

The Sustainable Policy of the Scottish Pelagic Sustainability Group

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I. Introduction

The UK RSW (Refrigerated Sea Water) pelagic industry, centred in North East Scotland and Shetland, ranks among the best in the world. A modern, technologically advanced fleet of RSW vessels supplies a progressive, well-equipped processing sector. The industry is involved in the catching and processing of some of the most abundant fish stocks found in the North East Atlantic and North Sea. These species include mackerel, herring, blue whiting and horse mackerel.

The Scottish Pelagic Sustainability Group (SPSG) was established in 2007 following a strategic review by the Scottish pelagic industry. The SPSG represents all sectors of the industry, from fishing to the processing and marketing of pelagic fish. The SPSG took ownership of the industry's sustainable policy as well as launching a number of additional sustainability initiatives which includes entering all of its main fisheries for Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) assessment. Estimated annual landings of MSC certified fish at the beginning of 2019 were over 218,000 tonnes with a landed value of £200 million.

Today, there is an expectation and demand that the harvesting of the world's fishery resources should be from demonstrable sustainable sources. This industry led document addresses the sustainability issues involved in the fisheries exploited by the UK RSW pelagic industry.

II. Background

The pelagic fisheries in the North East Atlantic are a commercially important sector of the seafood industry for participating nations. Commercial advantage has been achieved through investment in modern fishing vessels and processing factories in response to growing international demand for pelagic fish and fishery products. With exploitation by NE Atlantic fishing nations of these highly valuable pelagic resources; very careful and often complex regulation and management is required to ensure these fisheries are harvested responsibly and sustainably.

It has long been recognised that this scenario is common throughout fisheries worldwide. If fish stocks are to be maintained with enough fish for future generations then everyone involved in fishing must help conserve and manage these resources. It was with this in mind that the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) developed and subsequently adopted the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries in 1995.

The Code sets out principles and standards of behaviour for responsible practices with a view to ensuring the effective conservation, management and development of living aquatic resources. The Code recognises the nutritional, economic, social and environmental importance of fisheries and takes into account the biological characteristics of the resources, their environment and the interests of consumers and other users.

The UK has now left the European Union. Until the end of 2020, during the Implementation Period, the UK will adhere to the rules of the Common Fisheries Policy. A new UK Fisheries Bill will set the legislative rules governing fisheries from 1st January 2021.

Within the EU, management of fisheries has been developed by Member States and the FAO Code is applied through the regulation of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP). The existing CFP, (1380/2013) agreed by the European Commission, Council of Ministers and the European Parliament; has undergone extensive review and came into effect in January 2014.

The scope of the CFP states that it shall cover “the conservation of marine biological resources and the management of fisheries and fleets exploiting such resources.” One of the main objectives of the CFP is to ensure that fishing activities are sustainable in the long term, and are managed in a way that is consistent with the objectives of achieving economic, social and employment benefit; and that “it shall aim to ensure that exploitation..... restores and maintains levels which can produce maximum sustainable yield.”

The CFP prioritises the development of multi-annual plans (Articles 9 & 10) which aims to restore and maintain stocks at levels capable of producing maximum sustainable yield, either for single species or for mixed fisheries, and provides for the introduction of regionalised management between Member States to achieve this (Article 18). In the NE Atlantic, Member States through the regionalisation process have agreed and implemented pelagic discard plans to comply with the new landings obligation requirement.

III. Concepts and definitions of sustainability

For the purpose of this policy document it is important to define what we mean by sustainability. In the management of fisheries and their exploitation; sustainability can have a varied and broad meaning; or it can refer to a specific area within a larger socio economic or ecological framework.

In marine ecosystems, sustainability is the characteristic of resources that are managed so that the natural capital stock is non-declining through time, while production opportunities are maintained for the future.¹ However, the use of sustainability is often used in fisheries management as a shortened term for sustainable development.

