



The Norlantean in Kirkwall. The Orkney Fisheries Association is profiled in this issue on page 5. Photo by Craig Taylor

Annual catch talks begin

By Bertie Armstrong

As autumn draws near, the thoughts of the industry turn to the annual round of negotiations which will determine next year's catching opportunity. Those stocks fished jointly with states outside the European Union have a great deal of importance to the Scots industry - mackerel, cod and haddock, to name but three. As always, the outcomes of the Coastal States and EU/Norway negotiations on all the joint stocks are every bit as important to us as the final decisions in the grand package at the December meeting of the EU Council of Ministers.

'Front loading' - the movement of decision-making to a period earlier than the December

Council - has begun, but in practical terms for us it does not make much difference this year. We have for the second year received a European Commission Policy Statement giving an indication of intention, and the science concerning the North Sea and West Coast herring and North Sea Demersal stocks was produced early. Next year will see all the science produced earlier to facilitate consultation and decision making earlier than December.

Risk of various kinds has been a feature of the fishing industry for centuries. It can be grouped in the broadest terms into 'biological' and 'regulatory' and both are alive in the autumn negotiations. The approach of the Scottish industry to risk, particularly over the

last seven years, has been to adapt and change responsibly. There has never been a period in history where all stocks have been in a uniform state of maximum volume - that is not the nature of an interdependent ecosystem. Care will therefore be needed with some stocks at any point in time. This is accepted - and, in the case of the Scottish industry - reacted to responsibly. An unfortunate part of the backdrop is the occasional overstatement in the media of risk, sometimes in unfortunate terms - for example, 'no fish in the sea by 2040' - was a recent headline in an otherwise normally sensible newspaper. It is the duty of all who know better to keep the real story in the

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minds of the public.

It is far too early to give predictions as to the details of catching opportunity for 2008, but the shape of the science to date and the state of the stocks experienced by the fleet at sea is already producing strong pointers. Herring stocks both east and west will require care and the Scottish pelagic industry is deeply involved in the production of plans to ensure health of the stocks and viability for the industry. The recovering abundance of cod, particularly in the North Sea and to the North West, compared with the very low recovery TACs is creating well-publicised difficulties with discarding of fish caught as a by-catch in the mixed fisheries. A good settlement for mackerel, a sensible outcome for cod and an equally sensible halt to excessively precautionary 'salami slicing' across the board will be needed for continued optimism in the industry. Effort control – days at sea – will be an issue for the prawn and whitefish fleets. With all this in mind, the SFF has been at the

forefront of working up a package of measures including voluntary real time closures for the protection of juvenile cod, an observer scheme to encourage avoidance, a range of technical measures, a potentially different approach to effort control and enthusiastic participation as a core player in the Scottish Industry Science Partnership. This is a practical and demonstrably responsible approach to securing catching opportunity for 2008 and beyond.

Catching opportunity represents the means of discharging our responsibility to harvest sustainably the world-class natural resources found in our fishing grounds. We call upon all involved in the autumn process to help us meet that important responsibility. Our new government, including the men and women of the newly named and structured Marine Directorate, have made commitments and engaged in the process – we look for positive outcomes.

Timetable

- 9-10 October – NEAFC (North East Atlantic Fisheries Commission), PECCOE meeting (Permanent Committee on Control and Enforcement)
- 18 October – Pre ACFM (Advisory Committee on Fisheries Management) advice industry briefing.
- 19 October – Public release of ACFM advice.
- 18-19 October – NEAFC, PECMAS meeting (Permanent Committee on Management and Science). Areas of interest for SFF will be issues of coral at Rockall.
- 22-23 October – Coastal States blue whiting negotiations (EU-Norway-Faroe-Iceland).
- 5-26 October – Coastal States Atlanto Scandian Herring Negotiations (EU-Norway-Faroe-Iceland).
- 5-9 November – EU-Norway Fisheries Negotiations, 1st Round.
- 12-16 November – NEAFC Annual meeting (will set catch levels for mackerel, blue whiting, Atlanto Scandian Herring, Deep Sea species and Rockall haddock in international waters).
- 21-26 November – EU-Norway Fisheries negotiations second round.
- 18-20 December – Annual Fisheries Council negotiations.

