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An t-Ionad Fiosrachaidh

Rural Affairs Islands and Natural Environment Committee

**27th Meeting, 2022 (Session 6),
Wednesday. 26 October**

Inshore fisheries roundtable

In this roundtable, Members will have an opportunity to discuss with stakeholders on issues affecting Scotland's inshore fisheries. The following witnesses will be attending:

- Lucy Kay, Coastal Communities Network
- Charles Millar, Sustainable Inshore Fisheries Trust
- Phil Taylor, Open Seas
- Ellie MacLennan, Scottish Entanglement alliance
- Calum Duncan, Marine Conservation Society
- Sheila Keith, Shetland Fishermen's Association
- Alistair Bally Philp, Scottish Creel Fisherman's Federation
- Hannah Fennell, Scottish Fishermen's Federation and Orkney Fisheries Association
- Elaine Whyte, Community Inshore Fisheries Alliance

The session will be structured around four themes:

- 1. Fishing industry pressures**
- 2. Science**
- 3. Sustainable fisheries management**
- 4. Inshore fisheries governance and community empowerment**

Background

'Inshore fisheries' is a broad term with no fixed definition. In this paper, this term refers to issues affecting waters within 12 nautical miles where fishing activity takes place typically (though not exclusively) by vessels under 10 metres in length that

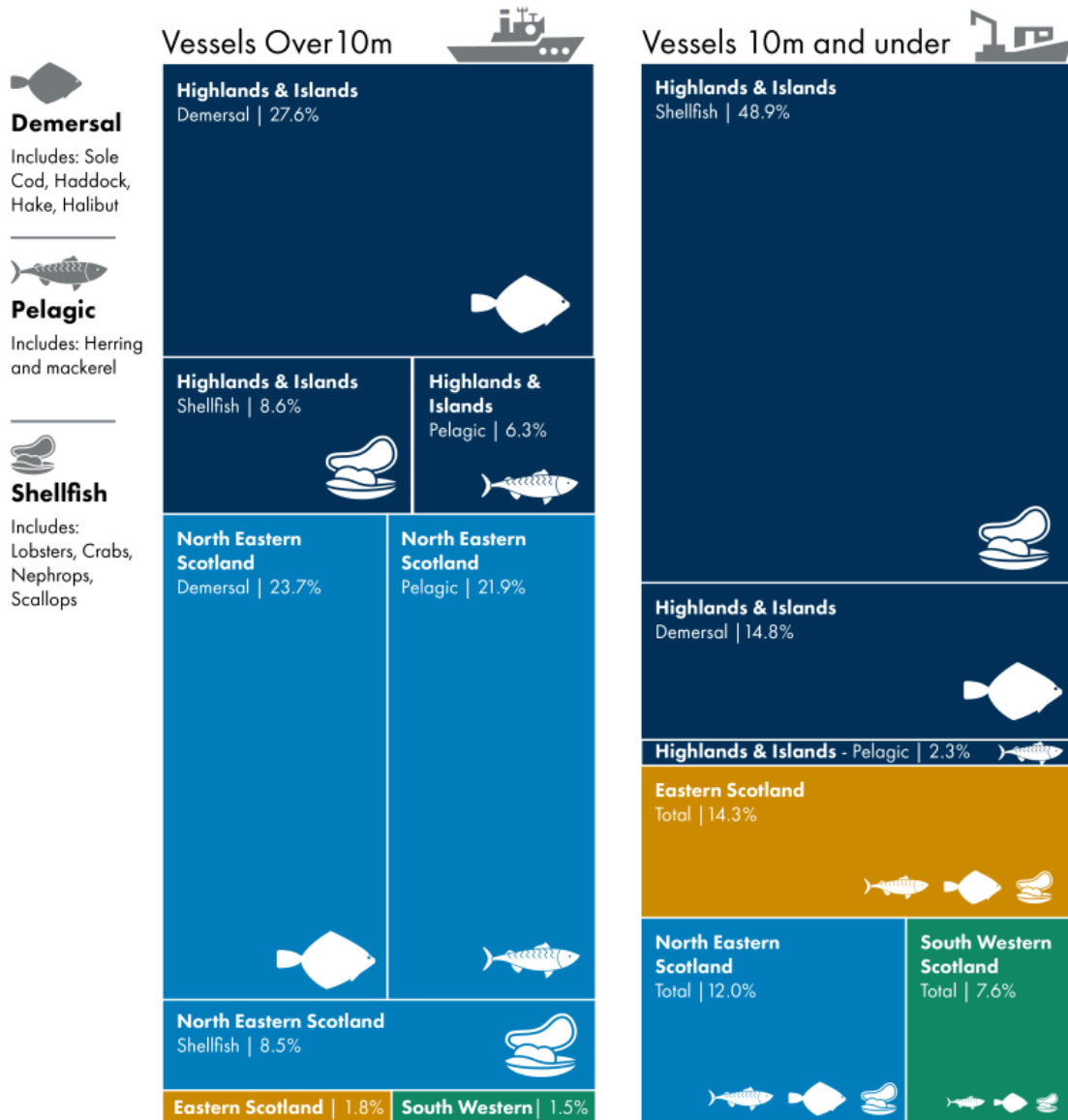
target the shellfish species nephrops (langoustine) and non-quota shellfish such as scallops, crabs and lobsters.

