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WORLD FISHERIES CONGRESS/KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE

'Towards a just transition'

The Scottish Creel Fishermen's Federation was part of a UK team that presented a session at the World Fisheries Congress in Seattle in March – a huge event marred only by the lack of working fishermen and their representatives

THE SCOTTISH CREEL Fishermen's Federation (SCFF) gave a presentation to the World Fisheries Congress on 'Unintended Consequences', looking at the existing challenges in managing Scotland's inshore fisheries and some of the new challenges that might emerge if we were to attempt to implement our commitments under the UN Sustainable Development Goals and Marine Strategy Framework Directives.

Our presentation was part of a panel session alongside two NGOs, Blue Marine Foundation and Fauna & Flora. Fauna & Flora presented a study attempting to define and measure 'destructive fishing' and associated indicators. Destructive fishing is a term used in the UN Sustainable Development Goals, but is not yet clearly defined.

Blue Marine highlighted the need to transition away from higher-impact fishing practices, and presented a novel framework to assess the costs and benefits of transition options and demonstrate the applicability of a just transition framework through analysis of local UK case studies.

The session also heard via a livestream from the Isle of Skye from the co-ordinator of the



By BALLY PHILP

Scottish Entanglement Alliance, who talked about the realities of gear exchange and the potential unintended consequences on the ground, as well as from Fauna & Flora's marine and coastal manager for Kenya, who spoke about an example of a gear exchange programme, highlighting the need for an enabling environment. The session was well attended by eminent fisheries scientists, managers and representatives from Scotland and elsewhere around the world.

The conference itself saw over 1,700 attendees including scientists, fisheries managers, fishermen, NGOs and government officials from all over the world. They came to exchange ideas and



▲ Left to right: Bally Philp, Emily Bulled (Blue Marine), Hannah Richardson (Flora & Fauna) and Joe Richards (Blue Marine) at the World Fisheries Congress in Seattle. Fewer than 1% of the 1,400 attendees were active working fishermen.

perspectives about new research, emerging issues, scientific breakthroughs and governance related to fisheries science, industry, conservation and management.

Some of the key themes at the conference were:

- A need to move towards ecosystem-based fisheries management, moving away from single-species (MSY) management and adopting a multi-species, whole-site approach.
- A strong desire for a co-ordinated approach to sustainable fisheries. There were a number of talks and presentations exploring how this can be achieved, including challenges and successes both locally and internationally.
- Recognition of the need to reduce the impacts of bottom trawling and the environmental, social and economic benefits of doing so for fishermen and fishing communities.
- The importance of fisher engagement and involvement in management processes, including example case studies of where this has been highly valuable for individual fisheries and broader fisheries management.

- Social equity and the inclusion of indigenous communities in conservation and fisheries management.

It was great to hear about these new and emerging subjects, as well as to see so many of the longstanding big issues being grappled with, such as illegal, unreported and unregulated fisheries. Bycatch, entanglement and non-selective gears were also the focus of several talks.

Seabed impacts from mobile gears, such as habitat modification and carbon sequestration, were also featured, as were the euphemistically named 'reduction fisheries', which target poorly managed fisheries and non-quota species for fishmeal and oil. These global-scale highly industrialised and mostly corporate-owned fisheries are having big impacts on fishing, communities and marine wildlife alike.

Our biggest disappointment was the serious lack of attendance by fishers and fisheries representatives. Although we brought fishermen and there were a few familiar faces from the Scottish industry present, the ratio of non-fishers to fishers

was about 100:1. This is probably because there was a very exclusive price-tag barrier to attending. The tickets were in excess of \$700, and with accommodation and flights on top, very few fishermen could ever hope of attending.

Not only that: there were few if any opportunities for actual fishermen to actively participate or meaningfully contribute. It was only practical for the SCFF to attend due to the fact that we were presenting and had secured generous support from eNGOs such as Blue Marine Foundation and Fauna & Flora, and we also managed to bolt on a fisher knowledge exchange project which had funding from The Fishmongers' Company.