Sustainable development can be defined as the management and conservation of the natural resource base, and the orientation of technological and institutional change in such a manner as to ensure the attainment of continued satisfaction of human needs for present and future generations. Such sustainable development conserves (land) water, plants and (animal) genetic resources, is environmentally non-degrading, technologically appropriate, economically viable and socially acceptable.²

When describing specifically sustainable fishing activities, those are activities which do not cause or lead to undesirable changes in the biological and economic productivity, biological diversity, or ecosystem structure and functioning from one human generation to the next.³ In terms of the catch or yield from a defined stock, the sustainable yield is the amount of biomass or the number of units that can be harvested currently in a fishery without compromising the ability of the population/ecosystem to regenerate itself.⁴

Over recent years EU fisheries management has moved to adopt management measures based on the principle of maximum sustainable yield (MSY). MSY describes the largest average catch that can be continuously taken from a stock under existing environmental conditions. Fishing at MSY level; means catching the maximum proportion of fish from the stock whilst at the same time, ensuring its capacity to produce sustainable returns in the long term is maintained. Further explanatory guidance giving an [Overview of MSY](#) can be viewed through this link.

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1. Sutinen, J.G., ed. 2000. A framework for monitoring and assessing socioeconomics and governance of large marine ecosystems. NOAA Technical Memorandum NMFS-NE-158, 32 pp
 2. FAO (1989): Sustainable development and natural resources management. Conference. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Rome. C 89/2 – Sup. 2. August 1989: 54 pages
 3. Anonymous (1998): Sustaining Marine Fisheries. A report of the Committee on Ecosystem Management for Sustainable Fisheries; Ocean Studies Board; Commission on Geosciences, Environment, and Resources; National Research Council. National Academy press.
 4. FAO (1997): Fisheries management. FAO Technical Guidelines for Responsible Fisheries, 4: 82 p

IV. The Sustainable Policy of the Scottish pelagic industry

The Scottish pelagic industry is committed to the achievement and ongoing principle of sustainability in all fisheries in which it operates, and regards this policy as an essential tool in pursuit of this goal. The Scottish pelagic industry considers the following principles to form the basis of this policy:

- The industry will take all appropriate and necessary measures to ensure that the pelagic fisheries in which it operates are fished and managed responsibly to preserve the sustainable use of all marine resources and their habitats for current and future generations.
- The industry recognises that pelagic fisheries are a shared resource at national and international level; and as such will cooperate with all industry stakeholders and regulatory authorities in their sustainable management.
- The industry promotes the participation in and equitable implementation of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) as a means to apply and build upon the framework of the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries.
- The SPSG has worked diligently through the Pelagic Advisory Council to bring about the successful implementation of the landing obligation across all fisheries in which it operates.
- The industry takes full note of ICES advice as the basis of best scientific advice which will contribute to management measures governing pelagic fisheries. To fully support this and actively contribute in scientific input to ICES; the Scottish industry directly employs scientific expertise to implement a data collection strategy and ensure innovative and efficient use of data from the Scottish pelagic fleet in stock assessments and advice.
- The industry is committed to the maximization of product quality. This is achieved through the application of best practice in all fishing activities; from the methods of fishing; bringing the catch aboard; onboard storage of the fish through to the discharging of the catch once in port. It is also committed to encouraging training of personnel to achieve these objectives.

Scottish pelagic processing factories are located in North-East Scotland and Shetland near to the main fishing grounds. These modern plants are equipped with the latest machinery for receiving, grading, filleting, packing, and freezing herring and mackerel. They are specifically designed to handle high volumes of pelagic fish and can ensure the highest quality is maintained throughout the process.

The industry is further committed to minimise the carbon footprint of pelagic fish production and has supported analysis and benchmarking studies⁵ of the carbon footprint of Scottish pelagic fisheries and will use findings to deliver continuous improvement to reduce these impacts.

