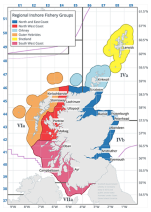

Evaluation of Regional Inshore Fisheries Groups (RIFGs)

We want to hear from individuals and organisations involved in the inshore fishing industry in Scotland. Your views will be used to evaluate Regional Inshore Fisheries Groups (RIFGs) and for researchers to make recommendations on their future.

RIFGs were established in 2009 with the purpose of giving inshore fishers a voice in inshore fisheries management. Each RIFG is chaired by an individual appointed by the Scottish Government, but the groups are independent of Government. There are 6 RIFGs in Scotland: North East, North West, South West, Orkney, Shetland, and Outer Hebrides.

The survey will look into the impact of RIFGs, their remit and organisation, as well as the future. The survey is conducted by the Marine Analytical Unit, a group of social researchers, economists, and data analysts based in the Marine Directorate of the Scottish Government.

Closing date: 30th April 2024
Estimated completion time: 12-15 minutes

How we will use your data:

Your responses will be analysed by researchers in the Marine Analytical Unit and the findings used to produce an evaluation of the RIFG network. Your individual responses will not be published in the evaluation report and we will aim to remove any information which could personally identify you.

In addition, we are looking to build a database of fishers who are willing to be contacted for occasional research conducted by the Marine Analytical Unit. This is entirely voluntary and does not affect your involvement in the RIFG evaluation. If you are a fisher and consent to be included in the database, at the end of this survey you will be asked to provide a name, vessel grouping, email address, and phone number. If we contact you, you can choose if you want to participate in that specific project or not, and you can ask to be removed from the database at any time in the future. You would not be asked to participate any more than twice in any given year. Your involvement in the database would be valuable to ensure fisher's perspectives are incorporated into evidence.

The completed questionnaire and any personal data that you provide will be held in strictest confidence, and will be securely stored in the Scottish Government document management system and deleted after 5 years. With regard to the database of contacts, at

the end of five years we will contact you to ask if you are willing to remain on the database for another period of time or if you wish to be removed from it. Again, this will be entirely voluntary.

The data will be processed by the Scottish Government. There is the possibility some data will be processed by a third party for transcription purposes only.

For more information, please contact the Marine Analytical Unit at MarineAnalyticalUnit@gov.scot

If you have concerns about how your personal data is being processed and handled please contact the Scottish Government Data Protection Officer at DataProtectionOfficer@gov.scot

Data protection

1. I have read and understood the information provided in the 'How we will use your data' section above and I consent to my responses being used for the purposes outlined. *

- (●) Yes
- ( ) No

2. I understand that any information I give will be treated confidentially and securely, in accordance with the terms of the Data Protection Act. *

- (●) Yes
- ( ) No

About You

3. What is your role in relation to the inshore fisheries sector in Scotland? *

- ( ) Fisher - skipper and boat owner
- ( ) Fisher - skipper and do not own boat
- ( ) Fisher - crew

- ○ Owner of fishing vessel - not fishing
- ○ Organisation representing the commercial fishing industry
- ◉ Organisation representing other relevant interests outside of the commercial fishing industry
- ○ Seafood processing / other ancillary seafood sector
- ○ Other third sector organisation
- ○ Public sector

4. What fishery office are you administered by? *

- ○ Aberdeen
- ○ Anstruther
- ○ Ayr
- ○ Buckie
- ○ Campbeltown
- ○ Eyemouth
- ○ Fraserburgh
- ○ Kinlochbervie
- ○ Kirkwall
- ○ Lerwick
- ○ Lochinver
- ○ Mallaig
- ○ Oban
- ○ Peterhead
- ○ Portree
- ○ Scrabster
- ○ Stornoway

- ○ Ullapool
- ◉ Not Applicable

5. Of the six RIFGs, which one are you most closely associated with? *

- ○ North and East Coast
- ○ North West Coast
- ○ Orkney
- ○ Outer Hebrides
- ○ Shetland
- ◉ South West Coast
- ○ All
- ○ Not sure

6. Are you a member of any government initiated stakeholder groups that relate to the fishing or marine industry in Scotland? Please select all that apply. *

- ☐ Fisheries Management and Conservation Group (FMAC)
- ☑ Regional Marine Planning Partnership
- ☐ Coastal Partnerships
- ☐ Other
- ☐ None

7. Please specify which other government initiated stakeholder groups that relate to the fishing or marine industry in Scotland are you a member of?

