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FEDERATION

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# news

MARCH 2025 MEMBERS NEWSLETTER



UK fisheries minister Daniel Zeichner  
visiting Peterhead Fish Market last year.

## SKIPPERS' MESSAGE TO PM:

# do not gamble away our futures for EU deal

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The Prime Minister must avoid gambling with the future of Scottish fishing businesses by using the industry as a bargaining chip in negotiations to improve relations with the EU.

That was the stark message delivered to Sir Keir Starmer in a letter from the Scottish Fishermen's Federation and Scottish Association of Fish Producers' Organisations prior to talks on future trading arrangements between UK and European negotiators.

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“The Scottish fishing industry has twice in the past been regarded as expendable by British Prime Ministers when it comes to Europe,” warned SFF chief executive Elspeth Macdonald.

“We must not have a repeat of 1973 when the condition of entry to the EEC was that our richly endowed fishing waters be pooled with other members, or of 2020 when the Brexit agreement, while restoring the UK to the status of sovereign coastal state, granted continued access to our waters to EU vessels to catch far more fish in our waters than they catch in their own.”

Ms Macdonald urged the Prime Minister to state unambiguously that the UK giving up rights to its own waters and natural resources would represent a long-term critical loss of a national asset critical to food security and the production of climate-smart food.

**“The UK’s Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and the fisheries it supports are the envy of many. While there are many provisions within the law about how coastal states should cooperate with their neighbours and how resources are managed, the 2020 Brexit deal left the UK in a situation that no other independent coastal state would countenance – giving unfettered access to another’s fishing fleet.**

“This is why the EU catches around seven times more fish by value in UK waters than the UK catches in EU waters every year. Its fishing fleet is highly dependent on access to UK waters; in contrast, over 85% of UK catches are taken from our own waters. Reciprocal access is heavily loaded in the EU’s favour.

“Wild capture fisheries in our EEZ are naturally renewable – they don’t need chemicals and fertilisers to secure our food security – just skilled, knowledgeable and experienced fishermen who have dedicated their working lives to harvesting these resources efficiently and sustainably.

“Giving up rights to decide who fishes in our EEZ, and when and how, would be a betrayal of UK sovereignty. We don’t give the EU access to the UK EEZ to build windfarms or extract oil and gas, so why would we give away our hugely valuable fisheries resources?”

In her letter, Ms Macdonald also emphasised that the SFF preference is not for a multi-year access agreement with the EU but annual negotiations as per the international norm, and indeed what the Brexit deal sets out will apply after 2026.

She urged the Prime Minister to insist on payment for any long-term access for the EU fleet to UK waters.

“That payment should be of direct benefit to the UK’s fishing industry, SFF’s clear preference being further transfers to the UK of fishing quotas of stocks that we prioritise.”

Industry delegation meeting Nick Thomas-Symonds, the lead Cabinet Office minister for the relationship with the EU.



Ms Macdonald stressed that the UK and its devolved administrations should have complete discretion over how fisheries are managed within the UK EEZ and that market access must not be a condition of a long-term fisheries access arrangements.

“It clearly infuriates the EU that the UK, an independent coastal state, can now manage its fisheries as it sees fit. There must be no concessions given to the EU on the UK’s right to make its own decisions about fisheries management. We now have a robust legal framework in place in the UK for fisheries management through the UK Fisheries Act, and Fisheries Management Plans are being developed.

**“The UK now has the opportunity to do fisheries management better than the EU – more practical and appropriate to the UK situation. Any concessions on this that would suck the UK back into even the outer reaches of the CFP’s orbit would be a significantly backwards step.**

“In addition, the UK must not allow itself to be threatened by the EU on market access. No other fisheries agreement in the north-east Atlantic couples access to fisheries with access to markets, and the UK Government must resist this strongly.”

The SFF has been at pains to point out that while others are focused on full control over the 6-12nm zone, it is important to remember that this is already the case around most of the UK and it is only in the English and Bristol channels that the 6-12 is an issue.

Industry representatives met Nick Thomas-Symonds, lead Minister in the Cabinet Office for the relationship with the EU on 25th February to press the industry’s case.

This followed a pre-Christmas meeting with Charlina Vitcheva, Head of DG MARE, in London, where it was clear that the EU will forcefully argue for an advantageous deal for the continent’s fishermen at the expense of ours.





## Out and about

In addition to meeting Minister for the Cabinet Office Nick Thomas-Symonds in London in February, SFF representatives met Daniel Zeichner, Defra Minister for Food Security and Rural Affairs, and the Defra shadow team, led by Shadow Secretary of State, Victoria Atkins MP.

