



Scottish fishing industry outlines its priorities for Scottish election

The Scottish Fishermen's Federation has published a mini-manifesto outlining the main points of action that the newly-elected Scottish Government should address after the May election.

Whatever the political landscape after the Holyrood election, the proper support of the Scottish fishing industry will remain as important as ever.

The Federation says there must be a team approach between Holyrood, SEERAD and fishermen on all the key issues facing the industry.

The main points in the SFF call for action are:

Appropriate representation

Principal amongst the challenges is the achievement of appropriate 'bottom-up' representation for the Scottish industry in both the UK and European contexts. There must be clarity in the way that the interests of Scottish fishing are taken into account in the UK-wide decision-making process. This must include an assurance that this process

will work properly, and if it doesn't, then seek appropriate change.

Catching opportunity

The annual round of negotiations must seek the maximum sustainable catching opportunity for the Scottish fleet. In campaigning for the best deal possible for Scotland, sustainability is always at the forefront of the industry's concerns. However, no single factor should be allowed to distort a balanced approach to securing catching opportunity. In particular, it is sometimes too easy to adopt an excessively precautionary approach.

Cod Recovery

There must be the assurance that regulation controls for 2007 – including days-at-sea, the cod recovery programme and discards – are managed in a fair and equitable manner.

Better regulation

Amongst other issues, there needs to be the assurance that the UK Marine Bill - presently at the White Paper stage - takes proper

account of the needs of Scottish fishing and recognises its socio-economic importance in making arrangements for marine spatial planning, UK marine management and marine nature conservation. There also needs to be recognition that effort control rules imposed for cod recovery impinge on mixed fisheries targeting other species and that there will be no easy solution to the discard issue.

Improved perception of Scottish fishing industry

The next Scottish Government needs to provide support in the continuous improvement of the public perception of the fishing industry, recognising that it is a sustainable, responsible and compliant sector.

SFF chief executive Bertie Armstrong said: "Whatever the political landscape after the May election, the proper support of the Scottish fishing industry is vitally important and we hope that all parliamentary candidates will recognise this during the election campaign."

Difficult year ahead for Scots crab fishermen

Crab fishermen on the West Coast of Scotland are anticipating a difficult year ahead after a recent government decision to allow Irish vessels to fish for crab in UK waters.

The agreement, made in return for much needed cod and haddock quota to supplement Scottish whitefish catch allocations for 2007, could allow a significant number of Irish 'super-crabbers' into Scottish west coast waters.

Although the reallocation will not reduce the number of days that Scottish crab vessels can go to sea, it is expected to have a severe effect on the fragile brown crab market. An increase in product available on the market will reduce the price paid to Scottish fishermen or may make it impossible for them to sell their catch at all, a fact which the Scottish Executive appears to have overlooked.

SFF chief executive Bertie Armstrong said: "The Scottish Executive does not seem to have allowed for the effect of the swap on the brown crab market. The nomadic Irish shellfish fleet is far more sophisticated than the small, inshore vessels of the West coast and increased pressure on the market could seriously affect the viability of local operations. These factors could have been overcome if there had been prior consultation with the industry on the swap."



Delegates at the symposium

Symposium outlines measures to aid cod stock recovery

Cod stocks in the North Sea and North Western Waters are capable of recovery, a major symposium on cod recovery has heard.

The *Symposium on Cod Recovery* held near Edinburgh on 9 and 10 March brought together some of the world's leading scientists, environmentalists, senior EC officials and parliamentarians, fishermen and other stakeholders to discuss cod stock recovery in the North Sea and North Western Waters.

The aim of the symposium – which was organised by the North Sea and North Western Waters Regional Advisory Councils (RACs) – is to push forward new approaches to stock recovery by utilising the wide and varied range of knowledge available.

The information gathered at the symposium will be used by the organising RACs to provide the basis for their submissions to the EC and member states as part of the mid-term review of the current Cod Recovery Programme.

The symposium heard that there has been a decline in cod stocks due to a combination of factors, including fishing pressure, predation, and poor recruitment due to unfavourable environmental conditions.

Of key significance is the broad consensus from many of the speakers at the symposium that cod stocks have the capacity for recovery. However, there is a lack of real time scientific information on the current status of cod stocks, and it was put forward that more resources should be devoted to improving our knowledge. The further development of the already successful fisheries/science partnerships would be one constructive way of increasing this flow of information. It was also recognised by many that there needs to

be a more thorough evaluation of the impact of the current recovery measures in place.