⁵ [Estimation of the Carbon Footprint of the Shetland Fishery for Atlantic Mackerel](#)

V. Operational management

Instrumental to the sustainable development of the Scottish pelagic industry is the ongoing viability of both businesses and communities from a socio-economic perspective. If this aim is to be achieved, it is of paramount importance that the industry meets these goals whilst operating to the highest standards of maritime and employment safety.

The Scottish pelagic industry fully supports the implementation of new legislation to deliver improved standards at sea for fishermen through the International Labour Organisation's Work In Fishing Convention (ILO 188). This builds on existing standards to provide safer and fairer working, living and employment conditions for all fishermen.

The Scottish pelagic industry will:

- Operate vessels and carry out fishing activity to the highest possible standards of maritime safety. Ensuring that all gear conforms to safety requirements, that regular inspection and scheduled maintenance are carried out in addition to statutory inspections; paying particular regard to engines and safety equipment.
- Provide a safe working environment for all members of crew and any third parties at all times, whilst promoting a fair and amicable working environment which seeks to encourage strong teamwork.
- Ensure that all training needs of fishermen are met in terms of the statutory minimum MCA requirements, and furthermore; will strive to provide the best training, education and awareness programmes to the benefit of all members.
- Practice a reasonable and mutually respectful attitude to all sea vessels and other users towards the exploited resource and the marine environment as a whole. In particular, where competition for sea space arises whilst working on fishing grounds, amicable agreement or compromise will be sought with other fishing parties to avoid conflicts of interest while paying particular regard to historical rights in the area.

The quality of product and marketing opportunities such product will attract are the basis to the success of the industry sector. Therefore all stakeholders of the pelagic industry will constantly work to:

- Maintain the highest possible standards of hygiene onboard vessels and throughout the process chain.
- Optimise the conditions in which the fish are caught, held, handled and processed in order to maximise their market value and encourage the widest choice of value adding potential. This will assist in preserving not only quality but additionally the nutritional value of the fish.
- Provide advanced landing information concerning quality, size, volume and traceability of the catch in order to maximise processing potential and improve the efficiency of landing activities.

- Operate all processing plants with defined Quality Management Systems, and meet strict hygiene and food safety standards which are monitored by both local Environmental Health Departments and by their customers.

VI. Commitment to a Sustainable Development Programme

The Scottish pelagic industry is committed to sustainable fisheries. In order to evidence this; the Scottish Pelagic Sustainability Group was established in 2007 with the principal aim of securing independent accreditation of the main pelagic fisheries. The group immediately entered the North Sea herring and Western mackerel fisheries into Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) assessment.

The MSC certification programme is an objective, scientifically verifiable and fully transparent voluntary sustainability standard. It meets the requirements of both the United Nations FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries and ISEAL; a global association of sustainability standards. It is now also the first seafood certification programme to be recognised by the Global Sustainable Seafood Initiative (GSSI).

There are three core principles which every MSC certified fishery must meet:

1. Sustainable Fish Stocks: fishing activity must be at a level which ensures it can continue indefinitely.
2. Minimising Environmental Impact: fishing operations must be managed to maintain the structure, productivity, function and diversity of the ecosystem.
3. Effective Management: The fishery must comply with relevant laws and have a management system that is responsive to changing circumstances.

The SPSG is an active member of the Executive Committee of the Association of Sustainable Fisheries. Through this involvement, the SPSG seeks to draw on its experience and provide input to these forums assisting in sustainable policy development at an international level.

Fishery	Certification Dates	Current Status
North Sea Herring	First Certified: July 2008 Re-certified: July 2013 Re-certified: April 2017	Certified
NE Atlantic Mackerel	First Certified: January 2009 Re-certified: May 2016 Suspended: March 2019	Suspended
Atlanto-Scandian Herring	First Certified: March 2010 Re-certified: January 2016	Certified
Blue Whiting	February 2016	Certified

Following progress between the EU, Norway and the Faroe Islands; a five year fisheries arrangement was agreed for 2014 to 2018, on the sharing arrangements for mackerel in the North-East Atlantic and has provision for a reserve of quota share for additional Coastal States wishing to enter the agreement. This agreement now been extended until the end of 2020.

