

Howard Wood submission of 24 August 2022

PE1951/S: Reinstate inshore coastal limit on the use of dredge and trawl fishing gears

I became involved in campaigning for spatial management of fisheries 30 years ago. As a diver, I saw first-hand the devastation of the seabed after the 3 mile limit on bottom trawls was ended in July 1985. An increase in scallop dredging in subsequent years exasperated the decline of the marine environment.

In my opinion, both in the Clyde and most of the west coast, the Recreational Sea Angling (RSA) industry worth 10s of £millions was sacrificed by Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (DAF), Scottish Executive Environment and Rural Affairs Department (SEERAD) & now Marine Scotland due to poor fisheries management and a bias toward one vested interest. Once the white fish were no longer economically viable, it appears that officials persuaded Ministers to support and fund prawn bottom trawling and scallop dredging in 95% of Scotland's inshore waters, rather than introduce effective measures such as re-instating the 3-mile limit that would have allowed a white fish recovery.

In my view, the response to the petition by Marine Scotland clearly shows they have learnt nothing from their past failures. They continue to allow specific stakeholders a veto over any management changes. Due to these failures in management in the Clyde alone, commercial fishing employment has over the past 30 years, declined by approx 70%, while RSA employment has declined by approx 95%. Marine Scotland's addiction to prawns and bottom towed mobile gear, in my opinion, is a national scandal. Our seas, which are a public asset, have been managed for just one vested interest. Everyone else living in our fragile coastal communities have suffered due to this policy of managing inshore water primarily for the two methods of shellfish extraction that do the most damage to seabed ecosystems.

It is little wonder indicators for the health of Scotland's inshore waters show a continued decline.

Marine Scotland is nowhere near achieving Good Environmental Status. Their own analysis shows that biodiversity within our inshore waters is continuing to decline and seabed habitats are being lost and further degraded. Fish stocks too are also continuing to decline. Spatial seaward limits on bottom towed mobile gear are normal in most Scandinavian countries, along with approx 50% of English inshore seas. Radical action is needed in Scotland if we are to reverse the decline.

Marine Scotland set up Inshore Fisheries Groups in January 2009 that exclude all stakeholders except commercial fishing representatives. These groups have failed, over the course of 12 years, to produce any tangible management plans that even attempt to recover a mixed fishery. In my view, all they have done is preserve the status quo of continuing decline.

We are in both a Climate Crisis and a Biodiversity Crisis because, in my opinion, Ministers and their policy officials ignore the science that doesn't suit their narrow economic views. Marine Scotland's record of refusing to contemplate fisheries inshore spatial management, such as a 3 mile limit, is a perfect illustration of why we continue to fail to even start addressing these twin crises.

Around the South of Arran, we have basically a 3-mile limit (although prawn trawling is allowed in some places in the outer mile). Published research showed that within 4 years from 2016 it saw a 102% increase in species abundance.

In conclusion, I support the SCFF petition.