

Alistair Bally Philp submission of 24 August 2022

PE1951/H: Reinstate inshore coastal limit on the use of dredge and trawl fishing gears

Personal testimony in support of the SCFF's petition for reinstatement of a version of the historic inshore limit.

I am 49 years old and have been fishing full time (on and off) since I was 15 years old. I come from an extensive family of commercial fishermen, my grandfather, my father and numerous uncles were all at the fishing. I have spent at least 30 years of my working life fishing and at least 20 of those years as skipper of various commercial fishing vessels. I have worked in many of Scotland's inshore fisheries, on dredge, trawl and creel boats.

In my view, there is so much evidence and so many scientific papers available on the subject, that I find it quite incredible the Scottish Government appear to maintain the argument that everything in our inshore is fine, or that where it is not, that they have suitable plans in place to fix this. In my view, this is clearly and verifiably not a credible position!

The Government say; *“References to the decimation of inshore ecosystems and fish populations are not accurate”*. This is a very significant area of disagreement. My own experience, backed by evidence, indicates that many inshore fish populations and the ecosystem have been and continue to be decimated.

I invite the Committee to look at this [Scottish Government produced graph](#) illustrating fish landings from the Clyde area between the 1960s and 2010. The graph shows fish landings from this area, since it was opened up to trawl and dredge, have declined from thousands of tons to practically zero. This is illustrative of the declines in demersal fish populations throughout our inshore.

It's not just the commercial fish populations that have dramatically declined, this [link](#) takes you to the Scottish Government's own records of 'loss' within our essential fish nursery and spawning habitat. Some of those losses are in excess of 90% (in just the last decade). This, to me,

demonstrates that those fish populations and ecosystems have been and continue to be decimated!

The Government also reassures us that:

“Scotland’s Marine Protected Area (MPA) network already covers in excess of 37% of our sea area”.

If we are to believe these two government claims are accurate and robust, there might appear to be little requirement to introduce extensive spatial management to achieve better social, economic and environmental outcomes. However, I consider both of these claims to be verifiably inaccurate.

It is true that we have ‘designated’ 37% of our seas as some sort of protected area, however [this paper](#) explains trawling and dredging are restricted in less than 5% of our inshore seas. And it is to the percentage that is afforded protection from the impacts of trawling and dredging that this petition relates!

Obviously if we disagree with each other on such fundamental facts as the current health of the inshore, we will end up disagreeing about how we should best manage it.

From my own understanding of the evidence, two of the most important claims espoused in the Scottish Government’s submission appear to be unsound and contradict their own published evidence, furthermore they do not appear to reflect established scientific consensus.

I hope the Committee will make their own assessment as to the integrity of the Scottish Government’s claims, and use this knowledge to inform their assessment of the credibility of the Government’s overall position.

The Scottish Government also claim that *the trawling associations do not support having areas closed to trawling*.

I would tender to the Committee that populism, especially from narrow vested-interest groups, is not a suitable approach to developing Scotland’s fishing policy!

The [2020 UK Fisheries Act](#) states:

*“... the national fisheries authorities **must** seek to incentivise—*

a) the use of selective fishing gear, and

b) the use of fishing techniques that have a reduced impact on the environment (for example that use less energy or cause less damage to habitats).

Scotland requires a transition to sustainable inshore fisheries which, in my view, should prioritise access to fishing opportunity for lower impact, higher employment fisheries. As far as I can tell, none of the policies the Government list include introducing extensive spatial management of creel and trawl fisheries, nor do they indicate how they might afford preferential access to fishing opportunity to incentivise those fisheries that have a reduced impact on the environment.

In my lifetime at the fishing, I have witnessed the collapse of the inshore fish stocks that were healthy in my father's time, just as he had witnessed the collapse of the herring that was still there in his father's time. It's pretty much just the shellfish left inshore now. I believe it is long past time that we should do something about this.

The response offered by the Scottish Government offers me little reassurance they have this in hand.