Several speakers pointed out that the 'one size fits all' strategy for cod management does not work and a regional approach needs to be adopted, given the unique aspects of fisheries in different areas. For example, there was strong support for the suggestion that the European Commission should take the lead in the setting up of a series of *ad hoc* regional working groups for different cod stock areas, featuring representatives from STECF (EU Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries), ICES, RACs, NGOs and other relevant stakeholders.

In addition, a strong argument was put forward that the future management for cod recovery should focus on reducing mortality rather than trying to meet spawning stock biomass targets. This could be achieved by a variety of management tools including the use of more selective fishing gear and closed areas to protect spawning and nursery grounds.

The symposium heard in some of the presentations that there is a fishing industry requirement for greater stability and that socio-economic factors must be taken into account when developing future management plans. Rather than setting rigid and unachievable targets, it might be more fruitful to adopt an approach that ensures stock recovery is continually moving in the right direction.

SFF chief executive, Bertie Armstrong, said: "We will be fully engaged in developing the outcomes from the symposium, given the particular importance of mixed fisheries to the Scottish fleet."

SFF meets top EC officials at showcase event

The Scottish Fishermen's Federation told a showcase seminar in Brussels on the Scottish seafood industry that the catching sector is fully committed to sustainability and has made huge strides in meeting its environmental responsibilities.

The event – Scotland's Seafood Sector: Building the Future – was organised by the Scottish Executive and heard a number of presentations on how the industry and its fisheries administrators are moving from conflict to consensus. The seminar was attended by a number of leading EC fisheries officials.

The event included an open discussion session on the challenges for the future, most notably the need to ensure sustainable fishing.

Bertie Armstrong told delegates that the Scottish industry recognises its responsibilities to produce a sustainable harvest of excellent natural products.

He said: "The state of the marine environment is generally very good and we are committed to maintaining this position. However, the industry is facing the serious challenge of misinformation being fed to the general public."

This commitment to sustainability is illustrated by the increasingly close links being forged with scientists and the good state of

the primary target fish stocks of the Scottish industry.

Mr Armstrong pointed out that the industry has downsized dramatically in recent years and is now fully compatible with the current catching opportunities. The catching sector also fully believes in compliance and is developing a close relationship with the compliance agency.

But he warned that the industry is not in a position to endure further cuts, nor are they warranted, pointing out the serious socio-

economic effects this will have on fishing communities, and which would jeopardise Scotland's rich fishing heritage.

After the event, Mr Armstrong, along with Alex West and Ian Gatt, made their first ever contact with the EC's DG Environment by meeting with its chief Peter Gammeltoft.

With the increasing dominance of environmental issues, this meeting was seen as an important first step in forming a good working relationship with the environmental department of the EC.



Ian Gatt takes over as SFF Vice-President and President designate

Ian Gatt has taken over the role of Vice-President of the Scottish Fishermen's Federation.

He takes over from Mike Park, who steps down as Vice-President to give his full attention to the role of Executive Chairman of Scottish Whitefish Producers' Association Ltd.

A recent meeting of the Federation executive committee also agreed to appoint Mr Gatt as President designate of the SFF.



He will take over from Alex West when he retires from the role in June after three years at the helm.

With 30 years experience in the industry, 23 of which have been as a skipper and owner, Mr Gatt brings a wealth of experience from across the spectrum of commercial fishing from prawns to deep water species.

He said: "I look forward to meeting the challenges of my new role, giving support to the industry which has given me my livelihood. It is well

worth our best efforts - Scotland's fleet is a front-runner in Europe – whatever way it's measured, producing a hallmark range of products and with roots in every corner of our land. My experience gives me a clear picture of most of the problems and I will seek to strengthen communications with all our constituent Associations, to hear and promote their perspective on the issues."

Bertie Armstrong, SFF chief executive said: "We welcome Ian to his new role and his experience will prove invaluable to us. I would also like to thank Mike Park for the superb contribution he made to the Federation in his role as Vice-President."



SFF calls on 'sensible' approach to measures to reduce discards

The SFF is warning that the proposed introduction by the European Commission of a management system for reducing unwanted catches and discards must be implemented sensibly.

The SFF wholeheartedly supports measures to reduce discards but says it is vital that any regime introduced can work in the complex environment of mixed fisheries.

The EC claims that the discards can be as high as 70-90% in some trawl fisheries. However, this figure certainly does not relate to Scottish fisheries where by-catch levels are much lower. The Scottish industry has also been at the forefront of developing measures to reduce discards.

In an industry already constrained by limitations of the number of days that can be spent at sea, time spent catching and sorting fish of no commercial value is regarded by fishermen as valuable time lost.