Shetland cheer

Fishermen have welcomed the decision to award Cullivoe on the isle of Yell designated status for landing whitefish.

The move to grant the landing of whitefish at Britain's most northerly fishing port will mean that boats can land more than two tonnes of cod and hake for the first time since restrictions were brought in during 1999. Landings can only be made on week days between 9am and 5pm.

The move will be a huge benefit for fishermen who had sometimes been forced to steam six hours to Lerwick in dangerous seas because of landing restrictions at Cullivoe

The Shetland Fishermen's Association had been pressing the Scottish Executive for a number of years for Cullivoe to be awarded

designated landing status.

Chief executive Hansen Black said he was delighted the executive had agreed to the SFA's request for designation.

"Being close to the fishing grounds, boats will save both time and fuel landing in Cullivoe and more importantly in terms of safety it will remove the necessity to steam to either Lerwick or Scalloway in times of poor weather.

"Secondly, it demonstrates that the executive has confidence in the integrity of the local fleet and the robustness of enforcement measures currently in place."

The move will also benefit the local community, which had invested heavily in facilities providing ice, fuel and supplies for visiting fishing boats.

Golf event



The annual SFF/UK Oil and Gas golf event took place recently at Inchmarlo Golf Club.

The oil men emerged on top with a comprehensive 3-1 victory. Our photo shows SFF team captain Alex West handing over the cup to Paul Dymond.

Welcome



Teresa Munro has joined the Federation as administrator. Teresa, who is from Aberdeen, recently completed an HNC in administration at Aberdeen College.

SFF/Seafood Scotland joint venture is sealed!



Carole Connor, SFF accountant, and Jess Sparks, Seafood Scotland's technical manager, are pictured here celebrating their marriage at Meldrum House before flying off to Barcelona for their honeymoon.

We need a profitable industry



Richard Lochhead, centre, with Bertie Armstrong and Ian Gatt

The sea is one of Scotland's greatest national assets and the fishing industry is determined to protect this precious resource so as to ensure a profitable and sustainable future, Ian Gatt, president of the Scottish Fishermen's Federation, told guests at its annual dinner in Edinburgh.

Mr Gatt said it is in Scotland's interests that there is a profitable industry, given the support fishing provides to coastal communities and the revenues raised for Government coffers.

Emphasising that the SFF is a politically neutral organisation, Mr Gatt said that for him the acronym SNP stood for Sustainability, National Asset and Profitability.

On sustainability, he said: "The mainstay

species for the Scottish fleet are in good health and the fleet is now at the right size to fish for these stocks sustainably."

Turning to the sea as a natural asset, Mr Gatt said: "We have jurisdiction over a wide expanse from the Borders to Shetland out to Rockall and back to the Clyde. The good news is that our seas are clean and healthy and we have a diverse variety of fish and shellfish living in them.

"We need a national asset like the sea to be well-managed and within that we need our fleet to be well regulated."

However, he pointed out that in his 30 years of fishing, he had never known a time when all stocks were in good health simultaneously, probably because natural factors had their

role to play in determining fish populations.

As far as profitability is concerned, Mr Gatt said: "Scottish society needs the fishing industry to be profitable as it is expected that every industry and business should contribute to a successful economy.

"Fishing communities demand that the fleet is profitable as a successful community will feed from the fleet – processors, net makers and ship repair businesses all need us - just as we need them."

Mr Gatt added: "The good news is that the fleet has returned to profitability and there is an air of optimism for the future and new vessels will join the industry in the coming years. However, we need more young people coming into the industry to serve these new vessels and we are glad to see colleges all over the country having a full uptake for their fishery courses."

Meanwhile, SFF chief executive Bertie Armstrong told guests at the dinner that over the last two years there has been much closer co-operation between scientists and Government and this groundwork should be developed further.