The Scottish industry was a founding member of an international stakeholder collaborative to recertify the North-East Atlantic mackerel fishery. The Mackerel Industry Northern Sustainability Alliance (MINSA) with members from the UK, Norway, the Netherlands, Denmark, Ireland and Sweden with a group of over 700 vessels successfully recertified the NE Atlantic mackerel fishery in 2016. This achievement by a multinational stakeholder group was a world first for the MSC programme.

However the mackerel certification went into suspension in 2019 because there was no comprehensive management agreement on quota share between all Coastal States. The resulting suspension is out with the direct control of the SPSG and MINSA. However both these groups remain fully committed to the sustainability of the NE Atlantic mackerel fishery.

The SPSG is now engaged in further collaborative certifications for the Atlanto-Scandian herring, North Sea herring and blue whiting fisheries.

Furthermore, the SPSG will seek to explore the potential benefit of any programmes or projects which promote and enhance the marine ecosystem and environment as a whole, thus reducing the environmental impact and footprint the fleet may have during fishing operations.

In particular pelagic vessels will:

- Follow practices that minimise the emissions of dangerous substances during all fishing activities. As an absolute minimum, vessels will meet national standards but will endeavour to operate at a level promoting best practice.
- Optimise energy consumption in all fishing operations.
- Consider programmes and new technologies to optimise fuel consumption and other practices to save energy⁵.
- Follow good fishing practices which minimise gear loss and make every effort to follow procedures/protocols to mark and report lost gear. Wherever possible vessels will make every effort to retrieve lost gear and to retrieve any redundant gear which may become apparent during fishing activity.
- Ensure end of life gear is taken ashore and disposed of through a safe and recognised route. Many Scottish pelagic vessels now donate their end of life gear for recycling to the “Oor Bairns Charity”. The charity supports a number of projects including help paying for replacement boats in the likes of storm hit communities in Burma, India and Sumatra.
- Operate waste management plans on-board and will communicate and implement the plan during all operations.

Whilst marine litter is not frequently encountered in pelagic fishing, the SPSG fleet are committed to retain and dispose of any marine litter caught through the KIMO Fishing for Litter programme.

VII. Responsible fishing

Consumers require high quality fresh fish, that is sourced from fully traceable, responsibly operated and sustainable fisheries. These demands mean supply chains need to demonstrate their products can indeed satisfy these requirements.

Seafood businesses consider corporate social responsibility (CSR) policy as a core element of their strategic operation supporting them with a 'license to operate'. These policies detail corporate operations in respect to environmental impact, waste and recycling, codes of conduct for product sourcing and social welfare. They all contribute to business strategy and how businesses operate; stakeholders require these policies to be in place. Fishing vessel operation can be thought of in the same way as any other business, and therefore vessel operators should be aware of the these demands from customers and seek ways in which to meet them.

For fishing vessel operations there is currently only one standard of good practice which can be used to demonstrate good responsible fishing practice. The Responsible Fishing Scheme (RFS) launched by Seafish in 2016 is a voluntary vessel-based programme certifying high standards of crew welfare and responsible catching practices on board fishing vessels. It was developed to raise standards in the catching sector, enabling those within the seafood supply chain to demonstrate their commitment to the responsible sourcing of seafood.

The Scottish pelagic industry has been an active participant to the RFS and the pelagic industry supports this scheme as a means by which it can provide reassurance to customers; the supply chain, the ultimate consumer and society in general of their ability to follow good operational practice. Scottish pelagic vessels are in membership of the scheme, demonstrating a recognised standard of good practice and providing the supply chain with the reassurance that pelagic products have been fished responsibly.