There are over 1,400 fishing vessels operating in Scotland's inshore waters, making up two-thirds of the Scottish fleet. The inshore fleet is diverse and includes trawlers, creelers, netters, dredgers and divers. As stated above, inshore vessels are mostly smaller boats under 10m in length and have a one or two-person crew. These vessels typically fish within inshore waters that extend from the coast out to 12 nautical miles (nmi), with most fishing activity taking place within 6 nmi. However, larger, more powerful vessels operating mobile fishing gear (dredge and trawl) are capable of operating in both inshore and offshore waters.

The chart below shows the proportion of landings (by value) by species and location of the Scottish fleet and vessel size (under and over 10 metres in length).

What fish are caught in Scotland and where?

Proportion of fish caught by vessel size between August 2019 and September 2020 - Scotland



Source: Marine Management Organisation

Scottish Government statistics show that the number of nephrops trawl and creel fishing vessels has decreased in recent years (see Table 1 below).

Table 1: number of active registered vessels by vessel size and type 2017-2021

Year	10 metre and under Nephrop trawlers	10 metre and under creel fishing	Over 10 metre Nephrop trawlers	Over 10 metre creel fishing
2017	63	911	200	100
2018	56	946	160	105
2019	53	992	185	99
2020	51	892	187	99
2021	54	879	188	96
Trend 2017-2021	-9	-32	-12	-4

Source: [Scottish Government](#)

Theme 1: Fishing industry pressures

Supply chain issues

In the UK, we export a large proportion of the seafood we catch and import much of the seafood we eat. Our seafood supply chain is heavily integrated into the global seafood supply chain. Therefore, both local and global changes have consequences for the UK's seafood supply chain.

The inshore fleet is particularly vulnerable to supply chain issues due to its [reliance on exporting fresh shellfish to overseas markets](#).

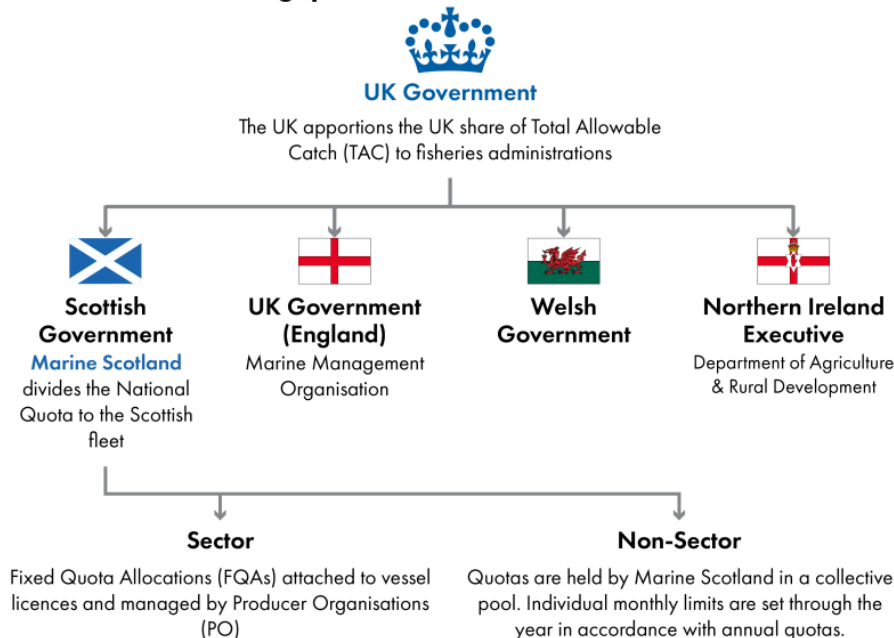
In recent years, supply chains have been particularly affected by the impacts of EU exit and the COVID-19 pandemic. These include:

- Businesses trading with the EU experienced major disruptions and delays due to new trading requirements and logistical issues.
- Many fishers targeting non-quota shellfish species were impacted by depressed market demand through a combination of Covid-19 restrictions and export disruptions.
- COVID-19 impacted workforce absenteeism across seafood supply chains.

