

SCOTTISH FISHERMEN'S FEDERATION

INTRODUCTORY SUBMISSION TO THE RURAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE OF THE SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT

SEPTEMBER 2026

The Scottish Fishermen's Federation (SFF) is pleased to be invited to provide evidence to the Rural Affairs Committee on 30th September 2026 and provides this paper by way of background information. We are happy to provide the Committee with more detail if that would be of assistance.

BACKGROUND

The Scottish Fishermen's Federation (SFF) is a democratically constituted industry group set up in 1973 and its key aims are:

- Promoting and protecting the collective interests of the Scottish Fishermen's Federation's constituent Associations.
- Supporting production of healthy and sustainable wild-caught seafood, ensuring a sustainable future for the industry and our marine environment.
- Advancing the reputation of fishing by championing responsible practice in meeting a growing demand for healthy, climate-smart food.
- Improving fishing safety through supporting and promoting professional standards of training and compliance with safety standards.
- Showing fishing as a positive career choice – one with a viable and positive future.

SFF is comprised of eight constituent Associations, with around 450 vessels within their membership, representing a wide range of fishing businesses, both inshore and offshore and catching a wide range of fish and shellfish species across demersal, pelagic and shellfish fleets.

Provisional Scottish Sea Fisheries Statistics for 2025¹ report that Scotland had 1,993 active fishing vessels in 2025, around three-quarters of which were under 10 meters in length. These vessels were crewed by 3,738 fishermen and landed 509,000 tonnes of fish and shellfish worth £960 million in 2025. By sector, pelagic landings accounted for £582 million, demersal landings for £204 million and shellfish for £174 million.

¹ [Provisional Scottish Sea Fisheries Statistics 2025 - gov.scot](https://gov.scot/publications/provisional-scottish-sea-fisheries-statistics-2025/)

Whilst full 2025 figures for the UK are not due to be published until the end of October, Scotland generally accounts for around between 60-70% of total UK landings and value (71% of landings and 63% of value in 2024²).

FISHING – CONTRIBUTING TO FOOD SECURITY AND GOOD NUTRITION

Fishing is a surprisingly complex business in terms of policy and regulation, but fundamentally it is about food production. Commercial fishing produces high quality healthy protein from renewable resources, with a very low carbon footprint. Compared to other forms of food production, commercial fisheries require few external inputs, the main input being the fuel needed to power fishing vessels. There is no requirement for chemicals, fertilisers or water inputs.

Fish and shellfish are consumed across the globe, and it is widely acknowledged that seafood has an important role to play in feeding a growing population. It is important therefore not just to think of food security in the context of Scotland and the UK but to look at the growing global demand for protein, and the inputs and resources needed to provide that.

Globally, over 3 billion people rely on fish for 20% of their protein intake³. Not all of that will be wild-caught – a significant proportion will be from aquaculture. The global population is projected to rise to 9.8 billion people by 2050 - an extra 2 billion people who will need to eat. Sustainable wild-capture fisheries have a key role to play in ensuring food security for many people worldwide.

The most recent considerations from the World Health Organisation⁴ conclude that consuming fish provides energy, protein and a range of other nutrients important for health, and that there are benefits related to fish consumption during all life stages (pregnancy, childhood and adulthood). The Eatwell Guide⁵ which represents governments' nutritional advice for Scotland and the rest of the UK recommends that people should eat at least two portions of fish per week, one of which should be oily fish.

FISHERIES MANAGEMENT – SOME CONTEXT

With very limited exceptions (e.g. shooting of wild game) commercial fishing is unique in terms of modern food production as it relies on completely wild, natural resources (fish and shellfish) that are not subject to any rearing, cultivation or husbandry by humans. Fisheries management is in place to manage the amounts of fish that can be harvested

² [2025_12_02 - UK Sea Fisheries Statistics 2024 report - .pdf](#)

³ [Global Fish Consumption Statistics 2026](#)

⁴ [Joint FAO/WHO Expert Consultation on the Risks and Benefits of Fish Consumption](#)

⁵ [Eatwell Guide | Food Standards Scotland](#)

and the ways by which this is done, but fish and shellfish stocks are also influenced by many naturally occurring factors.

