

Marine Scotland – Inshore Fisheries Pilots – Proposal Form

Please note:

- Proposals should be completed on the appropriate form in line with the accompanying guidelines with supporting information as may be required.
- The selected area must be within the Scottish Marine Regions (<http://www.gov.scot/Topics/marine/seamanagement/regional/Boundaries>).
- Please be aware that Marine Scotland would expect Proposal Forms submitted to be made publically available.
- Proposals should be submitted to Marine Scotland by 30 September 2017.

Details

Group/organisation name	OUTER HEBRIDES REGIONAL INSHORE FISHERIES GROUP
Principal contact name	Donald Nicholson
Address	c/o 28A East Street Sandwick Isle of Lewis
Postcode	HS2 0AL
Email	doninicholson@hotmail.com
Phone number	01851 705207

Proposal Questions

1. Who is the recognised lead on the proposals, i.e. who is the primary point of contact?

Duncan MacInnes, Secretariat, Outer Hebrides Regional Inshore Fisheries Group.
Donald Nicholson, Chairman, Outer Hebrides Inshore Fisheries Group

2. Please provide a background on the group proposing this pilot?

The Outer Hebrides Inshore Fisheries Group was formed over 10 years ago and represents the interests of all stakeholders with commercial fishing vessels operating in the area and has representation from all the Government Agencies involved in the management of the Marine environment.

A Management Plan on developing a well managed, sustainable and profitable fishery was agreed by all stakeholders and submitted to Marine Scotland. The implementation of that Plan is nearing completion with both the development of new fisheries and limiting effort in the static fisheries remaining outstanding.

That Management Plan had been discussed at public meetings throughout the Western Isles giving everyone involved in the industry the opportunity to discuss and comment on the management measures contained within the Plan.

3. Please summarise your proposal, including other options that you have considered?

The number of pots set in the inshore waters of the Western isles has been increasing year on year for the last 20 years and has now reached the stage that pots are being left unfished on the fishing grounds for long periods simply to claim grounds and to prevent others from gaining access. Limiting the number of pots per vessel has been discussed within the Outer Hebrides for well over 20 years. Scottish Government had intended limiting pots numbers over 15 years ago, when they introduced a ban on the use of parlours in pots with a mesh size smaller than 60mm to prevent parlours being used once a pot limitation scheme was introduced. The catch per unit effort has been reducing, resulting in more pots being set to maintain catches at the same levels.

The proposed pot/trap limitation area is to the East of Lewis south to Barra and is the heaviest fished static gear area, in the whole of the Outer Hebrides, for lobster, brown and velvet crab, nephrops and latterly wrasse.

In addition, the number of pots is encroaching onto previous grounds that used to be towed by nephrop trawlers and scallop dredgers and this is now resulting in more conflict between mobile and static gear vessels.

It is worth noting that the recent MAIB report into the loss of the Louisa makes reference to crew fatigue and the continuous lifting of pots. This is a clear indication that vessels with several thousand pots in the water are working excessively long hours and a reduction in pot numbers will improve the health and well being of the crew, in addition to benefiting the shellfish stocks. The new ILO C188 Regulation which is being extended to the fishing industry in 1918, makes reference to crew welfare and working hours and the current unlimited number of pots worked by vessels leaves crew exposed to working prolonged periods.

The Outer Hebrides Regional IFG visited the Northumberland IFAC to study the management measures operating in their inshore waters, where it was evident that they had to control pot numbers being fished in the inshore waters out to 6 miles. The report from that visit was discussed at length by the IFG and they concluded that a pot/trap limitation scheme offered the best available option to improve the catch per unit effort and to reduce gear conflict. In addition, it would prevent vessels from leaving unfished gear on the grounds and would also reduce incidents of gear conflict when marker buoys left unfished became dirty and fouled propellers of passing traffic.

Other management measures have already been introduced by increasing the minimum landing sizes for lobster, brown and velvet crab. However, the benefits derived from those measures are being eroded with vessels putting additional pots/traps onto the grounds.

4. Please indicate clearly the geographical area you wish to propose for consideration as a pilot area (please provide a chart/image clearly defining the area).

GIS Map Awaited from Marine Scotland showing borders with neighbouring RIFG's

5. How would you categorise your proposal. If you feel that none of these options are applicable please select 'Other'.

Localised approach to fisheries management

Separating different methods of fishing

Other

6. Are you aware of any statutory or voluntary arrangements already in place within your proposed pilot area?

There is a statutory seasonal prohibition on scallop fishing between Lochmaddy and Barra from 1 March until 1 May and from 21 August until 1 November each year. This conservation measure has been covered by statutory legislation since 1984 and has been welcomed by the various sectors of the fishing industry, as it has further reduced seasonal conflict between brown crab fishermen and scallop dredgers.

There is a further Code of Access arrangement in the Rodel, Harris area between nephrop trawlers and nephrop creelers, to reduce gear conflict.

7. Please outline any interaction you have had with the relevant Regional Inshore Fisheries Group (rIFG) in the development of this proposal?

