

Nourish Scotland submission of 23 August 2022

PE1951/N: Reinstate inshore coastal limit on the use of dredge and trawl fishing gears

Nourish Scotland supports petition PE1951 to Reinstate inshore coastal limit on the use of dredge and trawl fishing gears.

Nourish Scotland are a food justice charity that take a systems approach to food, and recognise that the health of our seas is integral to the health of the whole food system – the people who eat, catch, process and produce – as well as our natural environment and biodiversity.

Scotland's waters are an important part of our economy, as well as our culture. They are a diverse source of protein, providing livelihoods – particularly for rural communities. However, we are not looking after our waters, nor valuing their offerings.

Nourish Scotland are members of the Our Seas group of over 130 organisations calling for the reinstatement of an inshore limit on the use of bottom trawled fishing gear. The current Scottish Government approach allows trawling and dredging in 95% of our inshore fisheries and no extensive spatial management.¹

We believe at least 25 – 30% of the inshore must be protected from bottom-towed gears, particularly in the nearshores area where the essential fish habitat and priority marine features can be found.

Nourish Scotland have long been campaigning to put stronger protection for human rights, and particularly the right to food in Scots law. A human rights-based approach would put duties on State parties to adapt proactive measures to support everyone to have physical and economic access at all times to sufficient, adequate and culturally acceptable food that is produced and consumed sustainably, preserving access to food for future generations. Furthermore, food should be available from natural resources, for example through the cultivating of land, animal husbandry, fishing hunting or gathering.

The Scottish Government have committed to incorporating the right to food into legislation in this parliamentary term, however, in our view,

¹ <https://www.openseas.org.uk/news/snp-green-coalition-propose-to-legalise-throwing-away-juvenile-fish/>

current marine policy is blocking the realisation of the right to food and the right to a healthy environment for current and future generations.

- 1) Current marine policy is not preserving the availability of food for future generations: Removal of the three-mile limit in 1984 has resulted in decimation of inshore ecosystems and fish populations. This is evidenced by a 99% decline in fish landings from the Clyde area.² Evidence also shows that landings from the former three mile limit area of commercial fin-fish species (such as Whiting, Hake, Saithe, Plaice etc.) have significantly declined since the area has been opened up to trawling.

The population of cod off the west of Scotland has declined by 92% since 1981 – primarily as a result of overfishing – this is the biggest decline of any UK cod stocks.³ Additionally, much of the flora and fauna have seen dramatic declines, particularly in the last decade. This flora and fauna provide essential ecosystem services which provide support for commercial species throughout their life cycles. Scotland's Marine Assessment 2020 found that from 2011 – 2018 Scotland has lost significant areas of biogenic reefs⁴. Moray Firth has lost 217 hectares of biogenic habitat, including losing 99.5% of blue mussels reefs. The Outer Hebrides lost over 27% of their seagrass beds. Seagrass beds are increasingly recognised for their essential role in capturing carbon and mitigating climate change.

Compared with using creels and pots, there is evidence demonstrating that dragging of gear across the sea bed has greater physical impact.⁵ Trawls can smooth the seafloor, destroying emergent fauna, remove or bury plants and adversely affect the habitat for crustaceans and juvenile fish. Creels and pots have a lower ratio of discards in comparison to more invasive methods such as trawling. Species caught via creel self-select to enter a creel, smaller individuals can more easily egress from a creel and are less likely to return discards that are dead or dying. Trawling is less discriminatory – smaller individuals and non-target species can have their egress prevented through entanglement with other organic and inorganic matter in the net. Furthermore

² <https://britishseafishing.co.uk/the-decline-of-the-firth-of-clyde/>

³ <https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/20635871.overfishing-author-charles-clover-calls-mpa-failures/?ref=eb>

⁴ <https://marine.gov.scot/sma/assessment/biogenic-habitats>

⁵ <http://www.scottishcreelfishermensfederation.co.uk/report/CORRECTING%20THE%20MISALLOCATION%20OF%20NEPHROPS%20STOCKS%20-%20SH2.pdf>

survival rates for discards are lower with greater chances of injury during towing or hauling and longer time lag between being landed on deck and being returned to the sea.

- 2) Current marine policy is reducing creel boat fishermen rights by not protecting their access to inshore fishing grounds. Many creelers experience an on-going threat of having their gear towed, at substantial cost.⁶ The threat of this has led to creel operators undertaking avoidance action.

74% of Scotland's inshore fleet are creel fishermen – creeling employs more people, has a lower carbon footprint and causes less collateral damage to the seabed than trawling, as well as producing less by-catch.⁷ The Scottish Creel Fishermen's Federation, and the Our Seas coalition, share a wider concern that the mobile sector wields disproportionate influence with public bodies such as Marine Scotland, and subsequently the management of Scotland's fisheries appears more aligned with the interests of the mobile sector than with public interest or fisheries policy.

It is important to subject trawling to an environmental assessment, just as every other industry must be subject to as we urgently address the twin climate and nature crises. This is aligned with commitments to numerous international treaties including the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the Convention on Biodiversity.

We urge the Petitions Committee write to the Scottish Government asking that they re-introduce a variation on the historic 3-mile coastal limit on the use of mobile dredging and bottom-trawling fishing gears to ensure that at least 25 – 30% of the inshore is protected.

⁶<http://www.scottishcreelfishermensfederation.co.uk/report/CORRECTING%20THE%20MISALLOCATION%20OF%20NEPHROPS%20STOCKS%20-%20SH2.pdf>

⁷ <https://ourseasscotland.eaction.org.uk/bring-back-the-fish>