

## **Scottish Environment LINK Marine Group Comments**

### **Next steps on 2024 interim measures for lobster and crab stocks**

May 2025

#### **Overview**

Scottish Environment LINK's Marine Group support the 2024 interim measures introduced in response to stock assessment and concern about pressure on Scotland's lobster and crab stocks. Crabs and lobsters play important ecological roles as omnivorous predators and prey, influencing benthic habitats by shaping food webs and sometimes acting as keystone species. Their activities can affect the structure of marine ecosystems through trophic cascades and interactions with other species, such as suppressing herbivores or providing habitat. These actions mark an important move toward restoring ecological balance in our inshore waters and securing the long-term viability of coastal livelihoods. However, these measures must not remain temporary and should form part of the foundation for a long-term, science-led management system that is responsive to both ecological evidence and the socio-economic realities of Scotland's marine environment.

#### **Short-term actions**

LINK members would support maintaining the current interim measures and enhancing their effectiveness through improved monitoring, enforcement, and stakeholder communication, such as through mandatory catch reporting for all vessel sizes and beginning the phased rollout of vessel tracking and Remote Electronic Monitoring (REM), even for smaller inshore vessels. Gear limitations, particularly caps on creel numbers per vessel, should be retained to help manage effort creep. Where seasonal dependence on berried females is high, particularly in winter months, rules for protecting them should be applied and effectively managed with careful local or regional adaptation, based on scientific evidence and applying the precautionary principle where necessary.

#### **Medium term actions**

The interim measures must be developed into a more comprehensive, legally enforceable management system rooted in ecosystem-based and spatially responsive approaches. Improved data collection and effective enforcement should inform adaptive management, allowing spatial and seasonal refinements that reflect regional stock conditions and fishing patterns. We recognise that many small-scale fishers lack viable alternatives to shellfish due to vessel size, market access, or geography making it all the more vital to take the steps required to bring about the recovery of these stocks. Government support must include investment in effective monitoring and enforcement as well as new diversification pathways such as access to alternative sustainable species, gear innovation, training, and local infrastructure improvements. These are essential to ensure a fair transition and reduce over-dependence on pressured shellfish stocks.

#### **Long term actions**

Shellfish fisheries management must be fully integrated into Scotland's wider marine policy framework, including the National Marine Plan 2 and delivery of climate and biodiversity targets. This means embedding lobster and crab management within a broader vision of healthy, resilient seas, supported by ecosystem-based spatial management (including an inshore low impact zone comprising of No-Take Zones, static-gear only zones, low impact mobile-gear only zones (but only where this can be demonstrated) and areas for nature

conservation) with effective monitoring and enforcement as part of transparent co-management structures. Long-term fisheries governance should provide clear rules, means of effective monitoring and enforcing, consistent incentives for sustainability, and active support for coastal communities to adapt and thrive in the face of ecological and economic change.

*Comments compiled on behalf of LINK's Marine Group and supported by Marine Conservation Society, National Trust for Scotland, RSPB Scotland, Scottish Wildlife Trust and Young Sea Changers Scotland.*

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