Access to quota

The Scottish Government (through Marine Scotland) is responsible for allocating Scotland's share of the UK quota to the Scottish fleet. This process is set out in the diagram below.

How is the UK's fishing quota allocated?



Most of Scotland's quota share is allocated through 'Fixed Quota Allocations' which are attached to vessel licenses and managed by Producer Organisations (quota management and marketing organisations made up of member fishing vessels). Inshore vessels without FQAs can access quota for some species that the government has held back from the FQA system through non-sector quotas.

[Scotland's fishing quota is highly concentrated](#) and [has been criticised](#) for not providing enough opportunity for smaller inshore vessels. There are [historical and operational reasons for this quota distribution](#).

However, [there have been calls for changes in the way quota is managed](#). This includes the provision of more quota to inshore vessels so that they can diversify their catch, create more transparency, linking quota to social and environmental and economic criteria and creating community quota pools to increase community resilience.

The [Scottish Government's Future Fisheries Management Strategy](#) committed to "increase the benefit from fishing to local areas through our policies around allocation of additional quota, ensuring quota is in the hands of active fishers, and increasing the volume of fish landed into Scotland including through the introduction of a Scottish economic link licence condition in early 2022."

In June 2020, [the Scottish Government allocated £2 million worth of additional quota to inshore fishers](#) who usually target shellfish as part of a package to alleviate the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In December 2020, [the Scottish Government also launched a consultation](#) alongside the four UK fisheries administrations on how additional quota secured through the UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement should be shared. This consultation included the option of distributing a portion of additional quota to non-sector vessels [which received majority support](#) (43 in favour, 21 against).

Fuel and energy costs

Increasing fuel and energy prices had a big impact across all sectors of the UK seafood industry, especially in relation to fishing, seafood processing and distribution.

[According to a recent article in Shetland News](#), the price for marine diesel has been as high as £1.06 per litre, compared to 23.84 pence on 17 April 2020.

[A recent article in Fishing News](#) also highlighted that rising energy costs are threatening to put seafood processors out of business.

[A report on the impact of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict by Seafish published in April 2022](#) highlighted that UK fishing fleets economic viability was significantly affected by the pandemic, therefore fishing fleets economic performance is more sensitive to fuel price increase. It modelled the impact of different fuel cost scenarios. Key results from this modelling projected the following outcomes:

- If the fuel price remains at the highest level of £0.90 per litre, two-thirds of fishing fleets might drop to negative operating profits and won't be able to cover their operating costs.
- Reduction of the fuel price to £0.68 per litre after shock in March-April would help four demersal fleet segments to keep fishing operations profitable.
- Nephrops trawlers, beam trawlers and scallop dredgers are the most vulnerable fleet segments. In all modelled scenarios only two fleets, in this group of 12, operations remain profitable.

Labour shortages

Labour shortages are a key issue affecting fisheries. [Recent analysis of seafood supply chain issues conducted by Seafish](#) highlights that these impacts have been particularly problematic across the processing and logistics sectors. Seafish reported that Government self-isolation requirements drove a rise in short-term absenteeism which further exacerbated ongoing staff shortages related to issues such as new immigration controls and strong competition from other sectors.

In April 2021, the UK introduced a new immigration system which applies to non-UK citizens working on vessels operating within the UK's territorial waters (within the 12 nautical mile limit). The addition of 'Share fisherman' and 'trawler skipper' to the list

of skilled professions under the new immigration rules [was welcomed by fishing industry bodies](#) as it allows vessel owners to recruit overseas for these positions.

However, concern has been raised over some of the requirements that need to be met. These requirements are:

- Potential employers need to be licensed as sponsors and pay a fee of between £536 and £1,476 depending on the type of licence applied for.
- Potential new recruits need a job offer from a licensed sponsor at a skill level RQF 3 or above.
- The job must meet a minimum salary threshold, which is the higher of either a general salary threshold of £25,600 per annum or the specific salary requirement for their occupation, known as the 'going rate'.
- New recruits must also meet an English language requirement.

