland scallop fishery is undergoing its Marine Stewardship Council accreditation review which Open Seas are objecting to.

A comment that it is important to communicate with the public and the media what MSC accreditation means, how the fishery operates and is managed by SSMO, and the science that supports it and raise awareness of the importance of the Scallop fishery in Shetland.

*Question for SSMO- What has changed? As the same number of licences and gear are being fished as was during the previous accreditation round so, why are Open Seas targeting the scallop fishery again?*

SSMO responded that nothing had changed but Open Seas were campaigning for more areas of the seabed to be closed to dredging even though Shetland already has the highest amount of closed areas. It is suggested that it is a broader issue with the MSC themselves with Open Seas not agreeing with MSC accrediting any dredge fishery rather than a personal issue with Shetland fishers.

*There was a further question for SSMO- why have no new licences been given out when factories are having to source scallops from Orkney to fulfil orders due to Shetland fishers not using their effort. The SSMO were also opposed to fishers swapping gear allowance and effort to another fisher.*

SSMO responded by saying that it was a complex issue which would be better discussed in a dedicated meeting.

#### **4. Update from the SFA**

There was a visit from Scotland's First Minister John Swinney in August-The SFA chose to use his visit as an opportunity to focus attention on the under 10m fishery which are often overlooked during these sorts of visits. They visited a fisher onboard their vessel and spoke about issues such as access and enforcement.

#### **5. Issues from Shetland Fishermen- Hilary Burgess**

Issues were raised around the lack of support available to fishers to assist with grant funding applications. HB investigated and was advised that there is no designated person to assist. The Marine Fund Scotland application process advises applicants to contact their local fisheries office should they require help completing the application form. The local fishery office cannot advise applicants on how to answer the questions, but can help with the actual completion of the form online should an applicant require help with this.

It was commented that the assistance available may depend on how boats are set up. For example, if a grant will be of benefit to the wider fleet, SFA can help. Or LHD can offer help for their members.

It was commented by a fisher in attendance the requirements post approval that were the issue with grant applications. The stipulations were so rigid they pulled out of the scheme. They were provided with a 40 page document of grant conditions which were not achievable and were unworkable. For example, they wanted exact dates of engine fittings which couldn't be set at this stage along with monthly meetings and a need to access full bank account statements.

It was suggested that the ideal solution would be to have a dedicated person to assist fishers with grant applications and managing post acceptance grant conditions however which organisation would host them and how this would be funded would need to be explored.

The SFA are aware that there is an issue and have been discussing it internally. To make it feasible there would need to be funding in place to cover the salary for a year and then once established, this cost would be added into grants applications.

It was reiterated by a fisher that grant compliance puts them off and they can't meet the criteria and timescales for getting work done as they are so rigid. They need someone in Shetland with the specialist knowledge to help individual fishers navigate grants and conditions.

It was suggested whether organisations such as Business Gateway and Highlands and Islands Enterprise would be able to offer support to individual fishers.

Another suggestion was to request that the subject be added to the agenda of the next SIC Fisheries and Aquaculture Working Group.

**ACTION- HB Request that this issue is added as an agenda item.**

AN commented that fishers aren't always aware of additional costs that may come in the form of MCA approval and so this is not always accounted for when applying for grants. AC is happy to run an educational piece aimed at fishers to help advise them.

**ACTION- HB organise with AN a suitable way to move this forward.**

Comments from several fishers raising concerns over large vessels (over 10-15m) fishing within 3nm difficult to tackle.

Point raised that small boats jigging- when a decent days fishing- large boats come in fishing as close in as quarter of a mile inshore. Scare away and displace fish. Want 2 mile limit around Shetland- limit horsepower. Also, the issue of gear conflict- some incidence of towing away creels. SFA members split on this issue. Currently not breaking the law. Worried that a 2 mile limit would just keep getting increased. If start spatially separating fleets would need to introduce other spatial asks. SFA no defined position. HB- voluntary agreements a possibility? Comment that it is rare that it's Shetland boats. Could try voluntary agreement but don't think they have a motivation or drive to agree to it or keep to it. HB- risk to fish industry and very public and damaging for small boats/ Comment UHI - Some areas identified for juvenile fish, could that be a way of suggesting areas best avoided? Comment UHI data exists for nursery grounds could conduct more spatial analysis to investigate this.

