

**Flapper skate conservation – Interim protection measures
Meeting with Communities Inshore Fisheries Alliance (CIFA)**

**MS Teams online meeting
29 January 2021 16:00**

Attendees

- Marine Scotland
- Communities Inshore Fisheries Alliance (CIFA)

Meeting notes

- Marine Scotland welcomed everyone to the meeting and provided introductions.
- Marine Scotland described the background paper provided ahead of the meeting and outlined the advice received from NatureScot.
- Marine Scotland stated that the advice suggested that skate eggs are sensitive to multiple marine activities including mobile bottom-contacting and static fishing gear, aquaculture and the introduction of marine infrastructure to the seabed.
- Marine Scotland said that we are keen to hear about the challenges and impacts the proposed measures may have on CIFA members and that these will be represented in official advice to Ministers.
- Marine Scotland mentioned the overlap of this site with other Priority Marine Features (PMFs) for which management is currently being considered. CIFA recognised that potential industry impacts, over and above those which may arise as a result of the PMF management project, were limited and unlikely to be substantial for local fishers.
- Marine Scotland advised that a wider public consultation and additional surveys would be required ahead of proposals for permanent measures.
- CIFA stated that they accept NatureScot's scientific advice however they have concerns over the robustness of the data sources, and the frequency sites of national importance being discovered.
- CIFA highlighted that the timing of proposals is insensitive in their view as the industry is currently experiencing multiple hardships arising from COVID-19 and EU Exit.
- Marine Scotland acknowledged and accepted their feelings regarding timing and suggested that what we are facing is a convergence of issues, all of which are important.
- CIFA suggested that these measures would simply displace effort in an area which already faces a high level of gear competition. Marine Scotland stated that NatureScot had affirmed that they had interrogated data from multiple sources that confirmed the importance of this site, as no other site in Scotland is known to have such a high concentration of flapper skate eggs.
- CIFA suggested that Marine Scotland should investigate the populations of flapper skate and spurdogs, as they believe that their predatory behaviour may affect populations of commercially important species. Marine Scotland agreed to consider this point.

- CIFA suggested that environmental groups are using urgent conservation measures as a strategy to set future precedents for bringing in fisheries measures without consultation.
- Marine Scotland made the point that some of the evidence came from citizen science but this had all been verified by NatureScot's own survey work.
- CIFA stated that the fishing industry has been the victim of some whimsical science, and outlined that they would robustly defend existing fishing grounds until a robust evidence base supported the need for fisheries closures.
- Marine Scotland reaffirmed that further seabed surveys would be undertaken to support the development of permanent management proposals.
- Marine Scotland stated that they would welcome potential counter proposals for boundaries at this site where CIFA identify conflicts, along with additional information on the number of vessels affected and potential impacts.
- CIFA suggested repeating this call following the decision of the Minister to consider potential boundary refinements to minimise industry impacts. Marine Scotland welcomed the suggestion.