In [an article in Fishing News](#), Simon Macdonald, chair of the Scottish West Coast Regional Inshore Fisheries Group is quoted as stating *"We welcome anything that's going to attract new employment, but the salary thing is the big stumbling block, because boats work on a share basis and fishermen don't always reach that quite high target"*.

[The Scottish Government's Future Fisheries Management Strategy 2020-2030](#) commits to *"promote fishing as an attractive and safe career of choice, with a focus on improving safety standards, fair work, supporting new entrants into the sector, and equal treatment regardless of national origin or gender. We will not tolerate illegal treatment of any worker in any part of fishing industry."*

Competition for marine space

Competition for marine space is intensifying due to various spatial pressures, chief amongst which are offshore wind and marine protected areas.

In June 2020, [The National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations \(NFFO\)](#) and the [Scottish Fishermen's Federation \(SFF\)](#) contracted marine consultants ABPmer to develop a better understanding of spatial pressures on fisheries. [Their report](#) indicates that by 2030, a third of UK waters could no longer be fished with mobile gear. It also stated that by 2050 this could be as much as a half. It predicts this will have significant implications for the future viability of the industry.

Theme 1 suggested topics for discussion:

1. The impact of COVID-19 and EU-exit on seafood supply chains.
2. Changes to how quota could be managed to provide opportunities for diversification of fishing in inshore fisheries.
3. The impact of rising fuel and energy costs on the inshore fleet and processing sector.

4. The current status of the workforce in the inshore catching sector and wider supply chains.
5. How competition for marine space in inshore waters is impacting fisheries and the marine environment.

Theme 2: Science

The Future Fisheries Management Plan 2020-2030 commits to *“champion science-based approaches that are tailored to the needs of specific regions and ecosystems, are supported by robust yet proportionate management measures, and which take account of the shared challenges we face, such as climate change.”*

Respondents to the [Scottish Government’s consultation on the Future of Fisheries Management National Discussion Paper](#) raised the following points regarding science.

- The importance of strong science was seen as vital by respondents from the inshore sector for providing data regarding stocks and locations.
- There was strong support for direct industry involvement in the gathering of scientific data as well as support for the idea of an industry-science levy.
- industry would like a role in relation to working with Marine Scotland scientists to identify priority priorities for data collection.

A lack of robust scientific evidence, data collection and monitoring has been a recurring theme in recent policy developments such as the Joint Fisheries Statement and the [Committee’s consideration of seasonal cod closures in the Clyde](#).

[Respondents to the Committee’s call for views on the Joint Fisheries statement](#) questioned the ambition of the Joint Fisheries Statement with regards to science. For example, the Scottish Fishermen’s Federation stated *“Very general references to monitoring and research are made, but they lack any detail to allow assessment as to their merit. A reference to ‘good science....’ for example, is largely meaningless, without defining what is meant by ‘good’.”*

In [written](#) and [verbal evidence](#) regarding seasonal cod closures in the Clyde, stakeholders also expressed concerns over the absence of any data collection and monitoring programmes to assess the effectiveness of policy proposals.

For example, in written evidence, the Orkney Fisheries Association said *“Strong, robust, and transparent science underpins effective fisheries management. Data on inshore fisheries is patchy [...] Failure to share the science behind the decision to close the Clyde Cod Box undermines fisher faith in the decision-making process and prevents the industry and Marine Scotland exploring alternative scenarios and management options. This has long-term consequences for how fishers view*

management and conservation and may undermine future attempts at co-management.”

The Clyde Fishermen’s Association called for greater involvement of fishers in science, stating that *“Fishermen can offer practical advice and precise solutions in helping to collate real time science and expertise.”*

Theme 1 suggested topics for discussion:

6. Whether sufficient scientific evidence, data and monitoring is available in inshore fisheries to support effective fisheries management.
7. When the last stock assessments of crabs, lobsters and scallops were made and whether they are frequent enough.
8. How scientific research, data collection and monitoring could be improved.
9. What is needed to ensure trust in the scientific evidence underpinning inshore fisheries management.

Theme 3: Sustainable fisheries management

Scotland’s marine environment faces many pressures, such as:

- [changing composition and distribution of species due to climate change](#),
- [declining seabird populations](#), and the recent bird flu crisis
- [seabed damage due to fishing pressure](#).