None

Your engagement with RIFGs

8. Are you aware of RIFGs? *

- (●) Yes
- ( ) No

9. Have you been involved with RIFGs in the past 5 years? e.g. attended a meeting, received an email update, spoken to a RIFG Chair. *

- (●) Yes
- ( ) No

10. How have you been involved in the RIFGs in the past 5 years? Please select all that apply. *

- [ ] I was a RIFG Chair prior to 2023
- [ ] I've attended one meeting in the past 5 years
- [ ] I've attended two or more meetings in the past 5 years
- [x] I receive email or verbal updates about the RIFG
- [ ] I worked to a voluntary agreement established by an RIFG
- [ ] Other
- [ ] Not relevant

Theme 1: Remit

Since January 2023, the RIFG remit is:

a) To improve the sustainable management of inshore fisheries and,

b) to give commercial inshore fishers a voice in wider marine management developments.

11. Were you aware of the remit of the RIFGs? *

- (●) Yes

- ○ No
- ○ Not sure

12. Do you think the current remit is the right remit for a government initiated stakeholder group which concerns inshore fisheries management? *

- ○ Yes
- ○ No
- ◉ Not sure

13. Please explain your answer.

As non-statutory organisations, it would be more appropriate for the remit of RIFGs to be 'to contribute to improving the sustainable management of inshore fisheries', thereby acknowledging that it is the Scottish Government that is ultimately responsible for taking decisions and actions to ensure that Scotland meets its international and national legislative and policy obligations to deliver sustainable fisheries and fisheries management.

The remit of RIFGS should include reference to contributing to legislative and policy obligations relevant to sustainable fisheries management including, delivering an ecosystem based approach for fisheries management, incentivising fishing opportunities for lower impact fisheries and achieving Good Environmental Status.

It is also relevant for the remit of RIFGs to include recovery and protection of ecosystems including essential fish and shellfish habitats and increasing biodiversity.

Since fisheries are a public asset, other stakeholders should be involved in decision-making regarding fisheries management. While there is a legitimate argument for there to be fishing-industry specific stakeholder groups, other stakeholders representing wider public interests should have equal opportunity to input to discussions and decisions about fisheries management within regional marine areas.

There needs to be greater consistency of approach within the RIFGs to ensure that they are able to contribute in a meaningful manner to enabling Scottish Government to deliver sustainable management and meet its international and national obligations and targets.

14. In your view, has your local RIFG or the wider RIFG network, contributed to a) *'improving the sustainable management of inshore fisheries'* in the past 5 years? Please indicate using the below scale, where 1 star means a low or no contribution, and 5 stars means a high contribution. *

★ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

15. Please explain your answer and give examples where possible.

There have been no improvements to deliver sustainable management of inshore fisheries. There has been no action to address past losses of fish stocks or address issues of overfishing, or to address the wider impacts of fisheries on marine ecosystems, habitats and species.

There has been a failure to acknowledge the past impacts of fisheries management decisions on fish stocks and condition of seabed habitats and marine life. The Clyde marine region provides an excellent example of this where failure to address overfishing and then opening up all parts of the marine region to bottom-towed trawl and dredge fisheries precipitated the collapse and loss of once profitable commercial fisheries and substantial recreational sea angling activity (and associated businesses).

In order to develop sustainable fisheries, it is necessary to determine what sort of fisheries we aspire to have in Scotland's inshore area. Is it just maintenance of the current degraded situation? Or do we aspire to try and improve fish and shellfish stocks and fishing opportunities alongside improved marine ecosystems? We do not see this being part of the discussion within the South West or other RIFGs.

It is also necessary to define what is meant by 'sustainable'. There needs to be an agreed definition that is framed within the context of an ecosystem-based approach to fisheries management that RIFGs and others are working towards.

Despite the Clyde having a Marine Planning Partnership there has been no contribution from the local RIFG to develop and promote fisheries policies that seek to address past losses and impacts and improve the state of fisheries. Spatial management of fisheries is an essential element of sustainable fisheries management but there has been no action by the RIFG to progress this. Similarly, balancing the relative impacts of different forms of fishing is an essential aspect of sustainable fisheries management, but again we see no action by the RIFG to look at this.

Fisheries Management Plans for inshore areas need to be developed with a clear framework for what these need to deliver in terms of sustainable fisheries and fisheries management within the context of an ecosystem-based approach.

16. In your view, has your local RIFG or the wider RIFG network contributed to b) '*giving commercial inshore fishers a voice in wider marine management developments'*? Please indicate using the below scale, where 1 star means a low or no contribution, and 5 stars means a high contribution. *

★ ★ ☆ ☆ ☆

17. Please explain your answer and give examples where possible.

Whilst the RIFGs have provided opportunities for fishing industry discussions about fisheries management in general it is certain fishing sectors and individuals that dominate and there are not well-balanced and equal opportunities for all fishing sectors to input views on an equal footing.