Fishing is clearly one pressure on fish stocks – and indeed the only one that can be actively managed – but it is widely recognised that fisheries are impacted by factors over which no actors in the supply chain have any control. These include natural fluctuations in stocks caused by changes in population dynamics – e.g. increased or decreased predation by other species, competition between species for resources (food and habitat), changes in weather patterns and fluctuations in recruitment to a stock. There are examples where in the absence of any fishing pressure, stocks have decreased through naturally occurring factors. For commercial fisheries to be able to contribute to sustainable food security and good health, there should be effective co-designed management based on robust data and well-founded science that informs evidence-based policy making.

On a global scale Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing remains a major threat to the sustainable management of some fish stocks. But in Scotland and the UK fishing is subject to mature and long-established management and regulations. Many of our stocks are jointly managed with our neighbouring fishing nations. In Scotland, the Scottish Government's Sustainable Fishing Indicator⁶ (SFI), which summarises the sustainability status of commercial fish and shellfish stocks in Scottish waters, shows that the sustainability status of stocks in Scottish waters has increased through time, from 39% in 1995 to 73% in 2023⁷, though dipping just under 70% in the most recent update. Whilst there is always more to do, this overall positive trend demonstrates the ongoing recovery of the commercial fish stocks in Scotland.

PUBLIC SUPPORT

Fishing has been integral to Scotland's society, culture and economy for hundreds of years – it's often called a traditional industry and it's part of our national identity. But fishing is not just part of Scotland's heritage – it is always looking to the future. Our fishing industry is modern, efficient, professional and globally recognised.

It is heartening that the Scottish public continues to support our industry – regular polling carried out independently by Opinion Matters⁸ on behalf of SFF shows sustained levels of positive public opinion with around 63% of Scots expressing positive opinions and only 6% having a negative opinion.

⁶ [Written question and answer: S6W-36300 | Scottish Parliament Website](#)

⁷ [Written question and answer: S6W-41726 | Scottish Parliament Website](#)

⁸ Research conducted by Opinion Matters among a sample of 1,000 nationally representative adults in Scotland aged 18+. Fieldwork conducted 22nd – 26th January 2026.

82% of respondents in our most recent poll agreed that the Scottish Government should do more to support this important form of food production.

SFF'S CURRENT PRIORITIES

In preparation for the election in 2026, SFF published a manifesto setting out our 'asks' – our key priorities – across a number of policy areas. These remain the areas that we will focus on and the manifesto is attached as Appendix 1.

In conclusion, SFF has enjoyed a good working relationship with the Rural Affairs Committee over the years and has valued the opportunities to provide evidence and information to the Committee on relevant matters. We look forward to continuing this in the new session of Parliament.

Appendix 1

MANIFESTO – SCOTTISH FISHERMEN'S FEDERATION HOLYROOD ELECTIONS 2026

“STAND UP FOR FISHING”

Our Asks:

- Continued support for the Scottish Fishing Safety Group, working to ensure that fishermen's safety is prioritised. Every fisherman should come home safe, every time.
- Commitment to securing the best possible fishing opportunities for Scotland's fleet through annual negotiations and international agreements.
- A practical, pragmatic and workable future catching policy that enables the sector to meet the objectives of the Fisheries Act and the Fisheries Management Plans.
- A moratorium on any further consents for offshore wind development until the impacts on our sector are addressed in full, including financial compensation for losses to ensure that the fleet remains viable and profitable.
- Fisheries management measures in inshore MPAs and Priority Marine Features following the model of the offshore MPAs – balancing conservation with sustainable harvesting.
- All fishing to be properly recognised and protected through development of Scotland's new National Marine Plan.
- Investment in science and research needed to prepare for the future – our seas are changing and fish stocks are changing – investment in science is needed now to ensure we have the right data to underpin decisions and management in future.

Fishing in Scotland - Facts and Figures:

- The UK is an island nation, and other than the land border with England, Scotland is quite literally, surrounded by sea.
- Scotland's land mass is around 77,900 km², accounting for 32% of the UK.
- At 462,315 km², Scotland's sea area is six times larger than our land area, and accounts for 63% of the UK's Exclusive Economic Zone.
- It is estimated that Scotland has almost 19,000 km of coastline and around 100 inhabited islands.
- It's no surprise then that Scotland accounts for the largest part of the UK's fishing industry, generally accounting for around 60% of total UK landings both by tonnage and value.
- Fishing is important to Scotland's rural and coastal economies. It is a key part of Scotland's food and drink economy and provides employment all around the coast.
- Polling carried out for SFF earlier this year showed that 86% of the public agreed that food production from Scotland's seas is as important as energy production, and that Scotland's fishing sector should be protected in our ever-more crowded seas.

