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Finlay Carson MSP
Convener
Rural Affairs and Islands Committee

By Email: rural.committee@parliament.scot

11 March 2025

Dear Mr Carson,

Thank you again to the RAI Committee for inviting us to meet on 05 February to discuss inshore fisheries. We agreed to follow up on a handful of queries, which are covered below. These are, paraphrased, as follows:

Can you please supply a list of Fisheries Management and Conservation (FMAC) group meeting dates?

Our FMAC group and its subgroups have met a total of 17 times during 2023 and 2024. These are as follows:

FMAC Main and Sub-groups meetings 2023 - 2024								
Main	16/01/23	17/08/23	26/6/24					3
Inshore	23/02/23	23/08/23	29/1/24	14/3/24	16/4/24	4/7/24	27/8/24	7
Future catching policy	21/03/23	28/6/23	21/5/24					3
Climate Change	28/03/23	04/09/24						2
Scallops	16/03/23	3/7/24						2
Total								17

When will Regional Marine Plans (RMPs) be in place across Scotland?

While no RMP has yet been adopted, when in place RMPs will reflect local circumstances and issues, and we are committed to providing support to this sector. The Scottish Government undertook a gateway review of developing Regional Marine Plans for the Shetland, Orkney, and Clyde regions in 2023, which identified that the plans would need work and revision before seeking approval from Ministers, and our policy team continue to work constructively with each Marine Planning Partnership to refine and develop their plans to be suitable to move to the next stage of development.

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The draft Shetland RMP has been through public consultation and work is advancing, with an aim to seek Ministerial approval for adoption in 2025. The draft Orkney RMP concluded a public consultation on the 25 October 2024 and responses are currently being considered. Officials will support the partnership throughout the year to produce a final draft RMP suitable for Ministerial consideration. The draft Clyde RMP is in the process of being updated ahead of identifying a suitable consultation period.

As part of The Scottish Governments [formal response to the final report of the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform \(ECCLR\) Committee Inquiry into the Development and Implementation of Regional Marine Plans in Scotland in August 2023](#), we have provided a clear approach to regional marine planning moving forward, with the position that no further MPPs should be established until after the adoption of the National Marine Plan 2 (NMP2). Aligning with our commitments to local communities, the NMP2 will continue to provide the overarching planning policy framework from which Regional Marine Plans can develop, and provide the context and direction for future RMPs, setting the planning policy to inform decision making and support licencing and consenting decisions.

Please confirm the drivers behind the IFMI Programme

The IFMI Programme was developed in 2024 partly in response to stock assessment advice and stakeholder concern highlighting sustainability issues with crab and lobster stocks, and partly due to wider recognition of the limitations of a national approach to inshore fisheries management.

It is fair to say that we have historically been restricted in our inshore fisheries management interventions by data limitations (e.g. high-resolution data about fishing activity, information about the number of creels in use, etc.). However, the development of technology in recent years, alongside the commitment to improve the inshore fisheries evidence base by using onboard electronic technology on under 12 meter vessels, means that we are now in a better position to review and improve upon our inshore fisheries management. Doing so will enable us to develop a more agile and responsive approach to inshore fisheries management which supports delivery of locally appropriate and sustainable fisheries management solutions.

What legislation and strategy does the IFMI Programme link back to?

We anticipate that the IFMI Programme will help us to achieve objectives and commitments outlined in a wide range of places. We intend to put together a more exhaustive list outlining any commitments or obligations as we develop the framework and review responses to our Call for Evidence. However we anticipate that it will include our Fisheries Management Strategy 2020-2030, The Fisheries Act 2020, our National Marine Plan, and beyond.

What assessment has the Marine Directorate made of bycatch from vessels using longlining or gillnetting?

When allocating resource for undertaking monitoring, we take a risk-based approach in order to prioritise fleets at higher risk of bycatch.

Longlines

Through the UK Bycatch Monitoring Programme, observer monitoring is in place in the Scottish longline fleet. Monitoring in Scottish waters has greatly increased our understanding of levels of bycatch in this fleet, which are outlined in the publication 'Improving

understanding of seabird bycatch in Scottish longline fisheries and exploring potential solutions': Improving understanding of seabird bycatch in Scottish longline fisheries and exploring potential solutions - gov.scot.

This paper also presents several solutions to mitigate seabird bycatch, including streamers (also known as bird scaring lines). Trials of streamers began in Autumn 2023, with funding provided by Scottish Government and the EU LIFE programme-funded CIBBRiNA project. In Summer 2024 Scottish Government held a workshop with industry, scientists, and NGOs to discuss these solutions and prioritise preferred options. Trials stemming from these discussions began in Autumn 2024 which included advancing the streamer trials at pace; increasing line sinking rates; and adjustments to offal management. These trials are ongoing and are expected to run until Autumn 2025.

Gillnets

Through the UK Bycatch Monitoring Programme, observer monitoring is in place in the Western Isles tangle net fleet. This began in 2024 and is ongoing. There is also some ongoing observer monitoring of the deepwater gillnet fleet in Shetland, with approximately 260 sampling days in UK waters since 2009 when this programme of work began.

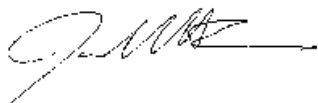
Through the UK Bycatch Monitoring Programme, observer monitoring is in place in UK waters, with approximately 260 sampling days undertaken in the gillnet fishery since 2009. This includes ongoing observer monitoring of the deepwater gillnet fleet (around Shetland and beyond), and the Western Isles tangle net fleet, which began in 2024.

What enforcement is in place in that regard?

Under a risk-based approach we focus resources on longline and gillnet fleets during the peak fishing seasons. Inspections by our Marine Protection Vessels (MPVs) and surveillance aircraft focus on the landing obligation and catches of prohibited species. For example, officers from one of our MPVs inspected three longline vessels during week commencing 24 February 2025. They spent time observing lines being hauled to ensure compliance. No offences were detected but officers reminded crew of the landing obligation. We will continue with these inspections to deter and assure ourselves of compliance.

I hope this information is helpful.

Yours sincerely,



Jim Watson

Head of Domestic Fisheries Management
Marine Directorate, Scottish Government