For this reason discards in the Scottish fleet are a fraction of what they were in days before quota and time limitations.

Mesh sizes in nets used by both the whitefish and langoustine fleets have been increased and the industry has been working closely for some time now with marine scientists in a research programme on fishing gear selectivity.

The detailed proposals have yet to be discussed and as usual the devil will be in the detail. But unintended consequences must be avoided as there is a real danger of serious extra constraints being imposed on a fleet that is already very tightly managed by quotas and days-at-sea restrictions.

It is essential that any measures introduced are done so sensibly and progressively. Realism will be necessary in designing practical rules and enforcement will be a key issue.

SFF Services milestone

A milestone was reached in March, with SFF Services engaging its 400th different vessel for guard duty since the start of 2001 and the commencement of the Cod Recovery days-at-sea regime.

In 2006 alone, 157 different vessels were utilised by the offshore oil & gas/energy/telecommunications sectors, with member vessels from each of the SFF's constituent associations being involved.

Given current days-at-sea restrictions, the importance of the guard work of the Scottish fleet as a whole cannot be overstated. It is also felt from a wider viewpoint that mutual benefit arises from the learning exchange between the fishing and oil/gas industries. For example, fishermen gain a wider appreciation of the level of and the actual physical size of subsea structures prevalent in the sea.

To the end of March 2007, 69 different vessels have been engaged in guard duty this year,



Wellheads are a lot bigger than some people think!

with the prospects for the rest of the year looking good. For further information on both vessel and liaison skipper opportunities with SFF Services, contact either operations manager Steven Alexander or logistics co-ordinator Liam Byrnes on tel: 01224 646966, fax: 01224 647078, or email sff.services@sff.co.uk

Monkfish is being fished responsibly and sustainably

The decision by supermarket chain Asda to stop selling monkfish has been strongly criticised by the Federation.

Boats in membership of the SFF have been working closely with marine scientists for the last few years in building an accurate assessment of the Scottish monkfish stock through a collaborative research programme.

Results from these scientific studies – which are continuing this year – show the stock to be in good health, resulting in the

quota for monkfish being increased by 10% for 2007.

There is absolutely no technical basis behind this move by Asda, which completely ignores the science and the fact that Scottish boats are fishing for monkfish responsibly and sustainably.

Part of the reason put forward by Asda to impose a ban appears to revolve around concerns about the environmental impact of beam trawling. The SFF has pointed out to Asda that there is not a single beam trawler in the Scottish fleet.

FISHSALESMEN'S ASSOCIATION (SCOTLAND) LTD

For very many years the companies now in membership of the Association had been members of the salesmen's sections of the Scottish Pelagic Fishermen's Association Ltd and the Scottish Whitefish Producers Association Ltd. For practical purposes the 'Salesmen' operated a joint salesmen's section as a constituent of the Scottish Fishermen's Federation.

In the early 1990s however a number of companies began to feel that their interests and views would be more distinctly represented by the formation of a new association and this led to the incorporation of Fishsalesmen's Association (Scotland) Ltd on 13 August 1993. The Association is therefore the youngest constituent of the Federation albeit its members have an earlier history of activity within the SFF and in the Scottish fishing industry at large.

The companies in membership of the Association have been part of the fishing industry for many years going back in most

cases to before the Second World War and indeed the antecedents of some of the members can be traced back over 100 years. The names of these companies have therefore been well known in the Scottish fishing communities and beyond. Investments in fishing vessels by these companies have generally been in partnership with active fishermen and these arrangements have admirably suited the structure of the Scottish industry and have stood the test of time. This measure may be due to the fact that many of the companies were founded by individuals who themselves had been active fishermen and succeeding generations of managers have been people enjoying long connections with the industry and with a commitment to its future.

Out of that history has evolved the distinct contribution of the Association combining a strong ethos of fellowship with fishermen and their interests, with financial and commercial realism. Perhaps the Association's name was not the best choice, because it gives the entirely false impression of a number of organisations

who 'just sell fish'. The reality is that these organisations have major investments not only in the catching sector but in other sectors of the fishing industry. The diversity and scale of investment and activity enables its members to bring a breadth of experience and knowledge to the counsels of the Association and the Federation.

The Association is proud to be a member of the Federation and thus to play its part in defending and promoting the interests of the Scottish fishing industry.



Spotlight on environmental policy

The Federation is currently formulating its environmental policy position in a move to proactively highlight the importance that fishermen attach to the marine environment and sustainable fisheries.

The influence of environmental matters on most areas of modern life is steadily increasing against a backdrop of concern about climate change and the general perception that human activity is damaging the planet. This influence is particularly evident in the reaction of the government, environmental bodies, and other groupings to the fishing industry.