Scotland is also [failing to meet international targets on marine biodiversity](#) and [the UK as a whole is failing in most indicators for achieving ‘good environmental status’ in UK seas](#).

The Scottish Government’s Future Fisheries Management Strategy commits to *“work with our stakeholders to deliver an ecosystem-based approach to management, including considering additional protections for spawning and juvenile congregation areas and restricting fishing activity or prohibiting fishing for species which are integral components of the marine food web, such as sandeels.”*

More recently [the Scottish Government and Scottish Green Party shared policy programme](#) committed to a “step change in marine protection” including a specific commitment to *“restoring marine habitats in Scotland’s inshore waters, with the aim of achieving good environmental status, recognising that those waters contain valuable blue carbon hot spots, nursery grounds for fish stocks and an array of rich marine wildlife and biodiversity.”*

Climate change

Much like other sectors of the economy, fisheries are affected by the impacts of climate change and contributes to its causes.

[The Scottish Marine Assessment 2020](#) states that climate change “*is the most critical factor affecting Scotland’s marine environment*” and sets out impacts such as sea-level rise, coastal erosion, rising sea temperatures causing changes in species distribution.

The Scottish Government’s Future Fisheries Management Strategy states that “*it is important for us to recognise and understand these potential changes and the impacts of our activities, and also to consider the contribution that the fishing sector itself makes to climate change and how we can reduce its impact.*”

In 2021, [WWF, RSPB and the Marine Conservation Society published a report on ‘climate-smart fisheries’](#). The report sets out a ‘management blueprint for climate-smart UK fisheries’ which sets out a number of recommendations such as protecting [blue carbon](#), decarbonising the UK fishing fleet, reducing pressure from bottom-towed fishing gear and increasing research to fill knowledge gaps.

Future catching plan and remote electronic monitoring

In March 2022, the Scottish Government launched consultations on its [future catching policy](#) and [remote electronic monitoring](#) of vessels.

The future catching policy sets out the Scottish Government’s intention to introduce a range of technical and spatial improvements for fisheries vessels, reduce unwanted catch and discards, and encourage compliance with legislation.

Remote electronic monitoring refers to the use of cameras, sensors and vessel tracking technology to improve data collection transparency and compliance, particularly in discard reduction.

Highly Protected Marine Areas

[The Scottish Government and Scottish Green Party shared policy programme](#) commits to “*add to the existing MPA network by designating a world-leading suite of Highly Protected Marine Areas (HPMAs) covering at least 10% of our seas.*”

Scottish Government Officials recently explained to the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee “The standard processes will be followed, which requires strategic environmental assessment, relative socioeconomic assessments and other related assessments that will seek to inform the network. [...] Obviously, stakeholder groups with all the affected stakeholders will be involved through that and with that screening and scoping generally. Those are the key initial stages that you would expect in the first 12 months.”

Fisheries Management Plans

Fisheries Management Plans (FMPs) are set up under the UK Fisheries Act 2020. They draw on scientific evidence, fisher experience and policy objectives to set out management measures that will help to build and maintain sustainable fisheries. FMPs also contribute to achieving other environmental, social and economic fisheries objectives, detailing the practical, fishery-scale delivery of the overarching Act.

[Respondents to the Committee's call for views on the Joint Fisheries Statement](#) raised a number of issues with the proposed development of FMPs in Scottish Waters. Key issues raised included:

- FMPs not meeting the criteria as set out in the JFS.
- A focus on single species FMPs in Scotland compared to those being developed by other UK Fisheries Policy Authorities.
- Key inshore species not listed in proposed FMPs.
- No Scottish FMPs scheduled to be produced beyond 2022.
- Species listed in Scottish FMPs are subject to international negotiations.

A new National Marine Plan

Managing competing demands on marine space is principally achieved through the [National Marine Plan \(NMP\)](#) as required under the Marine (Scotland) Act 2010, and can be implemented locally through regional marine plans.

The NMP was reviewed in 2021 and Ministers are required to decide whether to amend or replace the current plan which has not been updated or replaced since 2015. In the [2022-23 programme for government](#), the Scottish Government committed to starting the process of developing a new National Marine Plan.

Enforcement

Since EU-exit, Marine Scotland has taken on additional functions and obligations previously undertaken by the EU. This has increased regulatory and enforcement burden. [The ECCLR Committee took evidence on the £10m increase in the Marine Scotland budget in this financial year during budget scrutiny in January 2022](#). The Cabinet Secretary stated that these increases would fund the additional nearly 500 new obligations and 86 new powers that relate to the marine environment and fisheries management, which were previously undertaken by the European Commission or by member states.