The Outer Hebrides Regional Inshore Fisheries Group has been supportive of this management measure to introduce a pot/trap limitation scheme since the inception of the IFG over 10 years ago.

8. What engagement have you had with any other groups or fishers working in your proposed pilot area in developing this proposal?

The pot/trap limitation scheme has been in the original management plan for the Outer Hebrides Inshore Fisheries Group for over 10 years and was included for public consultation at events in Barra, Uist, Harris and Lewis. The public events had been advertised in the local press and had widespread support from all those that attended, as the whole industry had identified that there was too much effort being directed at the inshore shellfish stocks within the proposed area.

9. How many fishing vessels do you estimate currently work, both full and part time in the area proposed and how many will be involved in the pilot?

About 90% of the static gear vessels based in the Western Isles operate within the specified area at certain times of the year. The pilot would have to include all vessels operating within the area to be successful and to achieve the long term objectives of improving the catch per unit effort for all shellfish targeted within the area.

An estimated 140 vessels will be operating within the proposed area at certain period of the years. The most static effort will be directed within this area from October until May, with vessels moving gear to the West of the Hebrides during the summer months.

The wrasse fishery has developed, using traps, within the proposed area in the last 4 years and should have resulted in less effort being directed on shellfish stocks. However, those targeting that fishery left their pots on the grounds whilst they continued to fish in another fishery. Therefore, its of paramount importance that the traps used in that new wrasse fishery are included in the static gear effort in the area as there are some shellfish by-catch being caught in those traps. The number of traps used by vessels in the wrasse fishery would have to be tagged and used against that vessel's tag allocation.

10. Please clearly set out the management controls you would wish to see for the pilot and the rationale for each control proposed.

Management Measure	Rationale / Possible Positive Consequences	Possible Negative Consequences
Introduce a pot/trap limitation scheme based on vessel length and crew members employed	Overall reduction in pot numbers, improvement in catch per unit effort. More ground being freed up for commercial fishing as unfished gear is removed from area. Reduction in gear conflict, both amongst static gear fishermen themselves, and less interaction between mobile and static gear operators. Effort in the wrasse fishery will reduce gear set on the traditional shellfish grounds.	None

11. If your proposal involves limiting the number of vessels able to fish in the pilot area. Please outline:

- a. On what basis vessels will be permitted access e.g. method of fishing, vessel size, historical activity in the area (if so what would track record be)?

All vessels operating in the area would continue to operate in the area and would be restricted to the number of pots permitted per vessel, based on overall length and number of crew employed.

- b. Please outline your rationale for the basis for restricting access as outlined in question 11 (a)?

N/A

- c. Would those entitled to fish in the pilot area be limited to fish there only? If the answer to this question is 'no' please outline why access to other areas is required and why the proposed pilot does not include these areas.

Vessels would continue to have access in waters out with the pilot area. The other areas out with the Outer Hebrides Regional IFG waters have not shown support for limiting effort within those waters.

12. How do you propose oversight of this pilot project, should your application be successful? Do you envisage that a steering or monitoring group will be set up? How would this function?

The Outer Hebrides Regional Inshore Fisheries Group would manage the project along similar lines to the successful management regime which is in place in the inshore waters out to 6 miles in the Northumberland IFCA area.

- All pots set in the specified area must be tagged which will be unique for each vessel
- Provide up to 5 different coloured tags to unlicensed fishermen
- Introduce a maximum number of shellfish that unlicensed fishermen can retain on board and keep in storage
- Legislate that all marker buoys set must have the vessels name and registration number on each marker buoy
- Marine Scotland Compliance to take an active role in enforcing pot limits within the defined pilot area
- No vessel to haul any other person's pots without firstly obtaining clearance from Marine Scotland Compliance
- Pot limits to be set as per vessel size banding as specified in the approved Management Plan for the Outer Hebrides Inshore Fisheries area
- All static gear set without tags within the defined area would be removed and details of their position would be advertised locally and unless claimed within a specified period would be sold with proceeds used for future inshore stock enhancement projects.

The number of pots permitted per vessel would be depending on vessel size and crew numbers as detailed in the approved Outer Hebrides IFG Management Plan as follows:

- < 8 metre – 600 creels verified crew of 2 limit 800
- 8 – 10 metres - 1,000 creels verified crew of 3 limit 1,200
- 10 – 12 metres – 1,200 creels verified crew of 3 limit 1,500
- > 12 metres – 1,500 creels verified crew of 3+ limit 1,800

No vessel currently hauls more pots in a day that the proposed numbers.

13. Please outline what you believe the direct and indirect benefits of your proposal will be?

The direct benefits will be that gear will be hauled on a more regular basis, gear will not be left unattended for prolonged periods to retain territory as is the current practice. There will be less gear conflict both amongst static gear fishermen themselves and between static gear and mobile gear vessels. The catch per unit effort will increase and vessels will have to haul less gear to achieve the same returns.

Spending less working time at sea will give crews adequate rest time to be compliant with ILO C188 regulations.