Chief executive Bertie Armstrong says: "Until now we have been

reactive – this is not satisfactory and leaves us in a permanently defensive position. A much better approach is to take practical steps to continuously portray the Scottish catching sector in a positive light that the conditions surrounding the industry permit."

The basic framework of the new policy will include the following points:

- The state of maritime environment worked by Scottish fishermen is generally recognised as good.
- The Scottish fishing industry is part of the country's heritage and has significant socio-economic importance.
- The main target stocks are in good, sustainable condition and can remain so for the foreseeable future given responsible management.
- The industry is at the right size for the continuation of sustainable, responsible fishing.
- The industry is an enthusiastic partner with the scientific community in ensuring sustainable, responsible fishing.

The next steps in the development of the policy will be to initiate a full assessment of the environment, with the help and support of the Scottish Executive, FRS, Scottish Natural Heritage and others.

The Federation will also be gathering and commissioning the collection of socio-economic data and information on Scotland's fishing heritage. In addition, existing stock data will be collated and information to help confirm that the fleet is at the right size for the available catching opportunity.



SFF response to WFF action to take EU to court over cod quotas

The SFF has criticised WFF for taking the Council of the European Union to the European Court of Justice for allegedly breaching EU environmental law by failing to protect cod stocks.

The Federation is surprised and disappointed at WFF in taking this action, which fails to look at practical solutions for cod recovery. This action looks backwards and not forwards at what should be done.

WWF claims that the EU is breaching its own environmental law, but the law is extremely complicated and open to misinterpretation. However, the SFF believes this action will serve no useful purpose in pursuing the recovery of cod.

All it does is send out the superficial and wrong impression that cod is doomed. This was not the message that came out of the recent symposium on cod stocks, which involved stakeholders looking to develop practical solutions for cod recovery. WFF participated in this symposium without indicating that they intended to take this action.

WWF has produced an unsubstantial sound-bite, which bears little reality to the practical world of mixed fisheries.

The Federation is urging WFF to engage in practical discussions to find realistic solutions.



Marine Bill

The UK Marine Bill is now at the White Paper stage. It will give Scotland control of its own destiny by granting the devolution of marine nature conservation and will probably result in the setting up of a Scottish Marine Management Organisation.

SFF anger at quota swap deal for Scottish langoustines

The Scottish Fishermen's Federation has reacted with fury over a quota swap deal that will result in the Scottish fleet losing some of its catch allocation for the economically vital langoustine fishery.

Defra agreed a deal with Germany to swap 1.5% (375 tonnes) of the UK North Sea langoustine share for 150 tonnes of sole to be given English boats in the Southern North Sea which have been hit by the impact of recently introduced by-catch limits for skate and ray.

Langoustine is a key target stock for the Scottish fleet, fished by a well organised fleet which has made every effort, including heavy financial investment in quota, to abide by the rules and develop this sustainable fishery. The SFF is particularly angry that the deal was agreed without any warning or prior consultation by UK fisheries officials with the Scottish industry.

Bertie Armstrong, SFF chief executive, said: "We are astonished that this was done without any reference to the industry that actually fishes the quota. International swaps are not in the least unusual, but the general condition is that everyone agrees to the arrangement. This is an unconsulted *fait accompli*.

"Germany has not been involved to any degree in this fishery, with only a tiny quota, but this hands entry into a market that was painstakingly developed by the Scottish fleet.



"The problem of disappearing catching opportunity for the southern North Sea 10m and under fleet has been addressed by taking from Peter to pay Paul - it's a bit like a burglar coming into the house of a person who has worked hard and invested in their property only to be told 'I've not got much, so I'm taking some of what you have'.

"Catching opportunity is a finite resource and the problem has been caused by lack of regulation and control of the 10m and under fleet. Having developed now into a crisis, we find for the second time in recent history the responsible and rule-compliant langoustine fleet having their catching opportunity reduced to compensate. It looks all the more disappointing when compared with the Scottish whitefish fleet reaction to reduced catching opportunity - a 65% reduction by decommissioning."

Rory joins SFF team

Rory Campbell has joined the Federation as Science & Environment Policy Officer.

This is a new role for the SFF and Rory will be closely involved in keeping track of the scientific discussions and processes that lead to the setting of catching opportunity for each year.

He will also monitor and help develop policy on the expanding amount of environmental issues now affecting the fishing industry.

Rory, who comes from a Lossiemouth fishing family, joins the SFF from Fisheries Research Services where he was a fisheries observer.



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