



SCOTTISH
FISHERMEN'S
FEDERATION

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news

MAY 2024

MEMBERS NEWSLETTER

Pride in the Seas:
Adam, Paul and Mark Robertson



Industry Trends and Attitudes Report

SFF has published its first ever Industry Trends and Attitudes Report, which aims to dispel myths and rectify misconceptions about the sector as well as highlight the high level of public support for fishermen.

Opinion polling carried for the report demonstrates a strong degree of confidence in the way we provide healthy, nutritious, climate-smart food.

It will be shared with media and stakeholders to try to encourage everyone to see that fisheries is part of the solution to the climate crisis, not the problem.

The report is available via the SFF website at www.sff.co.uk



Standing firm against the onslaught

The Scottish fishing industry is in good spirits as we exit a damp and windy winter and into a (hopefully) more agreeable spring and summer.

Buoyed by the Scottish Government's decision last summer to shelve its plans to ban fishing in up to 10% of Scottish waters (via a series of Highly Protected Marine Areas (HPMAs) in addition to the existing Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) network which already covers 37% of our waters), the Scottish Fishermen's Federation (SFF) is confidently asserting the industry's rightful position as a key sustainable and climate-smart nutritious food producer.

Sadly, however, the victory against HPMAs – a result of the combined opposition of fisheries, seafood and processing organisations and Scotland's coastal communities led by the SFF – was only a small battle won.

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The onslaught from corporately-funded environmental NGOs, whose only stake in fisheries is the one they constantly seek to drive into its heart, is relentless.

More and more, it is apparent that the ideological stance of these groups blinds them to the complexity of marine systems and, they seem to think, exempts them from the need to provide proper evidence for their assertions.

It is a dangerous game – and one that risks putting thousands of people out of work and ruining our coastal communities. All because they believe fishing causes catastrophic environmental harm. Every form of food production has some environmental impact – that is unavoidable. But the reality is that our highly regulated modern fishing fleet harvests healthy, well-managed stocks. That is a very different story to calamitous narrative of the eNGOs – who, let's face it, need to keep the money rolling in.

Government needs to get the message that, with its low carbon footprint and important role in food security, fishing is part of the solution to the climate issue, not the problem. Of course there is more we can do – and are doing – but we start from a much better place than many food producers.

While the Scottish Government has been notably more conciliatory in its tone in recent months, the mindset that fishing is a problem to be managed is still very prevalent. We need to see policies that reflect their shift in tone – constructive, practical and co-designed with industry.

The Scottish Government itself is of course also in the autofocus crosshairs of the eNGOs, with a constant stream of freedom of information requests being made and legal action being both threatened and taken.

One of these organisations recently complained about “political delays” in the establishment of new fisheries management measures for MPAs, when the actions of it and similarly misguided groups are substantially to blame for the situation.

It looks very much like a deliberate tactic to absorb ministerial and civil service time and resources with these wholly cynical manoeuvres and then cry wolf when policy implementation slows up, allowing them to feed their negative narrative.

The trouble is that when their claims about the decline of fish stocks are tested against the evidence they fall apart spectacularly.

Over 70% of Scotland's key commercial stocks are fished at sustainable levels – the highest for over 30 years – and scientific advice is for increases of over 100% in total allowable catches for some stocks. There is also clear international scientific recognition of the healthy status of cod in Scottish waters despite what the eNGOs have pedalled to the public over recent years.

Faced with a lack of supportive data for their positions, they irresponsibly resort to the doom-laden rhetoric of damage and decline – cost-free when bashed out on a keyboard in a warm urban office but deeply offensive and potentially harmful to those whose livelihoods depend on going to sea in all weathers to produce low-carbon food.

People like skipper Mark Anderson and his sons and partners, who recently invested in two new whitefish vessels, *Copious* and *Prolific*; like Mark Robertson and his sons, and their new trawler *Zenith*. Or like Erin MacKenzie, at just 19 a deckhand on the west coast prawn vessel *Caralisa*.



Pride in the Seas: Steve Mackinson



Pride in the Seas: Mark Anderson



Pride in the Seas: Willie John MacLean and Erin Mackenzie



Pride in the Seas: Dr Paul Macdonald

People like Dr Paul Macdonald, senior fisheries analyst with the Scottish Fishermen's Organisation, who started out at sea but recently led a project to develop an electronic bycatch avoidance app that underlines the industry's commitment to sustainability. And our very own Elena Balestri, senior fisheries policy and science manager, whose expertise, both here in Scotland and internationally, is indispensable in so many areas of fisheries management.