There is now a strong force for change in the way that fishing matters are handled, with Scotland on the cusp of taking more influence in strategy and deciding priorities, given its predominance in UK fisheries.

But he emphasised: "This is not an Anglo-Scottish issue as there is no mutual exclusivity, but is more about bringing together sensible management and decision-making that benefits all UK fishermen."

20 point action plan for fishing

Richard Lochhead told guests at the dinner that sustainability will be one of the Scottish government's guiding principles and he paid credit to the huge efforts put in by the industry in recent years to achieve this goal.

But it is also vital to take heed of the community dimension to fisheries. Mr Lochhead said: "Every single decision that is taken in relation to fishing should include sustainability but should also be about the community dimension and the economic and social values of the fishing communities in Scotland."

And a key plank of future policy lay in the development of a food policy for Scotland.

"In terms of making the industry more profitable we are determined in the new Government to bring forward a food policy for Scotland because we do produce some of the best food in the world in this country and

there is no better example than the fish produce that's landed in Scottish ports.

Fish at the heart

"So we're absolutely intending to ensure that fish is at the heart of our food policy in Scotland because at the end of the day it is a fantastic food and a healthy food - which is very important given Scotland's health record."

He added: "But of course the profitability of the industry needs stability; if we don't have stability profitability becomes difficult and that's why another guiding principle of the Government is to bring stability to the industry to enable long term planning which will help attract young people into the industry and also to attract investment."

Turning to The Common Fisheries Policy, Mr Lochhead said the SNP had long believed that it is not good for Scotland's fishing communities and there are better options.

"But as long as we are in the Common Fisheries Policy we are going to constructively lead debate to change it, to reform it - until we get the powers to do even more radical things with it. We want to lead the debate because the CFP is far too centralised."

Mr Lochhead said that for the Scottish Government to meet its objectives, the first draft of a 20-point plan has been drawn up to improve Scotland's input into the UK negotiation position in the run-up to the December talks.

"We are going to discuss this plan with the SFF and the fishing communities in Scotland as to how to improve a relationship within the UK to make sure that Scotland's voice is heard and reflected within the UK negotiating position in the run-up to the annual negotiations," he concluded.

Seafish project to investigate sustainable squid fishery

The prospects for the sustainable development of the UK squid fishery are about to come under the spotlight in a new collaborative project led by Seafish.

The value of the UK squid catch in 2004 was £5m but it is believed that the potential could be much greater, given that it is a non-quota species that commands a high market value.

However, very little is known about stock levels of squid in UK waters, which makes it difficult to determine the sustainability of current catch levels and the potential for future development of the fishery.

This lack of knowledge is being addressed in this new project that will also investigate a range of other squid related issues including discards, fishing gear efficiency and optimising the quality of the catch. Financial support for the project has been provided by Seafish through its Industry Project Fund.

As well as Seafish, collaborative partners in the project are the Scottish Fishermen's Federation, Fisheries Research Services, Aberdeen University, and Cefas.

More information on the population and biology of squid is of fundamental importance with regards to sustainable fishing of the stock. A key focus of the project will be an assessment of the squid stock by scientists and the collection of information on squid

distribution and life cycles.

In addition, researchers will collect data on whether there are any discard related issues in targeted squid fisheries, given the small mesh sizes that can be legally used.

The project will also look at ways of optimising fishing gear through a series of sea trials. This will include using underwater cameras to observe how squid actually behave inside a trawl. Such information could prove vital in the development of selective fishing gears that will target marketable squid, yet keep catches of undersized and unwanted species to a minimum.

The project will also determine the optimum catch handling methods both onboard and offshore.

Seafish gear technologist Mike Montgomerie said: "This is a truly collaborative project and fishermen will be at its heart. The potential for developing the squid fishery in a sustainable manner appears to be good, but this can only be achieved if we can shed more light on squid biology."

Work has already begun with researchers recently undertaking some catch composition and discard work in the Moray Firth. Similar work has also just been carried out in North Devon. More sea trips are planned over the coming months, which will include the use of underwater cameras.

