

SECOND ANNUAL SCOTTISH FISHING INDUSTRY TAKES A CLOSE LOOK AT SCOTLAND POST-BREXIT

The second Annual Scottish Fishing Conference, held at the University of St Andrews on 22-23 August, was declared a great success by the organisers, Fisheries Innovation Scotland (FIS), and delegates alike. The conference provided the first real opportunity for representatives from all sectors of the fishing industry to get their teeth into the possibilities and challenges for Scotland in a post-Brexit Britain. **Kelvin Boot** reports

Delegates heard reports from the first tranche of science projects designed to support a sustainable Scottish fishing industry and learned about the projects that were just beginning, all of which deal with some aspect of improving fisheries understanding and efficiency. A particular highlight was a report given by young fisherman Michael Forbes, who visited fishermen in British Columbia, funded by FIS; his enthusiasm showed him to be a great ambassador for Scotland and its fishing industry.

Reality and promises

Guest speaker Ian Boyd, DEFRA Chief Scientist, painted a very real and honest picture of the future of science funding; the period from 2030 to 2050 is very likely to be 'difficult' in the face of growing populations, climate change and dwindling resources. Science would need to support

the strategic planning necessary to develop the fishing industry long-term, but the way science was funded would be different.

Cabinet Secretary promises to listen and help

Fergus Ewing, MSP, Cabinet Secretary with responsibility for fishing, began his keynote speech by highlighting the work of Fisheries Innovation Scotland and promised that: "I will do everything I can as Cabinet Secretary to enable you to continue to do that work."

He noted the support of Sainsbury's for their commitment and interest in sustainable fisheries, adding that he would like to encourage other large retailers to make contributions too.

Brexit was his next topic, and he stated that he recognised the differences between the Scottish government's desire to find a



The post-Brexit 'Question Time' panel was, from left, Klaas de Vos (Environmental Defence Fund), Bertie Armstrong (Scottish Fishermen's Federation), John Goodlad (Chair of FIS), Mike Mitchell (Young's Seafood), and Ian Gatt (Scottish Pelagic Fishermen's Association).



Prof Ray Hilborn struck a chord with his doubts about MPAs and the status of fish stocks globally.



Prof Ian Boyd, after-dinner speaker, spoke of difficult times ahead.

means of 'preventing us being kicked out of Europe' and the opinion of many fishermen, but emphasised that they shared a common interest in a thriving fishing sector. He also reminded the audience that EU funding has been vital in achieving success in the industry, supporting 1,200 projects and safeguarding more than 8,000 jobs in the industry.

Though only in post for a few months, Fergus Ewing impressed delegates with his grasp of the challenges that fisheries face.

Richard Slaski, FIS Executive Director summed up what many others had said after hearing his speech and talking to him face-to-face: "It was a pleasure to meet and welcome the Cabinet Secretary to the Conference, and I was struck by his immediate question when we were talking about the work of Fisheries Innovation Scotland: "What can I do to help?"

MPAs may not be the best way forward

Fishermen were further buoyed up while listening to Prof Ray Hilborn from the University of Washington. His refreshing look at fisheries management chimed strongly with delegates as he stated that globally fish stocks were not facing the dramatic



Michael Forbes, with Fergus Ewing MSP and Bertie Armstrong.

declines often reported, and that, in his opinion, the best way to ensure sustainability was through management rather than marine protected areas.

Young fisherman impresses

Star of the show for many people, and personally congratulated for his presentation by the Cabinet Secretary, was young fisherman Michael Forbes. He was one of two fishermen who were selected

as the first to be sponsored to travel overseas to look at how things are done elsewhere, and to begin to build long-term partnerships with other fisheries. Michael and fellow skipper Simon Harvey visited British Columbia, Canada in June and July 2015. Michael reported back on the trip and his presentation, despite him protesting: "I've never done this before", was a superb testament to the quality of the next generation of Scottish fishermen. Michael Forbes outlined

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Gerard J van Balsfoort from the Netherlands. One of many to put a question to the post-Brexit panel.

his career from leaving school and deciding not to attend university, to his first job as a 'Yopper on a local boat', and his trip to Vancouver Island. He highlighted the 100% at-sea and dockside-catch monitoring that took place, as well as the fact that there were no auctions – the price was the price. What came through was his passion for the fishing industry; his enthusiasm obviously impressed his Canadian mentors as much as it delighted the audience at the conference.

