

marine scotland

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**The Scottish
Government**
Riaghaltas na h-Alba



LEGACY 2014
XX COMMONWEALTH GAMES
SCOTLAND

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Our ref: A6345012
29th July 2013

Dear Mr Mactaggart,

Thank you for your letter of 8 July 2013 relaying the concerns of Argyll and Bute Council about the potential economic and social impact of effort restrictions on the fishing industry on the West coast of Scotland.

Time limits at sea are imposed by the European Union through the Cod Recovery Plan (CRP). Through the CRP, the EU allocates one pot of effort for the North Sea and one for the West coast, and does not allow transfers of unused effort between either. Each year the Scottish Government agrees with the fishing industry a scheme for allocating these pots of effort among Scottish vessels.

Controls on days at sea are set in relation to West coast inshore prawn vessels, in particular; even though it is widely acknowledged these vessels catch very little cod and have taken further new conservation measures (by inserting large fish escape panels into their nets) in 2012 to further reduce unwanted catches of fish. In 2010 we did succeed in getting 67 West coast vessels exempted from days at sea limits altogether.

The increased use of days at sea in 2012 was caused by an influx to the West coast of vessels normally active in the North Sea. They moved because prawn fishing grounds in the North Sea were less abundant. However, in August 2012, the Scottish Government banned almost all East coast boats from using the West coast limit, which allowed West coast vessels to continue fishing throughout the year. This allowed the West coast prawn fishery to remain open despite clear indications it would be safer to close the fishery in January 2013.

This year, having taken account of strong concerns voiced by industry and community representatives, days at sea allocations for 2013 for prawn fishing vessels on the West coast is the number of days equivalent to **95 per cent of their average annual time at sea in 2009-11**, with a minimum allocation of 110 days at sea. We also agreed to restrict

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transferring of West coast effort to ensure effort remains with the vessels that have a proven history of working on the West. We continue to keep these decisions under constant review through monitoring the use of effort on a weekly basis and we have made available an appeal mechanism on 2009-11 totals. We will reconsider the measures put in place to see if we can, where appropriate, alter them to the benefit of the fleet.

Official information indicates that (among the 97 prawn vessels based on the West coast with days at sea limits in 2012) 48 will receive an allocation in excess of their average annual time at sea in 2009-11, three will have their time reduced, but by less than five per cent, and the remaining 43 will have a five per cent reduction.

We have considered other avenues where we would assist the West coast fleet and proposed a scheme whereby through use of on-board cameras we might secure an exemption from days at sea limits altogether in the West coast. This proposal is currently being considered by the industry and we stand ready to help them take it forward if they so wish. We have also provided an option to participate in a range of publicly funded marine science initiatives identified by Marine Scotland that will improve inshore fisheries and marine science on the West coast. Participants will be invited to provide their vessels for chartered research activities on the West coast, which will include payment to the skipper.

Finally, you will wish to know Richard Lochhead MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment, called a meeting with fishermen's representatives last month to discuss the current situation and informed them he would draw up an action plan to help address the many and varying concerns and provide whatever support possible to assist the fleet. This action plan was published recently and a copy is included with this letter.

In addition, the Scottish Government continues with efforts to convince the European Commission of the need to amend the CRP and to implement it more flexibly, reacting to the needs of different fleets. This includes pressing urgently for the swift exemption from days at sea controls for vessels that catch very little cod and allowing greater ability to swap effort between sea areas.

I hope this letter reassures you and your council that the Scottish Government is doing everything possible to support the Scottish fishing industry in these tough times.

Yours sincerely



LINDA ROSBOROUGH
Director of Marine Scotland

RECEIVED

Date

30/07/13

Planning & Regulatory Services
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Aid to Adapt - a five-point action plan for Scottish white fish and prawn fishing

Introduction

In recent years, our whitefish and prawn trawlers have had to cope with tough times: high fuel prices, export markets under pressure and the continuing restrictions of the EU's Cod Recovery Plan have all taken their toll. On top of this in 2013 prawn fishers have struggled with very poor catches, reducing income for crews and placing pressure on whitefish quotas and markets. This is therefore a time of particular stress and challenge and the Government wants to help as much as we can. We want to help with immediate pressures and also support the transition towards discard free fisheries under the now reformed EU Common Fisheries Policy.

Point 1: Hardship fund

- We have established a £3 million hardship fund to offer help, where necessary, to affected fishing vessels facing exceptional stresses on their viability. We will now discuss urgently with fishing industry representatives how money from this fund might be made available to best help those in greatest need of assistance. In considering whether to deploy this fund, we will continue to monitor carefully the progress of prawn fishing, and will hope that improved catch rates will allow fishermen, through their own efforts, to restore stability to their businesses.

Point 2: Business flexibility

- We will where possible remove regulatory barriers that inhibit catching businesses from diversifying into alternative sustainable fisheries:
 - We will publish shortly proposals for changes to licensing systems that will reduce costs and add significantly to the flexibilities available to licence holders;
 - We will consider in particular calls from some industry representatives for multi-rig gears (fishing with more than 2 trawls in the water) to be permitted in the North Sea prawn fishery for at least part of the year; and,
 - We have received many representations about the cost of leasing fish quotas. Many fishermen have stated that these costs represent the most severe restriction on their flexibility and the greatest threat to the viability of their businesses. The Government is greatly concerned by these reports. We have in the past made proposals to seek to direct quota towards active fishermen and prevent it from being held as a speculative asset. In the light of the many representations we have received, the Government underlines that it remains ready to work with the fishing industry to improve the way in which quota is managed. We would welcome any proposals for ways in which this important national asset can achieve greater and wider benefits.

Point 3: Voluntary discard-free prawn fishing

- We will invite vessels – where they want to - to trial a discard-free prawn fishery this year by using gears including flexible grids that eliminate whitefish by-catch. We will then give vessels additional time at sea where required to catch whitefish quotas. We will seek funding from the European Fisheries Fund for this work to provide vessels with a minimum income to help them adapt to new ways of working.

- We will explore the scope for using fishing vessels in EFF-funded research into the North Sea eco-system.

Point 4: Reducing discards across the prawn fleet

- For vessels that do not want to move to discard free now, we will reinvigorate work with the fishing industry to develop new fishing gears and measures to achieve our discard reduction targets and will also consider whether it remains necessary for highly selective gears to be deployed in the Farn Deep, taking into account the potential for fishing effort to be displaced.

Point 5: Maximising economic growth through seafood

- The Scottish Seafood Partnership will shortly present an action plan to support the onshore sector as it seeks to maximise economic growth in Scotland, following which the Government will announce actions to be taken forward. We expect in particular to develop and roll out further efforts in langoustine marketing both at home and abroad.

Funding and implementation

Together, the actions outlined in this plan will involve funding of up to £6 million. We will provide information about the implementation of these actions in due course, including details of eligibility with respect to hardship funds.

The longer term

The Government seeks in this action plan to make a positive immediate contribution that helps fishermen and the businesses that depend on their catches to overcome, where possible and necessary, the challenges they face in the short term. But substantial challenges will remain, and Government and all those with a stake in fishing must look to the long term. As we work in partnership to implement this action plan, we will also discuss with interested representatives what further steps can be taken by industry and Government together to strengthen the resilience and adaptability of businesses in the fishing industries. We recognise that as well as off shore interests these industries also encompass onshore businesses which are directly affected by the pressures experienced by the fleet.

We will investigate in particular whether new measures could be put in place that would allow businesses to develop their business models and operating practices in ways that might improve their capacity to achieve over the next few years a successful and profitable transition to a reformed Common Fisheries Policy.

Scottish Government
July 2013