SPFA celebrates 75 years

The Scottish Pelagic Fishermen's Association is celebrating its 75th anniversary with a specially commissioned booklet that highlights developments in the sector over the last quarter of a century.



According to Association chief executive Derek Duthie, the booklet is a logical follow-on from a previous book published in 1982 to commemorate the first 50 years of the SPFA.

"There have been so many changes in the pelagic industry over the last 25 years that we thought it would be appropriate to publish an update," he said.

Running to 44 pages, the booklet will have three chapters; the first written by Derek Duthie on the main political issues dealt with by the association over the period; the second by David Linkie of Fishing News examining how the structure of the pelagic fleet has developed, and the last one by John Simmonds and Emma Hatfield of FRS on how the principal target stocks have fared.

The booklet was officially launched at an anniversary dinner held in Aberdeen at Pittodrie on 21 September.

If you would like to buy a copy, then please contact Derek at the SPFA office in Fraserburgh, telephone 01346 510714, email spf@btconnect.com

Price £7.50 plus postage and packing.

The SFF and offshore energy



Michael Sutherland and his phone

Fishermen will be aware that this past year has again witnessed a high level of offshore activity on the oil front. Members can be assured that the Federation is continually engaging with oil operators to ensure that the fishermen's voice is heard. SFF lobbying has become even more important in that there's been a clear trend for some of the 'big players' progressively selling many of their mature assets to smaller new companies who are fresh to Scottish waters. The Federation has made it a priority to get across the fishermen's message to these new players; it's been hard work but it is hoped it will prove worthwhile in the long run.

Also, with the Government's commitment to energy renewables there is an obvious drive to establish offshore wind, wave and tide projects and the Federation is also putting a lot of effort into engaging with these new industries.

Over the last year or so the Federation has also been in negotiations with oil companies and others to get a FishSAFE Mark II up and running as a successor to FishSAFE Mark I which undoubtedly has proved to be a very important tool for Scottish fishing vessels.

There's a lot of work to cover but Michael Sutherland and his team, as ever, are tackling matters head on.

Orkney Fisheries Association

Orkney Fisheries Association was initiated in 1972 and as the name indicates was intended to cover all fisheries sectors in the islands – fishermen, merchants and processors. The main objective in the early years was to protect the local fisheries from the threat from Europe – little has changed! In these early years, the Association received extensive assistance from the local council, which enabled frequent visits to mainland UK and Brussels to state the Orkney case.

At the same time Orkney advocated the issue of some forms of local management and joined Shetland in producing a number of proposals, which could be argued then resulted in the 'Shetland Box'. The Orkney FA was one of the associations, which refused to sign up for the CFP in 1977.

The original association largely comprised shellfish members but with assistance from HADB and the Council the white fish fleet gradually evolved from the late 1970s to the early 1990s. In the latter period there were 14 white fish vessels most over 80ft and which included seven new builds. At that time there was a development in boats dredging for scallops and fishing for prawns with about 12 vessels in membership. With the downturn in prices for this fleet they are down to three active vessels and decommissioning aided the downturn of the local white fish fleet to the stage where only five remain, albeit they are larger vessels. The present mainstay of the association is again the creel and dive

vessels spread throughout the islands with the most recent development being the offshore crab fishery targeted by vivier vessels.

Until 1997 the Association was run on a part-time basis with the Council providing the office and part secretarial services. The increasing workload due to the level of regulation and meetings relative to the industry dictated the need for a full-time post. A full-time secretary was appointed and an office established on Kirkwall Pier. The existence of the facility enabled the re-establishment of Orkney Fisheries Training Association – a part of the Seafish GTA network in 1998. Following on from that the Orkney PO was initiated utilising the same staff and more recently the OFA has instituted a fuel supply system for the smaller vessels now operated by Orkney Marine Oil Co Ltd. This currently has six locations with a further two awaiting to be commissioned. A property company to enable storage facilities for members has been assisted and OFA has been instrumental in the creation of Orkney Sustainable Fisheries Co Ltd, a company formed to take over operations of the OFA's lobster hatchery, sponsor accreditation of the lobster and crab fishery and to make general improvements to the inshore fisheries and the marine environment.



