

Good day everyone, my name is Alistair Sinclair and I am the National Coordinator for the Scottish Creel Fishermen's Federation. As some of you may know I was recently seriously injured in a road traffic accident. I am now in the recovery stage, unfortunately unable to attend today.

Creeling is recognised as a low impact high value traditional method of fishing. It is a method of fishing which embodies what it means to be sustainable. Fishing with pots and traps has been employed to catch shellfish for centuries.

The Scottish MPA process has a shorter history, but it too has probably been brewing for a few decades, as marine activities including damaging fishing have intensified. It is a crying shame that it has come to this. We need to take steps to recover the health of our inshore waters, but this is where we find ourselves. Our members **can work** with these MPAs. But we are not content. There is little policing in place to enforce the management of the new MPAs. And little baseline research has been carried out throughout the network. It seems irresponsible to set up a network without having these processes in place. It might reveal the degree of urgency felt by Government, but MPAs will only work if they are based upon sound science with evidence to support the management.

Government, we believe really are just scratching the surface. Fisheries management within MPAs affects just a small percentage of the inshore area. **Looking ahead**, we

need fundamental reform within our inshore waters if we are to secure a future for those who come behind us.

Many of you gathered here today will rightly think that MPAs are about protecting and recovering - I think those are legal terms-. We feel we must consider protecting the seabed and the very sustainability of marine life that so depends on good management. We see things a wee bit differently, we would contend that a wider, fundamental reform of inshore fisheries is necessary and has the potential to do **much much more**. Fundamental reform has the potential to start ***protecting*** and ***recovering*** our communities and local economies in Scotland. Independent reports (many commissioned by the government itself) have made it abundantly clear that changing fisheries management will lead to more jobs, more fish, more resilient communities for future generations. We cannot continue to taking out short-term loans for personal gain from our waters.

Fisheries management agreed for these MPAs has indeed brought our members access to areas of the inshore fishery that previously were no go, but this access needs to be better managed. The MPAs have also given access to other sectors, including fish farms and aquaculture developments. Right now there is a rush and a rash of applications to site new or enlarged salmon farms within MPAs on the West coast. Processes for guarding against the potential cumulative, toxic legacy of salmon farming have not been put in place. For

example, we are yet to understand the impacts of chemicals deposited in our rich muds, home to our shellfish. We must **look ahead**, with a view to looking after the interests of communities and the fishermen who work therein. This situation must be addressed urgently.

There's a lot of potential distractions to **looking ahead**. Brexit being a case in point. SCFF did not express a view. This was rightly a matter of personal politics. In the run up to the referendum, it was becoming clear that the recently reformed Common Fisheries Policy was going to present significant opportunities for our sector due to a legal incentivisation of low impact fishing. We must not lose sight of substance. Of the right and sensible 'direction of travel' however the constitutional chips will inevitably fall, we will work with partners across these borders - real or imagined - to make the broader case for our communities and those creel operators within, promoting sustainable fishing.

The history of fishing in Scotland is a proud one. It is a history of a successful fishing nation catching huge volumes of world-class seafood. But it is also a history of short-termism. Of marginalisation. Of our inshore fishermen getting a raw deal due to over-exploitation, complex supply chains and concentration of wealth. Our members are mostly locally-owned SMEs. We are not the multinational interests that dictate the flows of global food markets. But by number we are the very fabric of our fishing cloth. Some 80% of

fishermen employed in the inshore waters are either creel fishermen or divers. We are united by a passion for fishing, with low impact methods.

Our philosophy is simple. Low impact fishing is good for long-term business, good for the environment.

We are rooted in our communities. Sometimes too rooted. It can be difficult to speak up. To push for change when others are ploughing another furrow. The lamentable issue of 'gear conflict' is a desperate example of this.

The fact that I am not here today reflects the fact that we are not professional meeting-goers. We do not have spare people to represent us. There is an imbalance in the health of our fishery which must be addressed. There is an imbalance in our fisheries representation - an inequality of influence. We have learnt the hard way that we need better representation. And In a short space of time, we have come a long way.

Things are changing. Let me show you something.

*“...the group had insufficient representation of inshore fishermen, particularly static gear operators. This was seen as a significant weakness from an inshore point of view, as the creel sector makes up at least 75% of the fleet operating in inshore waters.”*



Scottish Government website, October 2016



This screenshot from a Scottish Government website shows Marine Scotland and the folk at Victoria Quay are beginning to recognise the need for a shift. We are now a Federation for our 9 member associations and we hope people are beginning to listen to our story.

I would dearly have liked the opportunity to respond in person to comments made by those on the panel and to address the Cabinet Secretary in person. But if i have one message for the room today about the way ahead. One message. It would be to quote Richard Lochhead at the inaugural Fisheries Conference in Inverness, **‘we must be brave’**.

The measure of the challenge is perhaps no better explained by the few words of a fellow Sinclair. An American, a political writer who spoke truth to power.

*“It is difficult to get a man to understand something when his salary depends upon his not understanding it.”*



Upton Sinclair Jr, 1935



There are a few salaries at Victoria Quay dependent on the status quo. This needs to change.

**Bravery.** Our fishing industry badly needs more of it. Land reform in Scotland is gathering pace, but this change cannot stop at the shoreline. We need fundamental reform of our inshore so that low impact methods of fishing can thrive, with the view to regenerating our seas and Scotland's fishing communities.

Thank you for your time and I hope that this proves to be a valuable insight into who we are as an organisation.

Should you wish to consult with us at any time, please feel free to contact us by email at [info@scottishcreelfishermensfederation.co.uk](mailto:info@scottishcreelfishermensfederation.co.uk)

Thank you