People who have made fishing their lives, who are passionate about what they do and who are determined to pass the industry on to the next generation in excellent condition. In other words, people without whom our coastal communities would wither and die.

These individuals are among the 12 subjects of our Pride in the Seas exhibition which we launched in the Scottish Parliament in March. It is on display at the Skipper Expo, at stand A1, and we will be taking it on the road around our communities in the months ahead.

Do take time if you can to view the excellent photographs and read the individual stories – every now and then, as battles rage over regulations or science or policy, we all need to be reminded that it is people who are at the heart of this great industry.

Another vital aspect of the SFF's work is on a different dimension of the spatial squeeze being imposed on the industry – this time from the planned expansion of often colossal offshore wind farms that threaten our traditional fishing grounds.

While everyone recognises the need to decarbonise the planet's energy production, the wholesale displacement of fishing fleets that provide low carbon food would be utterly counterproductive. Alternative and more carbon intensive food sources would diminish if not eliminate any benefits of low carbon energy.

The majority of the new projects planned for Scottish waters are for floating turbines, which create even greater spatial and co-existence problems for fishing than fixed turbines do.

The SFF has always sought to engage constructively with offshore developers, and will continue to do so. We worked with Scottish Renewables recently to hold two "awareness days" for our respective sectors, aiming to help understand each other better and all involved found these to be useful, informative and constructive. It remains the case however that governments, not just here in Scotland but in many maritime countries worldwide, are hugely enthusiastic about offshore wind as way to decarbonise their energy supplies. But they must be careful that in their rush for low carbon energy security they don't harm, either by accident or design, our low carbon food security.

It needs to be recognised at the highest levels within the renewables industry and by both the Scottish and UK governments that catching fish is already an industry that produces nutritious, high-protein food with an extremely low carbon footprint. Fishing also supports many jobs and businesses ashore and is vital to Scotland's coastal communities. In the rush to energy transition, it is vital that our industry's voice is properly heard and that the fleet's access to Scotland's productive fishing grounds is protected.

In particular, proper scrutiny must be given to developers' claims that offshore windfarms and fishing activity can co-exist with little change to existing patterns of activity, since our experience to date shows very strongly that the opposite is the case. That will be an even greater problem with floating offshore windfarms.

Fish are not uniformly distributed in our seas – the fleet cannot simply move somewhere else. We need genuine and meaningful engagement, mutual respect and an even-handed approach to planning, consenting and licensing by a competent and fair regulator. Marine renewables are clearly part of Scotland's transition to net zero, but so is fishing. For the journey to net zero to be a just transition, there must be space for both to succeed.



Derek with Secretary General Dominguez, Derek's wife Jacinth, his son Nathan, Deborah Layde (CEO of Seafarers Charity), Katy Ware (MCA, UK representative at IMO) and Simon Potten (Head of Training, Safety and Services at Seafish).

Taking fishing to the heart of the IMO



SFF Marine Safety and Training Policy Manager Derek Cardno was delighted to hand over models of two different types of fishing vessel to the Secretary General of the International Maritime Organisation (IMO), Arsenio Dominguez, in London recently.

The models of the pelagic vessel *Adenia* and the demersal trawler *Venture IV* will be put on display among the many model ships that decorate the organisation's impressive headquarters on the Albert Embankment in Lambeth.

A highly experienced and dedicated fisherman himself, Derek has been on a mission for several years to promote the industry within the IMO and, equally, to highlight the organisation to fishermen.

The model of the *Adenia*, which fishes for mackerel and herring was donated by skipper George Willum Anderson, from Whalsay in Shetland.

The model of the *Venture IV*, which principally catches species such as cod, haddock and monkfish, among many others, was donated by the directors of Macduff Shipyards. The Scottish yard has built hundreds of fishing vessels, including four for the *Venture IV* owners the Lovie family, who come from a small fishing community in north-east Scotland.

Derek said: "I hope that these boats, as physical manifestations of our industry, will be situated in an area that staff, delegates and visitors can see and appreciate for years to come."

"However, I really hope that these models will serve to remind those who stop and look at that them that the fishing industry is very much alive and well, not just in the UK but across the globe.