Elspeth Macdonald was a panellist at the Scottish Offshore Wind conference in Glasgow in January alongside SWFPA's Raymond Hall, and Elspeth was also asked to speak at the European Subsea Cable Association's Plenary Meeting in Edinburgh in March (pictured above).

In January, SFF took part in a SmartSTEM event for secondary school pupils in Aberdeen, where young people could see and hear about careers in fishing, and have a go at important skills like net-mending as well as taking a VR tour around Peterhead Harbour's fishing operations. Our stand was very popular and we plan to do more of these events in future.

# Disgraceful attitude of Scottish Government

The SFF has learned that Scottish Government officials briefed the First Minister not to recognise the term spatial squeeze when engaging with fishermen and their representatives.

SFF chief executive Elspeth Macdonald said this was disgraceful given that the government's offshore windfarm proposals will systematically and permanently exclude fishermen from traditional fishing grounds.

"The spatial squeeze is not an imaginary concept dreamed up by fishermen, but a real and active force that a report carried out for the SFF has shown will exclude the trawling fleet from 50% of fishing grounds by 2050. It is time the Scottish Government woke up and realised that people's jobs and the future of our coastal communities really matter, and are not just talking points in political games.

**"It is incredulous that the Scottish Government seems not to recognise the spatial pressures that our industry is already feeling, and that are projected to increase in future. Just looking at the offshore wind sites in Scottish waters where Crown Estate Scotland has signed Exclusivity Agreements with companies that are planning to build fixed and floating offshore wind farms, it is blindingly obvious that fishing will feel the impacts of these.**

"The export cables that will bring power ashore also risk impacting the inshore fleet, especially during construction. It is possible too that the Scottish Government will require developers to make 'strategic compensation' for nature, if their developments are predicted to harm protected features such as seabirds. We have made very clear that fishing must not be expected to pay the price for any environmental harms from offshore wind.

"Coupled with consultations due and decisions awaited about fisheries management measures in Marine Protected Areas, ambitious plans for the expansion of seaweed cultivation and discussions underway around developing large-scale salmon farms further offshore to name but a few, it is only too evident that our sector faces more spatial constraints in future. The Scottish Government is currently developing a new National Marine Plan for Scotland, and SFF has been closely engaged in that process, making the strongest possible case for fishing Scotland's ever-more crowded seas."



# Why fishing should remain exempt from emissions trading scheme

Government has been seized for the past few years with initiative-itis, with consultations issued on a wide variety of subjects that affect our fleets.

Vessels moored in Fraserburgh.



While each is perhaps well-intentioned in its own right, the cumulative impact has been an enormous amount of time and effort on the part of the SFF to respond.

To give one example, we have made clear that we do not support the proposed extension of the UK Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS) to the maritime sector if fishing vessels would be within its scope. The proposals which were consulted on at the turn of the year propose extending the ETS to vessels over 5000 GT from 2026, with potential to further expand the ETS to vessels over 400GT from 2028.

There are currently no realistic alternatives to the fuels that are needed to run commercial fishing vessels and none are foreseeable in the short to medium term.

Fishing vessels will embrace and adopt alternative fuels when they become available, safe and cost-effective but the relatively small size of the fishing industry in Scotland compared to the rest of the maritime sector means that fishing is unlikely to drive the innovation needed for the maritime sector to decarbonise.

Those building new fishing vessels for the Scottish fleet are already doing what they can to decarbonise, with hulls and propulsion systems being designed to be more efficient through the water and to use less fuel. Doing this has meant in some cases owners having to invest in more tonnage as these more fuel-efficient hulls require the vessels to be longer than the one they are replacing.

The build costs have therefore been higher but have resulting in more fuel efficient vessels, where vessel owners report as much as a 20% reduction in fuel usage than their older vessel.

New builds are also required to invest in AdBlue systems to reduce emissions further. It is evident therefore that the Scottish fishing fleet is well aware of the need to reduce emissions and to decarbonise, is doing whatever it can based on current technology and will adopt new fuels and new technologies once they are proven and effective.

A key issue that SFF believes is being overlooked is that fishing produces a valuable product that is also part of the UK's transition to net zero – wild caught fish and shellfish. It is widely recognised and has been scientifically demonstrated that protein produced by wild capture fisheries, as well as being from stocks that are largely in good health and are naturally renewable, has far lower emissions per unit of protein than all other forms of protein production from animals, and in some cases lower than plant-based protein production.

