

**NIFCA TECHNICAL AND SCIENTIFIC
COMMITTEE MEETING SUMMARY
(26 MARCH 2025)**

CRAB & LOBSTER FISHERIES UPDATE

- Defra is planning to implement a statutory increase in lobster MLS from 2026.
- NIFCA (with input from fishermen) provided Defra with detailed input on economic impacts and stock differences (inshore/offshore) and the impact of this legislation on the industry, which has been taken into consideration by Defra in the process of developing this management.
- Consideration may be needed for Scottish vessels retaining lobsters below MCRS onboard in English waters not covered under new regulations.
- NIFCA provided Defra with detailed input on economic impacts and stock differences (inshore/offshore).
- Officers reported improved lobster landings and stable crab levels despite fewer active vessels due to industry attrition.

COQUET TO ST MARY'S MCZ TRAWL MANAGEMENT

a) Device Installation & Data Analysis

- Two vessels fitted with tracking devices; data collection has faced connectivity issues. Intermittent data requires CSV export and manual analysis.
- Presented method using 6-minute data intervals to determine fishing activity. Approximately 17 hours of fishing activity recorded to date.
- Members discussed error margins, data integrity, analytical methods and agreed with the accuracy of the process Officers have taken to get this data.

b) Fisher Feedback

- Feedback received about MCZ access limitations based on 2022 track records. One individual publicised their concerns via Fishing News.
- The possibility of this outcome had been anticipated. NIFCA's decision-making process was transparent, and consultation was thorough.
- It was confirmed the vessel in question never submitted active returns for the MCZ during the eligible years or any years which followed, therefore was not considered for an exemption. If it had, an exemption could have been considered.

c) Future Management

- It was agreed the 1000-hour fishing cap was a conservation compromise and should not automatically allow increased access.
- There should be further industry involvement for the 2026 exemption review.
- It was clarified that effort (not vessel numbers) is the managed factor under the current byelaw.
- There was a questions of whether delineation is needed between technical decisions (T&S Committee) and social policy decisions (General Committee) or if social factors can be discussed at T&S committee

TRANSPARENCY IN DECISION-MAKING

- Questions from stakeholders led to a discussion on transparency in committee decisions.
- While there was agreement that NIFCA already meets high transparency standards, further improvements were supported, including:
 - Publishing anonymised meeting summaries online.
 - Adding descriptions of subcommittees to the website.
 - Sending out minutes to be approved by committee members before wider circulation.
- Concerns were raised about naming individual members due to potential personal pressures or lobbying.