"It is also my hope that those who are part of the policy creation from within the walls of this building will appreciate and reflect on the effect they have on the fishermen that work on these vessels and other fishing vessels around the world.

"It is estimated that there are 33 million fishermen across the world. By a long, long way we are the largest maritime sector by personnel numbers in the world. However, as fishermen we feel our voice is lost in the debate.

"As an industry we ask of IMO to find ways to have better dialogue with us.

"We would like to be part of the discussion around inclusion and how this can work going forward that will improve the safety and wellbeing of fishermen across the whole world."

Addressing the Secretary General directly, he concluded: "As an industry we are thankful for this organisation and what it seeks to do. Please hear our hearts this morning. We are here, we have ideas and suggestions. We want to be at the table, we want to be included in the policy discussions, not just be on the receiving end of policy outcomes. Can you find a place for us so that my fellow fishermen for the generations to come can feel included?"

Derek said this was the first time the industry had had direct access to the Secretary General, and at an appropriate time as he has just begun his four year term in office.

The main photograph shows Derek with Secretary General Dominguez, Derek's wife Jacinth, his son Nathan, Deborah Layde (CEO of Seafarers Charity), Katy Ware (MCA, UK representative at IMO) and Simon Potten (Head of Training, Safety and Services at Seafish).

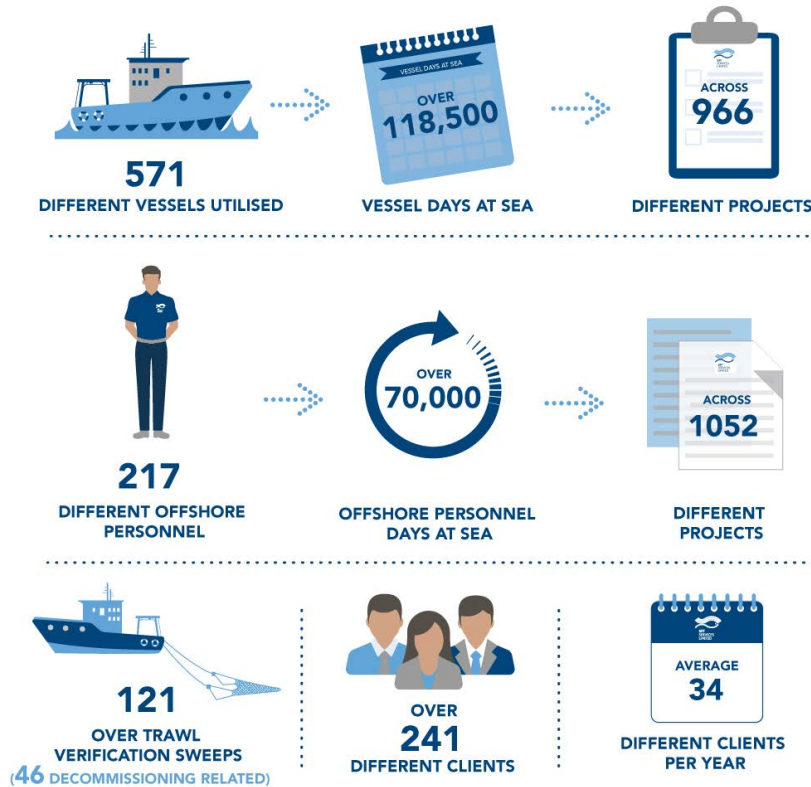
Busy first quarter for SFF Services

At the end of March 2024, 36 different member vessels had been engaged in offshore related work via SFF Services Limited (SFFSL) since the beginning of the year across 15 different client projects.

Some 571 different fishing vessels and 217 different offshore personnel have now undertaken offshore work through SFF Services since the start of the current millennium – the infographic below highlights these and some other SFFSL group milestones over the same period:



MILESTONES SINCE START OF MILLENNIUM



Steven Alexander, Managing Director of SFFSL and subsidiary company Marine Environmental Solutions Limited (MES), commented: "We very much appreciate the vessel owners of the SFF's constituent associations and the various skippers who have worked with us over the years to help make us the established company we are today."

Over the years, other nations, from an offshore energy liaison point of view, have enquired about the company's operating model, with most recently, Steven being one of the invited speakers at the High Wind 2024 Conference in Stavanger, where he provided a high-level presentation on the role of SFF Services and the part it has played in the relationship process with the offshore energy sector in Scottish waters of the UKCS.

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