It is our understanding that farming on land, with its far higher GHG emissions per unit of protein produced, is not within scope of the ETS. It is illogical therefore to penalise the most efficient form of food production in terms of GHG emissions, while exempting those that are more damaging.

The cost of fuel to run agricultural machinery similarly does not reflect the environmental cost of emissions from these fuels, yet the proposals set out in the consultation would not bring farming into the UK ETS, creating an unlevel playing field.

The Scottish fishing industry will be significantly impacted by the planned expansion of offshore windfarms, both fixed foundation and floating. Coupled with the introduction of fisheries management measures in Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), our fishing fleet will be displaced from fishing grounds that are productive and from where our industry has become exceptionally skilled at producing food efficiently.

The displacement of fishing effort from productive fishing grounds that will be developed for offshore wind or designated for conservation – both being driven by UK and Scottish government policy – will make our fleet less efficient. Our emissions are likely to increase, not through our choice or decisions, but through the way we will have to react to government policy. It would therefore be wholly wrong to further penalise our industry by bringing fishing into the UK ETS.

It is SFF's understanding the EU fishing vessels are exempt from the EU ETS. By not exempting UK/Scottish fishing vessels, this will put our industry at a competitive disadvantage. This would be particularly galling when the EU fishing fleet is so highly reliant on UK waters in which to catch its quota of fish. The UK fleet is already disadvantaged by the EU having unfettered access to the UK EEZ and having a far greater share of the fishing opportunities than would be rightly theirs under any other normal agreement between coastal States. Undermining the UK and Scottish fleet further would be deeply unjust, and likely subject to legal challenge under the Trade and Cooperation Agreement.



The Home and Dry campaign has an excellent new series of videos out on all aspects of fishing safety – head to our social media channels to see them.



## By Derek Cardno

When an industry like fishing experiences an accident that causes a fatality or serious injury, it is very deeply felt not just within the immediate local community but across the whole country.

2024 was not an easy year for many families attached to the industry, but fishing communities stand together.

Industry continues to learn and improve and over my last 15 years at SFF fishermen's safety has continued to improve year on year.

It's exciting as an organisation to see young fishermen we supported through their initial learning and training becoming skippers and running safe vessels while being successful fishermen.

Last year continued to be a challenge when working with the MCA – and not only for me but for many of SFF members.

A lot of my time has been taken up supporting members through difficult surveys and inspections while the MCA still struggles to produce a consistent survey/inspection regime for all classes of vessels.

SFF, however, continues to maintain very good relationships with key MCA staff and as always, we are here to support our members through any difficult times as we desire to see all our members' vessels in a survey presentable state for the MCA 24/7.

In a recent article, the MCA stated:

**The Maritime and Coastguard Agency's objectives, in becoming the world's best performing flag state and being a modern, progressive regulator. This also meets the UK's approach to regulatory reform, by modernising and allowing for the use of new technologies, easing burden on business by allowing them to make minor cost savings.**



SFF is encouraged to read that the MCA has aspirations to be the world's best performing flag state and being a modern, progressive regulator. Truly the MCA is aiming for the sky with these objectives, and huge changes will be required for them to be reached.

Surely if the MCA wishes to achieve this goal it must work more closely with the UK maritime sector which includes the fishing industry.

SFF very much hopes that regulatory reform will ease the burden on business because in the last 10 years regulations have done nothing but hold back industry and increase costs.

SFF has always had a very good relationship with the Marine Accident Investigation Board (MAIB) although very often we see things completely differently. Sadly, as an investigation body they continue to be well behind with reports. Our hope is that in 2025 this can be resolved as we must learn from accidents and sadly any fatalities quickly, not several years after the event.

The year ahead sees several challenges from a fishermen's safety and training perspective.

The list includes items like:

- **Working in Fishing Convention (ILO188) inspections**
- **Medicals for the under 15m fleet**
- **Survey and inspection consistency and quality**
- **The fight for space as Remotely Operated autonomous vessel usage increases around the UK**
- **New fishermen's Training Regulations.**

To finish up, since its inception in 2016 the man overboard awareness events continue to happen and impact every fisherman who attends.

These events are sporadic due to the need of an environmental pool for creating the right experience of being in the water with and without a PFD, however they are very impactful.

SFF is thankful for every fishermen who has attended an event over the last few years and would encourage all fishermen to do it.

