

**Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Net Zero and Just Transition Portfolio
Summer Tour
Marine Directorate - Enhanced Marine Protection Roundtable
MPV Hirta, Kirkwall Martina, Orkney
12 July 2023**

Attendees

Mairi McAllan - Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Net Zero and Just Transition
Caro Cowan - Deputy Director Marine Environment, Scottish Government
Cara Duncan – Access to Sea Fisheries, Scottish Government (notetaker)
Ben Johnson - Head of Environment for Cooke Aquaculture, Cooke Aquaculture
Sean Dennison - Director of Orkney Fisheries Association, Orkney Fisheries Association
Martin Foulis - Director of Orkney Fisheries Association, Orkney Fisheries Association
Kevin McDonnell - Chief Executive of the West of Scotland FPO and Chairman of the Association of Scottish FPOs, Orkney Fish Producers
Cllr David Dawson - Chair of Development and Infrastructure of Orkney Islands Council
Gareth Waterson - Director for Enterprise and Sustainable Regeneration for Orkney Islands Council
James Green - Team Manager, Marine Planning for Orkney Islands Council
Phil Bennet - Chair of Regional Inshore Fisheries Group
Anne Anderson - Head of Sustainability and Development for Scottish Sea Farms

Purpose of meeting

To provide an opportunity to engage with a variety of stakeholders interested in enhanced marine protection and to listen to views on how to take forward collaborative community engagement.

Welcome and Roundtable Introductions

Marine Protection in Scotland - Cabinet Secretary for Transport Net Zero and Just Transition

The Cabinet Secretary provided opening statements explaining that she was appointed as Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero and Just Transition in March 2023. Previous to this role, in 2021 she was appointed Minister for the Environment and Land Reform. The Cabinet Secretary explained her far reaching responsibilities within her portfolio also included transport in which she works closely with Minister Fiona Hyslop. The Cabinet Secretary made it clear that one of her main focuses is to tackle the nature and climate crisis which requires immediate action.

The Cabinet Secretary further explained that a failure to safeguard Scotland's marine ecosystems in response to the climate emergency threatens the future of all marine industries and coastal communities. In June 2023, the Cabinet Secretary announced that the proposals for Highly Protected Marine Areas (HPMAs), as consulted on to designate at least 10% of Scotland's seas as HPMAs by 2026, would not be taken

forward. This was based on initial analysis of consultation responses and feedback from engagement with stakeholders. The Cabinet Secretary further explained that she is committed to developing a new pathway and timetable for enhancing marine protection. As part of this process, she is focussing on community-led marine conversations and meetings like this will allow engagement with local stakeholders to co-develop the approach to enhanced marine protection in Scotland.

1) Discussion point: How the marine environment is protected in Orkney and what could be done differently to ensure community engagement and ownership of marine environmental protection?

The discussions flowed well between local representatives, and they provided feedback on what factors need to be taken into consideration towards enhanced marine protection. Many of the points raised were in light of the recent HMPA consultation and proposed policy:

Science

- Future policy proposals and protected areas needs to be based on robust scientific evidence.
- Commercial fish and shellfish are highly mobile species. If these species move into protected areas, it may prevent fishers accessing these species. Fishers often face challenges in presenting specific areas for species as their movement can be spatial and temporally affected.
- Local fishers and users of the sea hold a vast and specific knowledge of the local species and waters in Orkney which needs to be reflected alongside the scientific evidence.
- An island impact assessment needs to be conducted on a local Orkney scale due to diversity of islands. The impact of an enhanced protected marine area could have different impacts depending on where they were placed.