Drilling down into a post-Brexit industry

The mood of the conference was tangibly enthusiastic, and the much-anticipated opportunity to drill down into some of the many questions surrounding the future of Scottish fishing post-Brexit provided a lively and diverse 'Question Time' type of discussion. It was chaired by FIS Chairman John Goodlad, who reminded everyone that 'if the UK leaves the EU then the

UK will control its own fisheries in its own waters'. He outlined opportunities for the fishing industry, asking if this might mean an end to the 'much-reviled landing obligation'. He welcomed the fact that decisions will be made in Edinburgh and London, rather than Brussels.

But there are threats too, highlighting the doubt over tariffs and pointing out that three-quarters of all Scottish seafood exports, worth £438m every year, go to the EU. "How confident is everybody that the UK government may not use fishing as an expendable pawn in the complex Brexit negotiations, so much so that post-Brexit negotiations might even result in a poorer fishing deal than we have at present", he asked, before reminding the audience that Scotland had returned a stay vote – the immediate future would be complicated.

Questions remain unanswered

Questions built upon the themes outlined, and the panel agreed that some of the aspects of the CFP would have to carry on and the discard ban, which would exist in its present form for at least the next two years, might survive in another form later. However, all said this was

The complexity of discussions and solutions for the future inevitably led to many more questions and highlighted other issues

an opportunity to get it right for Scotland. As one fisherman put it, 'discard reduction' is a better approach than a discard ban.

The idea that Scotland might have its own fisheries policies, separate from the rest of the UK, was put forward, but Bertie



Sarah Clark, of the Devon and Severn IFCA, talked about mediation between fishers and the inshore potting agreement as part of the 'Shared Seas' part of the conference.

Armstrong and others felt that a UK-wide approach would be best for everyone, and reduce the likelihood of confusion. Other questions on the possibility of increased quotas and possible mixed quotas for the inshore fleet were well received, but, like many responses, 'we just don't know, that will be a political issue'. Markets provided a raft

of questions and the panel pointed out that while tariffs could be a problem, Scotland could now be in a position to open up new markets for high quality 'Scottish Seafood'. The sign of a great discussion is having more

questions than could be answered in the time, and this did not disappoint

The nitty-gritty

The debate overflowed into four workshops where delegates discussed in more depth, post-Brexit fishing in Scotland. One group that looked at 'abiding principles of fisheries management, enforcement and science' noted that the need for multi-annual plans and sharing with other states should continue. Not everything about the CFP was bad, they concluded, but aspects needed to be 'demonstrably credible' and implementation tailored for Scotland. When it came to science and data, there is a continuing need for the industry and stakeholders, at national and international levels, to work cooperatively.

Optimum utilisation of resources within UK's EEZ was a second thread for deliberation. This group highlighted the need to clearly define the aims of any new governance structure, including the processes leading to agreements of total harvest opportunities for shared stocks, as well as how international shares might be allocated. A further suggestion was that the coastal state model should be

the mechanism for management. There was resounding support for replacing 'the useless landing obligation with something useful'.

A third group looked at marine environmental protection and its relevance for the catching sector outside of the EU. Leaving the EU provided opportunities to review the whole area of marine protection, including streamlining bureaucracy, and to focus on those parts that provide the most benefits. Importantly, the question was asked: how will the environmental components of CFP be taken forward?

The final workshop, concerning the prospects for the onshore seafood sector and international trade, raised the question of access to funding if European Marine and Fisheries Fund (EMFF) monies were no longer available; a point that was also made by the other groups. Labour, on both vessels and in factories, if stricter border controls are introduced, is also an issue that was identified. A theme throughout the discussions centred on what the UK version of the CFP might look.

The complexity of discussions and solutions for the future inevitably led to many more questions and highlighted other issues, including collecting metrics to demonstrate the importance of the fishing industry, assessing the impacts of MPAs and how they might work better. The question of how control and management would work in the future was raised, and a common thread was the requirement to bring together a forum to map out how all changes might take place. It was stressed again and again that fishermen need to be involved at all stages. If the participation at the conference is a marker, there will be no lack of volunteers!

A full video-recording of the discussions captured by live weblink is available at <https://bambuser.com/channel/MindfullyWiredComms>. More detail of science projects can be found at www.fiscot.org ■



Delegates were treated to a Scottish menu at the ASFC16 conference dinner.