If vessel owners would like to put their crew through the training day this can be facilitated to work around the boat's fishing pattern.

**As one fishermen said recently:**

**this experience has changed my working life. I had respect for the sea before but this has increased that 10 times. My effort while on deck is to do my job safely and stay on the boat the last place I want to be is in the North Sea.**

**Derek Cardno is SFF Marine Safety and Training Policy Manager**



# Busy 2024 for SFF Services Group and outlook bright for 2025

The year 2024 was another busy one for the SFF Services Group with the vessel at sea days total reaching a four-year high and being the second highest in the last seven years.

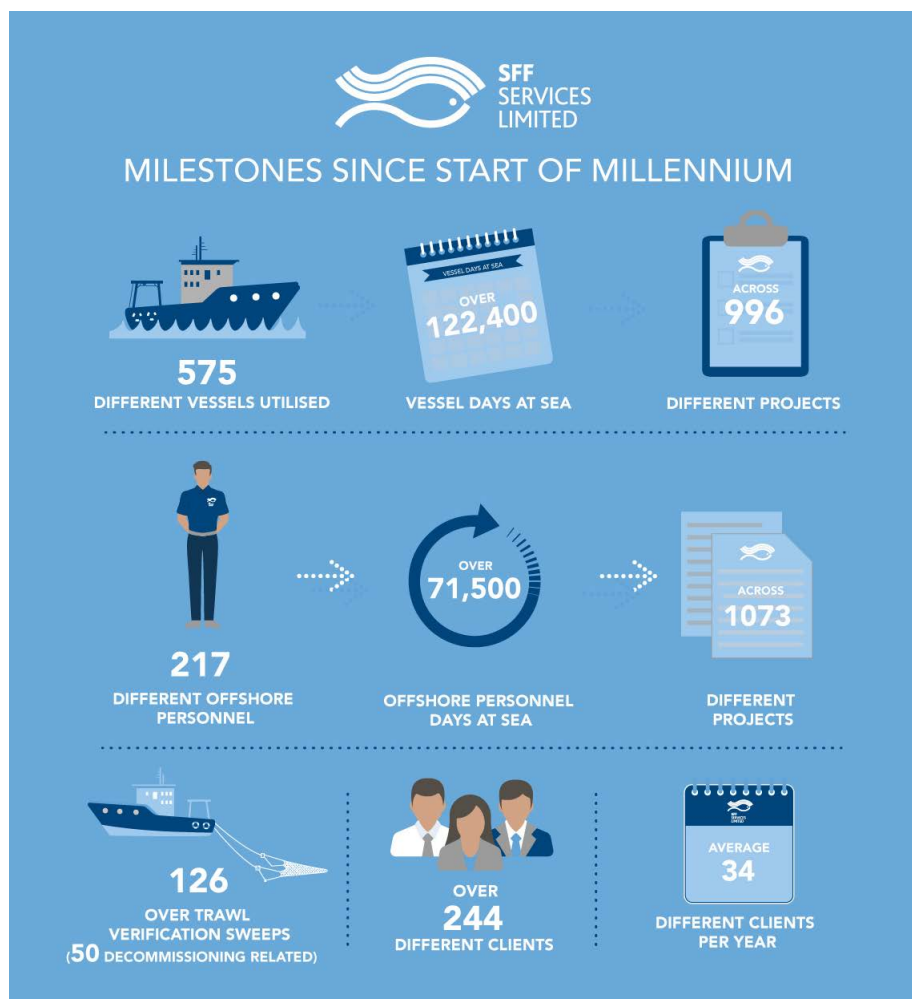


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The infographic below highlights some SFFSL group milestones since the start of the millennium to the end of 2024:



Fifty-nine different SFF constituent association member vessels were engaged in offshore related work via the company across 38 different client projects; 575 different fishing vessels have now undertaken offshore work through SFF Services since the start of the current millennium.

Twenty-two personnel were engaged in offshore related work via the company in 2024 across 26 different client projects; 217 personnel have now undertaken offshore work through the SFF Services Group since 2000.

Steven Alexander, Managing Director of SFF Services Limited and subsidiary company Marine Environmental Solutions Limited (MES), commented: "We are pleased to have enjoyed a successful 2024 and the outlook for 2025 is looking bright with a mixture of oil and gas and offshore renewables projects to service. Although our focus very much remains in the Scottish sector of the UKCS, 2025 will see us once again provide vessel services in the Norwegian sector and through MES we will be providing MMO services in the Iceland-Faroe Ridge over the summer months.