Communication

- A change in direction is required in future policies to included local insight into the potential impacts. The consultation process needs to be a bottom-up lead approach.
- Better communication channels to allow notification of future consultations at the earliest possible opportunity for stakeholders.
- The narrative of enhanced protected marine areas need to change and be sold as a benefit. For example, evidence shows that marine protected areas (MPAs) can increase fishing activity around these areas.
- Additionally, rumours surrounding MPAs/HPMAs need to be 'demystified' of their impact on fishing activities. It needs to be clearer that not all MPAs are no take zones for fishing, some areas will still be allowed to be fished under certain management measures. In Orkney, if a bottom trawl ban were brought in for sites it would have very little impact to current structure of fishing industry present. However, if enhanced marine protection was brought in against static gear this would be detrimental.
- Better communication and coordination amongst local stakeholders in Orkney and the Scottish Government.

Competing marine users

- It was felt by representatives that the proportionality of potential impacts was not equitable across the variety of marine sectors. Fisheries and aquaculture representatives stated that they were to be negatively impacted by HPMAs policy in comparison to renewables, transport, shipping and tourism.
- Similarly marine representatives felt that in comparison to terrestrial sector, there is a greater impact being had on the marine sector to accommodate for changes with no financial support.
- Marine representatives also argued that the carbon footprint of the aquaculture and fisheries industry was marginal in comparison to the amount of fuel consumed by Orkney ferry transport and the number of cruise liners which visit Orkney, but very little was being done to acknowledge this.
- Additionally, within the HMPAs proposals it was noted that the policy benefited the production of low carbon electricity over the benefits of low carbon food production, such as aquaculture.
- Imposing spatial restrictions on fisher's movements can be dangerous at sea given rapid and dramatic changes in tidal and weather conditions.

Resourcing and financing

- More resources are required within local authorities to introduce regional marine planning and to support the Scottish Government in their agendas.
- Further resources should also be allocated to the science on local scale projects associated with increasing knowledge and sustainability.

2) Discussion: Engagement with people of Orkney and sectors represented

The Cabinet Secretary was informed of the local challenges which face Orkney, many of which are not solely limited to the impact that HPMAs or enhance marine protected areas could have. A variety of social and economic issues were raised which affect Orkney including competing demands in the marine environment, lack of funding, resources and increased pressures through regulation, financial access to sector (fishing vessels) and the decrease of young people coming into sectors. Orkney is uniquely positioned geographically which brings many challenges and benefits.

However, it was discussed that Orkney has the potential to be a hotspot for other policy areas including Net Zero developments and could in turn help generate interest and economic gains. There is close links with the local campus of Heriot Watt University regarding blue carbon, biodiversity, and carbon storage in addition to projects with St Andrews University.

The Cabinet Secretary welcomed these points raised within the meeting. She agreed that there is a lot of local held knowledge and understanding of remote communities throughout the coastline of Scotland. It was expressed that support for fishing and aquaculture sectors continues and will continue to remain a priority of the Scottish Government. The industry brings a lot of benefit, as mentioned in the meeting, which includes source of protein through blue foods and employment to island communities. However, progress in these sectors has been proactive in providing protection with the environment to ensure sustainability. Every economic sector and business, marine and terrestrial, are being asked to respond and change their practices with regards to the climate emergency.

Furthermore, the Cabinet Secretary acknowledged that one approach for enhanced marine protection conducted in one area of Scotland may not work in another due to the diversity, uniqueness of the coastline and the different communities present. However, she noted the value of the work being conducted by the local authority on their regional plans.

Conclusion

The Cabinet Secretary had positive and constructive discussions with local representatives in Orkney. As stated, Scotland's seas continue to bring an important source of social and economic benefit and progress to protect the ocean health remains a matter of urgency. Over the summer, she will be reaching out and engaging with various stakeholders of the marine environment and will be developing a new pathway and timetable for Scottish Government work with a focus of increasing and strengthening the MPA network. This includes work focused on consulting on proposal for fisheries management measures in offshore MPAs (beyond 12 nautical miles). Following this, inshore MPAs and priority marine features management measures will be considered.

Action Points

1. Local aquaculture representatives for Orkney will be contacted directly prior to future meetings regarding enhance marine protected areas.
2. Marine Directorate will consider feedback provided of holding workshops in Orkney on further policies or consultations.