**ACTION- communications between SFA and UHI on data and further analysis**

## **Shetland RIFG Project update and discussion on future project options**

SF- Inshore fish survey update-

SF has been invited to attend a session an ICES session in Lithuania to present the data from the inshore fish survey. This a fantastic opportunity to present the work being done in Shetland to an international audience.

This year's survey is currently ongoing on the Kestrel with similar results as previous years. There is a consistent trend of a growing squid population and SF and his team are planning to look into how this affects inshore fish populations.

HB passed on her congratulations on it being picked up internationally by ICES and reiterated that it is great to see the work in Shetland being showcased in this way.

HB- asked whether there had been any opportunity to capture footage in the nursery areas on the 360 cameras. SF plans to look at doing this in next few weeks.

May still be small amounts of money available in RIFG pot so HB welcomes ideas for use. Orkney RIFG repeating crab tracking to help analyse impacts from cables/ renewables infrastructure. SF suggested the money could be used to complete a desk- based study on proposals for closed areas and what it might achieve.

**Action- SF to discuss the possibility for desk-based study with SFA**

## **6. Shetland RIFG education projects (community talks, school visits and community use of VR technology)**

Visits have been very well received by community and care homes. There has been a request put out for more 360 footage from fishers and looking to get footage from pelagic vessels soon. The project and footage were showcased to the First Minister during their visit who commented that it was one of most impressive parts of his tour. Scotland Outdoors also picked up on the project from a radio interview.

Nick McAffrey a suggestion to contact for underwater diving footage.

**ACTION- HB/EH to contact Nick re. 360 footage**

The project has created a great link between scientists, fishers and community and HB and EH are looking for funding to take it forward.

VR videos and activities have been taken to schools in Shetland which has helped pupils understand more about species such as lobsters and recognising when they are berried, and understanding and recognising gear types. Session with older pupils included role play scenarios such as consultations on the creation of MPAs to protect maerl beds with a VR experience relating to the actors they are playing- scientist, politicians, NGOs, fishers etc. and then they would debate and discuss. It worked very well and the plan is to trial in more classes and then role out wider.

Any idea was raised with the group to create Shetland vessel top trumps. Current Shetland vessels or historic vessels. 2 fishers were suggested as useful contacts.

**ACTION- SFA and HB to discuss further and follow up**

HB asked if the group thought it would be a good idea to organise some public meetings around Shetland to showcase the projects such as the inshore fish survey and VR headsets. In response, it was agreed as a good idea, however, the timing would need to be right to maximise attendance (i.e. when pelagic boats are ashore for example.)

LH gave a short update on the work promoting fishing as a career. There was a project meeting with Emma in March and they are to pick up on it again over winter. They are working on adding more content on My World of Work and the possibility of a visit to the Anderson High School.

**ACTION- LH to continue to liaise with Emma and explore options for a school visit.**

Seagrass project- LH- Evening launch event was very well attended. Baseline surveys done. 6 out of 14 grids planted. Extra funding for more baseline surveys over winter. Volunteer day coming up in Sept.

## **7. Consultations and Meetings**

- Draft marine and coastal restoration plan- deadline 19<sup>th</sup> Oct 25. Drop in event 23<sup>rd</sup> Sept at Lerwick Town Hall 14.00-19.00
- MD Recycling aquaculture and fishing gear event Islesburgh Sept 24<sup>th</sup> 9am -6pm
- Inshore MPAs- expecting an autumn consultation. Dates TBC.
- IFMI consultation- Q1 next year. Dates TBC
- Upcoming consultation on draft NMP2 has been delayed,

### **Fishing into the Future and Women-in-Fisheries-**

Are organising a 3 day event for women working in the fishing industry in London. 17th-20th November. Applications for places on this event close shortly (8th September). Please pass onto any women working in the fishing industry that might be interested

### **AOCB-**

None raised.

### **Date of next meeting**

January- date options to be sent via email poll.