From 1995-2006 the OFA operated the lobster hatchery producing a few hundred juvenile lobsters at the initial stages progressing to the regular output of 50,000 to 60,000 juveniles in later years. The hatchery was rightly regarded as a world leader and today further experiments in improving production and release techniques are ongoing. While dedicated hatchery staff have been the key issue, the involvement of fishermen in bringing in hen lobsters and laying out juveniles has played a critical part. OFA also ran a lobster v-notching scheme with EU aid in the years 2000-2001 and many members have continued this process voluntarily.

The OFA rejoined the SFF in 1999, and has taken an active part in its committees and representative bodies and continues to support the federation in its endeavours to promote all sectors of the Scottish industry. By this means the Association is able to further the aims and needs of its members.

'One Year On'

by Ann Gammack, SFF administrator

Having now been in post for one year, it was suggested that it might be a good idea for me to write a small article on how I have found working with the Scottish Fishermen's Federation. For a start this year has just flown past or it might be the case that I am just getting older. I have found my time here to have been really interesting and it has opened up a new meaning to the words 'fish' and 'fishing industry' up to the point that anything in the press or in print to do with fishing has

me making a beeline for it. My own family and friends relate to the fact that I am working for the SFF as just to mention the word 'fish' brings my name into the conversation. It has been a complete change for me, enabling me to travel to the bright lights of Edinburgh to attend the Executive Committee and SFF Services board meetings and also to visit Eyemouth for the June meeting. All-in-all it has proved to be a year of new beginnings for me and I hope this continues.



Busy time for SFF Services

By Michael Sutherland

As all members are well aware, SFF Services Ltd continues to be exceptionally busy and currently there appears to be no end in sight for the current high level of offshore activity. Next year and indeed the year beyond looks as busy as ever. Steven Alexander, SFF Services operations manager, has recently been doing some analysis and he's keen to highlight that we have just passed the significant milestone of 40,000 days of guard vessel activity over the last decade! This phenomenal milestone is a tribute to the professional attitude of our guard vessel skippers and crews, as well as the SFF Services team and the office back up staff.

Fishermen will have also witnessed a high level of Seismic Activity offshore which we know has sometimes been disruptive to their



Liam Byrnes, a member of the Services back up team.

activities. The stoic co-operation of fishermen combined with the professionalism of our SFF Services fisheries liaison skippers aboard various seismic vessels has ensured that the process has gone smoothly.

Finally, everyone is pleased to see John Watt back to full fitness, following his recent accident.

New trust is launched

A new trust company has been launched by the oil and gas and fishing industries to help keep fishermen safe in UK waters.

The Fisheries Legacy Trust Company's (FLTC) main function is to build a trust fund which can be used to maintain comprehensive, up-to-date information on all seabed hazards related to oil and gas activities for as long as they remain, and to make this data available for use by fishing vessel plotters found on-board in wheelhouses all around our coasts. The company is the outcome of ongoing co-operation between the Scottish Fishermen's Federation (SFF), the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations (NFFO) and Oil & Gas UK.

Organisational chart for sea fisheries division

Following the introduction of the new Administration this year, the Marine Group is now known as the Marine Directorate and although the two Sea Fisheries Divisions remain with the respective titles of Management and Conservation there have been a few slight reorganisational changes

which have taken place. Inshore Fisheries responsibility now falls within the Management Division, and due to its close links with the Fisheries December Council negotiations, Effort Management is now under the umbrella of the Conservation Division. Another slight change of emphasis

is the formation of a new Food and Fish Division within the Marine Directorate, headed up by Heather Jones. Gillian Barclay has transferred to this Division and taken the fish trade and marketing issues responsibilities. She will also be involved in the broader Scottish food theme.