Economics

- The Scottish Government's Scottish Sea Fisheries Statistics show that the Scottish fishing industry value in 2024 was £756 million. This is the highest value (adjusted to 2024 prices) of the last ten years.
- Scottish fishing vessels landed 561,000 tonnes of fish and shellfish in 2024, the greatest tonnage of the last ten years. In summary:
 - Scottish vessels landed 561,000 tonnes of fish and shellfish in 2024, an increase of 12% compared to 2023 and an increase of 41% compared to 2020.
 - Scottish vessels landed £756 million of fish and shellfish in 2024. Adjusted to 2024 prices, this is an increase of 5% compared to 2023, and of 31% compared to 2020.
- In 2024, 3,735 fishermen were working on Scottish vessels. Although employment in the fishing fleet is a small percentage of total employment, it accounts for a higher percentage in island communities (Shetland 3%, Orkney 14% and Na h-Eileanan Siar 2%).

- In 2022 the most recent figures available show that fishing accounted for £335 million approximate Gross Added Value (aGVA) – an increase of 45% over the ten year period from 2013. Fishing generated 7% of Scotland's marine GVA in 2022 - the same as aquaculture - and seafood processing which depends on raw material, generated £441 million aGVA. By comparison, coastal and marine tourism generated around £663 million aGVA and shipbuilding £403 million aGVA.

Scottish fish and shellfish is in demand both at home and abroad, so as well as supporting the Scottish economy and providing a sustainable source of high quality healthy protein with far lower emissions than most other forms for food productions, it contributes to Scotland and the UK's successful food and drink exports.

Fishing – Part of Scotland's Identity - Past, Present and Future

Fishing has been integral to Scotland's society, culture and economy for hundreds of years – it's often called a traditional industry and it's part of our national identity. But fishing is not just part of Scotland's heritage – it is always looking to the future. Our fishing industry is modern, efficient, professional and globally recognised.

It provides food, jobs and is the essential bedrock for so many businesses that are part of Scotland's seafood production chain. Yet as we enter the second quarter of the 21st century, our fishermen – and Scotland's ability to produce renewable, healthy food from our seas - are under threat as never before.

The combination of ever-more complex and often restrictive policies, 'spatial squeeze' from offshore wind developments and sites protected for conservation alongside the drumbeat of negativity about fishing from some eNGOs undermines our industry's core purpose – producing food, providing jobs and contributing to food security and the economy.

We ask candidates standing for election to Holyrood to **'Stand Up for Fishing'**. Show your support for fishing as an integral part of Scotland's food sector, producing healthy, renewable, sustainable and climate-smart seafood contributing to local and national economies, to food security and to healthier diets.

We want all candidates standing for election to the Scottish Parliament to stand up for Scotland's fishermen. Blue food is part of Scotland's greener future and with the right policy agenda and support from government, our industry is uniquely positioned to provide it.

What do we need?

There is rightly a very clear policy focus on fish stocks and the environment, but often insufficient focus on fishermen: perhaps they are more at risk than some of Scotland's protected species? What do Scotland's fishermen need to survive and thrive?

Our industry was failed badly by the UK Government through the UK-EU reset, giving away 12 years of access to waters for nothing in return. We were then failed again when the £360 million Fishing and Coastal Growth Fund 'consolation prize' was allocated through Barnett rules, leaving Scotland with less than 8% of the Fund, despite accounting for 60% of the catch.

Like all businesses, fishing businesses need certainty and a stable business environment. Whilst many fiscal measures affecting business confidence are reserved, most fisheries management is devolved, alongside nature conservation and marine planning, so we look to the incoming administration in the Scottish Parliament to drive policy that supports our fishing industry and provides that stability for business confidence.

We need:

- **A Government that supports, values and protects what fishing provides – renewable healthy protein, food security to meet a growing need, good jobs at sea and ashore enabling fishing businesses to contribute to Scotland's marine economy and to Scotland and UK exports**
- **Policy and regulation that supports fishing – enabling rather than restricting**
- **Commitment from government for no further policies or measures that undermines the industry and the economies of the coastal & rural communities that rely on fishing for work and financial security**
- **Space at sea for fishing – fishing cannot and must not be a casualty of offshore wind expansion – Scotland needs renewable energy and renewable food**
- **Nature conservation policies that balance environmental protection with sustainable use.**
- **A diverse fleet – Scotland's fishing industry is successful due to its diversity which brings resilience and investment over a range of different scales.**

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