

# Fishermen urge no 'back door' option for protected areas

Fishing boat skippers in Scotland are urging policymakers not to push through highly protected marine areas "by the back door" after publication of the consultation response.

The Scottish Government confirmed it will not be taking forward the controversial Highly Protected Marine Areas (HPMAs) policy in its current form, which would have led to a loss of around 10% of Scotland's fishing grounds.



However, many fishermen up and down the country remain concerned about the vague wording in the government's response, and fear supporters of HPMA's will try their best to usher in the policy through another avenue.

Fisherman Barry Brunton from Dunbar has welcomed the scrapping of HPMA's, but is adamant more collaboration between fishermen and the government is needed to find the best solution for all concerned.



Barry said: "I was absolutely terrified [about HPMA's], because we've only got a small patch of ground and I only work from the lighthouse at Dunbar to Dunbar Harbour; if they had put a HPMA in that area I would've lost everything that I've worked for.

"The best people to ask how measures will work are the fishermen. They know the grounds; they know the beaten stock. If everybody worked together to find a better solution, the Scottish Government's scientists, and fishermen, all around a table discuss the issue, that would be the right way ahead."



Skipper of the Zenith in Fraserburgh, Mark Robertson, also expressed his concerns about the potential effects HPMA's, or a similar blanket policy, may have on the sector, describing it as an 'absolute shambles.'



Mark said: "To keep people out of areas they have traditionally fished in for years is an absolute shambles. Between HPMA's, MPAs, wind farms, closed areas. I mean, how much sea are we actually losing? It's scary, it's really scary, because there's not a lot of areas inside twelve miles that you can actually work in."

Fellow fisherman, Mark Anderson from Shetland feels more scientific evidence is required before closed areas are implemented in Scotland's seas.



“The idea that these closed areas are going to be a Mecca for fish is complete fallacy. It’s a fantasy, that the fish are all going to congregate in one area.

“It’s based on an ideal, it’s not based on science. Imagine you close a whole heap of places around Shetland for 20 years and half the fleet disappeared; but in that time you found that you had not changed anything in fish density. Where’s that half a fleet that you got rid of? What are those guys doing now?

“I think it would be a great pity to destroy a whole load of livelihoods over hopes, without actual scientific fact and evidence.”

A recent poll conducted by the [Scottish Fishermen’s Federation](#) [SFF], found the industry was extremely well supported in the country, with nine in 10 Scots supporting the protection of fishing fleets amid increasingly crowded seas – and that same number calling for the Scottish government to do more to support the sector.

Elsbeth Macdonald, CEO of the SFF helped to form a coalition between several Scottish seafood organisations to voice their opinion against HPMA's earlier this year. She said: "In June we called on The Scottish Government to scrap their plans, scrap the ban and acknowledge that it's time to think again.

"The decision not to progress the proposed HPMA's recognises the importance of a balanced approach to marine conservation, taking into account the livelihoods of our hardworking fishermen and the sustainability of our fisheries.

"Nobody cares more about our marine environment than those who are dependent upon it for their livelihoods and we remain committed, as we have been for many years, to working with the Scottish Government on an approach to marine protection that strikes a balance between conservation and sustainable harvesting."

The HPMA proposals sparked major protests from fishing communities in Scotland. Critics said the policy threatened the viability of many businesses and was being pushed through without adequate consultation.