Many stakeholders, other than fishers, are disadvantaged by poor fisheries management. As commented above, fisheries are a public asset and other stakeholders should have equal opportunity to contribute to fisheries management decision-making.

Theme 2: Impact

18. In your view, what impact have RIFGs had on inshore fisheries management? Please indicate using the below scale, where 1 star means a low or no positive impact, and 5 stars means a high positive impact. *

★ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

19. In your view, what are the main benefits of the RIFG network in its current form? *

Providing some fishers with a specific space for discussion of fisheries management issues and for those fishers to input local knowledge to those discussions.

20. In your view, what are the main drawbacks of the RIFG network in its current form? *

The RIFG network is too narrow in its representation of interests for the regional sea areas the RIFGs encompass. RIFGs and the network as a whole has established what is in effect a closed shop for fisheries management discussions and decision-making within these regional areas. This is in relation both to some sectors of the fishing industry whose views are not equitably represented on the RIFGs, as well as to other (wider/public) organisations and stakeholders. Consequently, these excluded groups and individuals are not seen as having an equal and legitimate voice to input to fisheries management decisions, even though fishing activities clearly have wider impacts on marine ecosystems, habitats and species and implications for other stakeholders.

There is no consistency between the RIFGs and no clear framework for what they need to deliver and activity is piecemeal. RIFGs do not appear to be formally constituted organisations and there is a lack of accountability and transparency. There is no requirement for RIFGs to have to address ecosystem impacts of fishing activities.

21. In your view, what are the main changes that need to happen, if any, to make the RIFG network more effective? *

If properly constituted, with fair representation of wider stakeholder interests, and with a clear remit framed within the requirements to deliver ecosystem-based sustainable fisheries management, the RIFG network could provide a means to develop regional, inshore fisheries management proposals to recover fisheries and deliver sustainable fisheries management.

The question arises as to whether RIFGs remain as a sector-specific space for the fishing-industry or are developed to enable an equitable co-management approach to develop fisheries management on a geographic/regional area basis.
Either way, at a regional seas level, all fishing sectors and other (public) stakeholders need to have an equal and fair input in discussions and decisions about fisheries management.

There needs to be clarity as to how RIFGs interact with the FMAC groups.

Theme 3: Organisation

The current organisational arrangement of the RIFGS are as follows:

- RIFGs are non-statutory groups, this means that RIFGs are not established in legislation and therefore their role is not fixed and they cannot implement legal binding regulations.
- RIFGs are organised into 6 geographic regions
- Membership includes fishers or organisations which directly represent fishers
- RIFGs are led by a chair person funded by the Scottish Government and a limited amount of funds for discreet projects; some groups win funding from other organisations.

22. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements. Please use the scale of 1 to 5 below where 1 is strongly disagree, 2 is disagree, 3 is neutral, 4 is agree, and 5 is strongly agree. *

	1	2	3	4	5
RIFGs should continue as non-statutory groups	◉	○	○	○	○
RIFGs should continue to be organised by the current 6 regions	○	◉	○	○	○
Membership should be made up of fishers and fishers representative bodies only	◉	○	○	○	○

	1	2	3	4	5
RIFGs funding arrangements are appropriate for the functioning of the RIFGs	◉	○	○	○	○

23. Please share the reasoning for your answers to the previous question. *

The current RIFG network has failed to deliver sustainable fisheries management or to make a meaningful contribution to Scottish Government achieving its fisheries and marine ecosystem obligations and targets.

To have a co-management approach, all stakeholders need to be included and have a fair and equal voice in discussions and decision-making. As things stand, there is an emphasis on RIFGs providing a lead on regional fisheries management proposals, but this excludes input from other stakeholders. This has been very clearly demonstrated by discussions at the Clyde Marine Planning Partnership where the South West RIFG has essentially had a veto on the fisheries policies in the draft regional marine plan to the exclusion of other stakeholder interests.

There is a lack of transparency and governance of the RIFGs which is not appropriate with the role they have been given to develop fisheries management proposals. This raises the question as to whether there should be a fisheries sector-specific discussion space that is something completely different to a RIFG, with co-management regional fisheries management discussions and decision-making happening through other, formally constituted groups which might be part of the FMAC structure or sit within regional planning partnerships.