The tagging of all gear will result in gear being returned to rightful owner if accidental gear interaction happens. Currently, pots are left on pier as those recovering gear are unaware of the rightful owner of gear hauled.

The industry will take a more responsible role in management of the marine environment and self-policing of pot numbers will become a feature of future management. Based on a risk assessment the vessels likely to be breaching pot limits can be easily identified at an early stage and there will be no real need in having to invest in much more additional resources and better value for money can be achieved with better use of existing enforcement budgets.

A pot limitation scheme has been a management measure that has been discussed for inshore waters around Scotland for many years. Following a national consultation paper Scottish Government concluded that they would not introduce a Scotland wide pot limitation scheme. However, Marine Scotland did indicate that they would support a pilot in an area of inshore waters of Scotland where there was support for such a scheme. If successful, the proposed Outer Hebrides pilot will enable other local areas around Scotland to introduce similar management measures within their own regions to reflect their own pot limitation scheme to reflect stocks within their own locality,

14. Please outline any groups who you believe may be negatively impacted by your proposal and why?

All vessels will be impacted equally as vessels will be allocated a number of tags to reflect the size of their vessel and number of crew employed. There should not be any negative impact, as vessels will be allocated a number of pots which none of them exceed hauling in a current day's fishing operation. The catch per unit effort will increase through time and the industry will become more profitable in the longer term as less effort will be required to achieve higher landings.

15. Please outline the costs of your proposals both in terms of financial costs and resource costs.

The main costs of the proposals will be in staff time in getting the pilot established, ordering tags, introducing legislation which will permit the confiscation of pots which have no tags.

An estimated 80,000 tags will be required to allocate to the number of pots that will be fished within the proposed area. Tags are estimated to cost around 10 pence each.

The most cost effective method for enforcing a pot limitation scheme would be to charter a suitable static gear fishing vessel capable of hauling pots in areas where alerts of untagged pots had been reported. It would be necessary for 2 existing fishery officers to be aboard such a chartered vessel to ensure that all procedures in lifting pots were fully compliant with legal requirements. Any gear found without tags would be confiscated, taken ashore and notification advertised where the gear had been lifted and whether anyone wished to claim the gear could go to the local fishery office..

Chartering a static gear vessel capable of hauling pots would be in the region of £1,000 per day and that would be advertised for a tender bid.

The overall costs of tags would be an estimated £10,000

Estimated that a vessel would be chartered for 20 days per year £20,000

Additional staff time to monitor a pot limitation project would be a .5FTE post estimated to cost £20,000

Pots confiscated could be sold to offset the above costs or could be used to fund stock enhancement projects.

The current logbook system will have to be amended to ensure that accurate feedback is gained on the catch per unit effort used within the pilot area. There should be no additional costs in amending the logbook to gain that necessary information.

The Northumberland experience was that lots of pots were confiscated and none were ever reclaimed. They destroyed the pots after a specified period. However, prudent financial management of the project depending on the levels of pots confiscated could result in the confiscated gear being sold to reduce the actual costs of administrating and enforcing the pot/trap limitation project.

16. Please outline any risks to the successful implementation of your proposals either in terms of the management or the overall return from fisheries impacted?

Vessels hauling gear belonging to other vessels and a trade in tags from vessels that fish less pots than their allocation. If this practice did develop its highly likely that genuine fishermen abiding by the rules would notify the relevant authority that such a practice was taking place.

17. Do you envisage the pilot management controls outlined in this proposal having any impact (positive or negative) outside of the area detailed in question 2?

Once other areas see that a pot limitation scheme can be enforced and be well managed and see the state of the stocks improving then its highly likely that such pot limitation schemes will be extended to other inshore areas of Scotland.

18. Do you know of any evidence to help support your proposals? For example research documents, previous schemes, personal records or observations you may wish to provide?

A number of skippers from Barra, Uist and Lewis visited Northumberland to see how a pot/trap limitation scheme in operation and the benefits that had been achieved from such a scheme. The skippers on the visit saw no merit in destroying new pots that had been confiscated and favoured the sale of pots being used for future stock enhancement or to go to reduce the overall operating cost of enforcing a pot limitation scheme.

The nephrop creel fishery was developed within the proposed area in the early eighties when vessels fished with 200 – 300 pots, being hauled every day. As the catch per unit effort dropped they simply increased the number of pots fished to maintain the same volumes of landings. The situation continued to worsen and it is now reported that vessels have several thousand pots on the grounds being hauled once per week. This is preventing genuine vessels that wish to have a balanced and well managed fishery from having access to fishing grounds due to the greed of certain skippers that leave gear unfished and unattended for long periods. Reported incidents of gear interaction are increasing and will continue to rise unless some sensible management proposals are introduced to manage effort.

19. Is there any additional information which you have not provided elsewhere in the form relevant to your proposal?

Detailed information on the successful operation of an inshore pot limitation scheme is available from the Northumberland IFAC. Both the officials and Committee members in that area were extremely helpful in providing information to a group of fishermen from the Outer Hebrides that visited that area.