Our take-home is that fishermen need to have a different forum where we can participate, contribute and input into high-level fisheries management. Ironically, the World Fisheries Congress is certainly not a place for fishermen!

The SCFF would be very keen to encourage the creation of a different forum where fishermen could meaningfully participate, and to that end we are reaching out to our colleagues and counterparts in the UK to see if there's support for another conference like the Brexit-focused Future of our Inshore Fisheries that took place in London in 2019. This was widely acknowledged by industry and managers alike as being very successful – it was a great shame that Covid came along and slowed the progress made there.

If we do not gain support for this, we will be pushing for an event with a similar format in Scotland that brings together active fishermen, industry leaders, policy-makers, conservation groups and researchers to share knowledge that contributes to progressing an effective fisheries management system in our inshore. As for the World Fisheries Congress, unless we are invited to present again, it's unlikely that we will be attending another one any time soon!

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Avoiding entanglement: a fisherman's view

IT WAS A PRIVILEGE TO BE invited on the SCFF/SEA fisher exchange programme, and we are very grateful for the additional funding from The Fishmongers' Company that enabled this.

Blanket approaches never work in fisheries – well, not for

By **DUNCAN MCANDREW**
North West Responsible Fishermen's Association

fishermen, anyway. To gain insight into what – on the face of it – is and isn't working for fishermen

and cetaceans was invaluable. A good, bad and ugly picture became apparent.

The nature and level of entanglements are seemingly high in Baja California, Mexico, but the solutions seem simple and effective – a transition perhaps not readily available to us in Scotland. With such high numbers of whales to contend with, the transition away from fishing, especially during the breeding/calving season, is proving to be successful for even the smallest fishing outfits. Fishers are being licensed by the state to take tourists whale watching for three to four months of the year, leaving the fishery fallow, which is in turn providing better returns later in the year.

A similar project has been forced on the east coast shark fishery there. Industrial offshore fisheries have decimated the fishery despite a 30-mile limit, but with some help from Blue Marine, small-scale fishers are transitioning to tourism, with a generous buy-back scheme on new boats providing year-round employment.

It is pretty much a win-win situation across Baja, perhaps with the one exception of their marine rescue. The Mexico Marine Wildlife Rescue Centre, which is doing great work with fishers and conservation alike, has very limited government funding. This is one area that needs addressing for the benefit of all.

In a ying to Mexico's yang, over-regulation seems intent on causing harm to fishers and whales alike off the Californian coast.



▲ An individual pot tag: there are strict limits on pot numbers in the Dungeness crab fishery, and numbers are reduced by 50% at certain times in the season as an additional precaution to protect the growing whale population.

The litigious nature of the US has forced an entirely inappropriate set of rules onto the Dungeness crab fishermen, who despite their best efforts at mitigation are firmly in the crosshairs of state legislators.

The fishermen there work single traps, lifting up to 200 a day. The dumb-headedness of fisheries (mis)managers there is laid bare by their refusal of a plan proposed by crab fishermen to move to working fleets of pots, thus reducing vertical lines, and the risk of entanglement, by up to 90%.

All this is against a backdrop of significant increases in the whale population. The impacts of a growing number of whales and potential for increased interactions is seemingly not being considered – perhaps to protect against further action by eNGOs.

This is a cautionary tale for all

of us. The need for fishermen to be able to lead the way on mitigation and conservation is staring them in the face.

Protection from bottom-towed gear is in place across California, out to three miles, with separate closures having taken place for specific choke species, over time, extending beyond three miles. This leaves a robust fishery both inside and outside the limit, so perhaps there is a way to transition some of the fleet. However, unless new regulations are put in place that protect the crab fishery and crab fishermen, as well as whales, it will come at great cost to the fleet and rural communities alike.

Right now, I'd rather be a low-impact fisher in Puerto Chale, Mexico rather than Bodega Bay, California.



▲ The team visited the Dungeness crab fishery just as the season was drawing to a close – here, gear is being unloaded ashore, awaiting the start of the new season.

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