24. To what extent do you think RIFGs engage effectively with relevant organisations? Please use the scale of 1-5 below where 1 is very ineffective, 2 is ineffective, 3 is neutral, 4 is effective, and 5 is very effective. *

	1	2	3	4	5
Fisheries associations and federations	○	○	◉	○	○
Producer organisations	○	○	◉	○	○
Species specific groups	◉	○	○	○	○
Regional marine planning partnerships	◉	○	○	○	○
Coastal partnerships	◉	○	○	○	○

	1	2	3	4	5
Local authorities	○	◉	○	○	○
Environmental groups	◉	○	○	○	○
Marine Directorate fishery offices	○	○	◉	○	○
Marine Directorate compliance operations staff	○	○	◉	○	○

25. Please share the reasoning for your answers to the previous question. *

Covered by responses to earlier questions

Theme 4: Future

26. Do you think RIFGs play a role in the future of inshore fisheries management? *

- ○ Yes
- ○ No
- ◉ Not sure

27. Please explain your answer.

It depends how it is intended RIFGs will develop and be involved in inshore fisheries management in the future.

As commented in response to earlier questions, there is a need for spatially-based fisheries management that is developed and delivered within an ecosystem-based approach with equitable input from all stakeholders. Area-based fisheries management plans need to be developed that will recover, protect and sustainably manage fish and shellfish stocks and the habitats and species they depend on. Scotland needs to establish a much more effective framework for management and protection of its inshore marine areas including inshore fisheries. RIFGs, if properly constituted and resourced could be an appropriate way to deliver this, but there need to be fundamental changes as to how they currently operate.

28. What do you think is the best forum for the views of inshore fishers to be heard by the Scottish Government? *

Accessible engagement meetings that are effectively chaired/moderated and with a clear agenda and transparency. Area-based meetings would likely be most effective for fishers to want to input to, but thought needs to be given as to how to engage fishers and address any sector-conflicts that might exist.

29. If RIFGs are to continue for the foreseeable future, what do you think should be the top priorities of the RIFGs in the next 5 years? Please select what you think are the top **two** priorities. *

- [ ] Providing the forum for fishers to engage with the Scottish Government about the management of inshore fisheries
- [ ] Developing localised management approaches
- [x] Working towards recovery of key inshore stocks
- [ ] Trialling new technologies and new approaches
- [ ] Promoting fishing as an attractive career
- [ ] Working with fishers to mitigate gear conflict
- [ ] Working with the Marine Directorate to support Compliance initiatives
- [x] Other

30. Please use this space to write any further views you have on the RIFG network which you do not think have been captured in the survey.

In response to Qu 29, the two priorities we identify (but weren't give the option to expand on in Qu 29) are:
Within the context of an area-based ecosystem-based approach:
- Develop options for sustainable regional fisheries management that support recovery and protection of wider habitats and species
- Work towards recovery of inshore fish and shellfish stocks and essential fish/shellfish habitats

In response to Qu 30: The RIFG network has failed to deliver what it was set up to achieve. There has been no progress towards developing sustainable fisheries management. Past fisheries mis-management is being ignored and there is no consideration of the wider ecosystem impacts of different fishing sectors and the implications of these on fish and shellfish stocks, other fishing sectors, and the interests and businesses of wider stakeholders.

RIFGs have in effect been given a veto over local fisheries management decision-making even though RIFGs are un-constituted, lack oversight and transparency and do not engage other stakeholders other than the select fishers that input to their local RIFG.

RIFGs have not provided an effective mechanism to deliver sustainable fisheries management. A regional approach to inshore marine area management could be much more effectively and equitably delivered if an appropriate framework is established.

Please not in response to Qu 33, we do not operate a fishing vessel but had to select an option to complete the survey. We do though have a <10m research vessel.

Future research

Thank you for participating in the evaluation of Regional Inshore Fisheries Groups. We are looking for fishers who would be able to assist in future research projects. If you are content to be added to our research database and to be contacted in the future, please provide your name and email address below.

31. I consent to my name and contact details being saved on a secure database by Marine Directorate for future occasional research that I can opt out of at any time *

- (●) Yes
- ( ) No

32. Full Name *

Community of Arran Seabed Trust (COAST)

33. Vessel type *

- (●) Under 10 metres

- ◯ 10 meters and over

34. Email address *

email@arrancoast.com

35. Phone Number

01770 600656

Thank you

Thank you for participating in the evaluation of Regional Inshore Fisheries Groups. We plan to publish results in Summer 2024.

Microsoft 365

This content is created by the owner of the form. The data you submit will be sent to the form owner. Microsoft is not responsible for the privacy or security practices of its customers, including those of this form owner. Never give out your password.

Microsoft Forms | AI-Powered surveys, quizzes and polls Create my own form

Privacy and cookies | Terms of use