

**COSLA Response to the Scottish Government's Future of Fisheries Management
in Scotland
National Discussion Paper**

Summary and Recommendations

This paper brings to the Board's attention the publication of the 'Future of Fisheries Management in Scotland: national discussion paper' by the Scottish Government and seeks views to inform COSLA's response to the paper and engagement on this agenda moving forward. The paper also proposes to invite officers from the Communities Inshore Fisheries Alliance and Orkney Fisheries Association to a future meeting of the Board.

The Board is invited to:

- i. Agree, subject to any amendments, the content of COSLA's response to the discussion paper as outlined in paragraph 10 and provide any views on the Scottish Government proposal outlined in paragraph 11, and
- ii. Agree to invite the Communities Inshore Fisheries Alliance and Orkney Fisheries Association to a future Board meeting.

References

Previous reports on this topic:

- Environment and Economy Board June 2018 – The post-Brexit Implications for the Fishing Industry

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Purpose

1. This paper brings to the Board's attention the publication of the 'Future of Fisheries Management in Scotland: national discussion paper' by the Scottish Government and seeks views to inform COSLA's response to the paper and engagement on this agenda moving forward.

Current COSLA Position

2. The Board received a report in June 2018 which opened a discussion on the implications for Local Authorities of changes to fishing policy after the UK leaves the EU. Members welcomed the report and agreed that COSLA develop a policy position on the role of local authorities in developing onshore infrastructure for the fishing industry post-Brexit.

What is changing?

3. The Scottish Government discussion paper was launched by the Cabinet Secretary for the Rural Economy, Fergus Ewing, in March 2019. This was part of the Programme for Government commitment to develop a new approach to fisheries management in partnership with the fishing industry and other stakeholders, with a focus on inclusive economic growth. The paper can be accessed here: <https://www.gov.scot/news/future-of-fisheries-in-scotland/>.
4. Given the current uncertainty surrounding Brexit as well as the broad range of views expressed across the sector on the benefits and disbenefits of the UK exit from the EU, we have come to recognise that it would be difficult for COSLA to arrive at a proposal that would be reflective of both such diverse perspectives within the fishing industry and the likely range of post-Brexit scenarios.
5. We therefore viewed the Scottish Government's 'Future of Fisheries Management in Scotland: national discussion paper' as an opportunity to deliver on the spirit of what we agreed last June and to develop a national local government position on the future management of fisheries. In doing so we felt we could highlight common threads which run through the whole of the Scottish fleet and the role that councils have in supporting their local fishing industry and coastal communities.
6. The document – which follows an initial scene-setting stage of dialogue with stakeholders in November 2017 – aims to gather further views and comments to inform a formal Scottish Government consultation being published in winter 2019.
7. The discussion points presented in the paper include:
 - The need to consider strengthening the way fisheries are co-managed, improving governance, communication and local discretion, with an opportunity for local authorities to become more involved;
 - Ensuring that Scottish fishing quota is in the hands of active Scottish fishermen;
 - Supporting new entrants by creating additional licenses and quota;

- Pressing the UK Government to introduce a new work permit system to secure sustainable labour supply for the fishing industry;
 - Giving consideration to the most appropriate way of allocating any increased fishing opportunities after Brexit.
8. Scottish Government colleagues leading on this work have also advised that they would welcome individual conversations with interested local authorities over the coming months for a more in-depth discussion on the overall strategic direction for the future management of fisheries and matters of specific interest to their council.

Proposed COSLA Position

9. COSLA's provisional response to the national discussion paper is provided below:
- In general terms, COSLA welcomes the Scottish Government's commitment to developing a new approach to fisheries management in partnership with the fishing industry, stakeholder groups as well as local authorities and our fishing communities. We believe that Scotland's Future Fisheries Management Strategy presents the opportunity to collectively develop a robust framework of national principles with clear lines of national accountability, whilst also embedding a degree of discretion within local decision-making structures in recognition of the differences in geography, size and fleet across the country.
 - COSLA recognises that the fishing and seafood industry has a key role in the success of Scotland's food and drink industry, contributing to income generation and employment in our communities. Local authorities can and do make a distinctive contribution on this agenda – in terms of supporting local businesses, providing and maintaining local marine assets and infrastructure, investing in transport, spatial planning as well as local employment and skills development.
 - Crucially, councils' engagement with and in support for their local fishing industry and coastal communities varies considerably, depending on the area's geography, type and size of fleet and their overall commercial performance. The presence of local management structures to support and facilitate dialogue across all local stakeholders represents therefore an avenue to empower flexible local partnership structures and place-based approaches.
 - COSLA would also welcome further engagement between Local Government and Scottish Government in relation to the development of a new entrants' scheme, given Local Government's support of local economic development and employability. Creating a sustainable economic base that provides a wide range of opportunities, both to experienced and new workers, is key to ensuring the survival of our coastal communities. Councils have a role to play in promoting a sustainable regulatory environment for the local fishing industry, supporting research and easing the barriers young people face when trying to enter the industry.
 - In terms of fishing opportunities after Brexit, the fishing industry does see the potential for increased landings post-EU withdrawal (depending on what rules are put in place). However, onshore infrastructure and workforce supply to cater for this might not be available in some areas and will only be made worse by EU withdrawal if no access to alternative labour supplies is put in place. Moreover, in a recent survey on Brexit preparedness, some of our members have also highlighted concerns around EU funding and a need for clarity on the proposed UK Shared Prosperity Fund. These factors should be given adequate consideration as a strategic direction is set for future management structures.

- In conclusion, COSLA is pleased with the collaborative approach taken by Scottish Government to developing a new Fisheries Management Strategy and considers that further engagement with interested professional colleagues in local government would be worthwhile over the coming months.
10. The discussion paper also includes a proposal to move the Regional Inshore Fisheries Groups (RIFGs) to a statutory basis. The RIFGs are non-statutory bodies established in 2016. Their stated aim is to improve the management of inshore fisheries in the 0-6 nautical mile zone of Scottish waters and to give commercial inshore fishermen a strong voice in wider marine management developments. Officers would welcome members' views on this proposal, which will be reflected in our final response.

Next Steps

11. We had hoped to invite representatives from the Communities Inshore Fisheries Alliance (CIFA) to present to the Board. This was to follow on from, and to provide a complementary perspective to, the attendance last year by Simon Collins from the Shetland Fisherman's Association. Unfortunately, we had to postpone the presentation due to the need to cover the additional agenda item on the Clean Air for Scotland Strategy. It is our intention to invite CIFA to a future Board meeting, where we can expand on the themes covered in this paper and explore further what Local Authorities can do to support the fishing industry in different parts of the country.

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