[The Scottish Government and Scottish Green Party shared policy programme](#) commits to *“ensure more effective compliance by extending the requirement for Vessel Tracking and Monitoring Systems across the whole commercial fishing fleet by the end of the current parliamentary session, and increasing capacity and capability in marine monitoring and protection.”*

[During the Committee's pre-budget scrutiny session on 5 October 2022](#), the Cabinet Secretary responded to a question about increasing enforcement capacity stating:

“If I had an unlimited budget, it would be great to invest more money in more vessels for enforcement. Unfortunately, however, that is not the case. We have three marine protection vessels and two aircraft to help us with that enforcement, and we take a risk-based approach to the vast marine area that they have to cover.”

Members may wish to discuss:

10. What impact climate change is having on inshore fisheries and how can this be mitigated.
11. Views on the Scottish Government’s proposals on a future catching policy and remote electronic monitoring and whether this will improve sustainability of inshore fisheries.
12. Views on proposals for Highly Protected Marine Areas and how stakeholders should be engaged in the process of their development.
13. Views on what stakeholders would like to see in a new National Marine Plan.
14. Whether Marine Scotland has sufficient resources to ensure compliance with fisheries regulations in inshore waters
15. Whether there is a need for a new inshore fisheries Bill.

Theme 4: Inshore fisheries governance and community empowerment

Co-management of inshore fisheries

Debates over inshore fisheries management and conservation has become increasingly polarised, particularly between fisheries industry groups and environmental NGOs.

The importance of co-management of fisheries is recognised in the draft Joint Fisheries Statement.

Section 3.6 of the draft Joint Fisheries Statement sets out a vision for ‘participatory decision making’. It states:

“Our future vision is that industry should take a greater, shared responsibility for sustainably managing fisheries, while making a greater contribution towards the costs. This can include, for example, work to develop new management of practices and contributing to fisheries science, being more actively engaged in fisheries management decisions, and co-designing future policy.”

Regional inshore fisheries groups

[Regional Inshore Fisheries Groups \(RIFGs\)](#) are the main fora for providing a voice for inshore fishers in developing fisheries management measures. Marine Scotland states that RIFGs “*aim to improve the management of inshore fisheries in the 0-6 nautical mile zone of Scottish waters, and to give commercial inshore fishermen a strong voice in wider marine management developments.*”

The Scottish Government’s Future Fisheries Management Strategy 2020-2030 committed to “*strengthen our co-management processes and support transparent and responsive management to a local level wherever possible, in particular by strengthening the RIFG network. As part of this, we will always consider local community impact as part of our decision making process.*”

Their [absence of a statutory footing has drawn criticism](#) for lacking transparency and involvement of wider marine stakeholders in developing fisheries management plans.

In Shetland, powers have been devolved via a regulating order ([The Shetland Islands Regulated Fishery \(Scotland\) Order](#)) to manage commercial shellfish fisheries in inshore waters. This includes powers to issue licenses, make regulations and impose restrictions on certain fishing activity. This is currently the only region in Scotland where these powers have been devolved for the purpose of fisheries management.

Regional Marine Planning

Under the Marine Scotland Act, marine planning can be undertaken at a regional level through Regional Marine Plans. Regional marine plans are developed by Marine Planning Partnerships (MPPs). MPPs are made up of marine stakeholders who reflect marine interests in their region. The partnerships can vary in size and composition depending on the area, issues to be dealt with and the existing groups.

In Session 5, the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee conducted an inquiry into the implementation of regional marine planning. [The Committee published its final report in December 2020](#). The inquiry heard there was dissatisfaction among stakeholders over slow progress in establishing Marine Planning Partnerships and the development of Regional Marine Plans. Evidence cited a lack of human, financial and political support.

Members may wish to discuss:

16. How the Scottish Government and four UK fisheries authorities’ commitments on co-management of fisheries can be delivered in practice.
17. Views on how the role of regional inshore fisheries groups in inshore fisheries management and whether there is a need for reform.
18. Views on what role should regional marine planning play in inshore fisheries management.

19. Views on how communities can play a greater role in decision-making on inshore fisheries management.

Damon Davies, Senior Researcher, SPICe Research

Professor Paul Fernandes, Committee Advisor

Date: 18/10/2022

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