A new updated version of this scheme will be launched in 2020; Global Seafood Assurances (GSA) a not-for-profit organisation will operate, manage and deliver the new Responsible Fishing Vessel Standard on a global scale, whilst maintaining the ethos of the robust standard that has already been developed. Seafish and GSA will work collaboratively to develop Version 2 of the Standard, ensuring compliance with the ILO Work in Fishing Convention (ILO 188). The Responsible Fishing Vessel Standard is intended to be a globally applicable scheme to provide third party assurance of decent working conditions for the crew by demonstrating operational best practice from the catch to the quay, in line with internationally agreed protocols and guidelines.

The Scottish pelagic industry recognises that this review and modification to the standard will help keep it practical, relevant and meaningful to pelagic fishing operations. It remains supportive to participate in further development processes to forward and strengthen such tools which help to raise standards and seek continuous improvement for the benefit of the industry.

VIII. Management regimes and Coastal State/bilateral agreements

Of the main stocks fished by the Scottish pelagic fleet; mackerel is managed by a fisheries agreement between the European Union, The Faroe Islands and Norway which regulates fishing in these territorial and international waters through until 2020.

The blue whiting and Atlanto-Scandian herring fisheries are managed by Coastal States and ratified through NEAFC agreements. North Sea herring is managed under the joint-stock management of the European Community and Norway. The West of Scotland herring, North Sea horse mackerel and western horse mackerel are all under the management of the European Union.

The Scottish pelagic industry follows these annual talks closely and keeps stakeholders up to date with new developments in the management of the various fisheries.

IX. Long Term Management Strategies

There are currently Long Term Management Strategies in place to manage the blue whiting and Atlanto-Scandian herring fisheries. For NE Atlantic mackerel; following the ICES inter-benchmark in 2019; Coastal States are in the process of revising the LTMS and it is hoped that this will be finalised by the end of 2020.

The Long Term Management Strategy (LTMS) agreed for North Sea herring in 2015 is now currently under review. It is also hoped this work will be concluded by the end of 2020.

X. Sustainability principles

In order to realise the goals of the sustainable policy as described in section IV, members acknowledge that they must operate in a manner which clearly demonstrates these principles.

Pelagic stocks are an international resource which migrate through EU, third country and international waters throughout different seasons of the year. In respect to this policy; the Scottish pelagic industry will demonstrate its commitment to sustainability by:

- Supporting protocols which promote international cooperation between both Member States of the EU and third countries of this multi-national industry involved in the exploitation of pelagic fisheries.
- Engaging with other industry client groups who work to realise sustainable certification of NE Atlantic pelagic stocks.

- Accepting that to have a correctly managed and fairly allocated share of fishing opportunity for all pelagic species; fish stocks have to be estimated using the most reliable and robust scientific and mathematical techniques available. The quality of such data is paramount to the accurate process of determining Total Allowable Catches (TACs).
- Accepting that in order to prevent over fishing and ensure sustainability, the methods required to support such TAC's need to be effectively monitored and regulated. This will entail the accurate registration of catches; and may include the use of technical measures in permitted gear.
- Actively supporting and assisting in the gathering and provision of scientific data on the state of pelagic fish stocks; thus securing the most detailed information available for use in the assessments necessary for sustainable fisheries management.

XI. Scientific support

It has long been recognised that a successful and responsible fisheries policy requires sound scientific advice and data. All stakeholders of such fisheries should ensure sufficient resources and facilities are available to provide a comprehensive foundation in order that the necessary research can be carried out.

Such research requires monitoring of the stocks, the condition and size distribution of the fish within the stocks, and observations of the marine habitat and wider ecosystem of such stocks if the fishery is to be managed with a successful policy. This needs to be coupled with the necessary research and assessments concerning the fishing methods undertaken to fish the stock and the levels of effort which are being undertaken. Such information can include biological, oceanographic, meteorological and operational types. Additionally samples may be taken for further analysis in laboratory conditions ashore.

The value of such research is of particular importance when factors within the overall framework are likely to change in such a way as to influence the ecological balance of the fishery as a whole.

The Scottish pelagic industry fully supports the view that scientific study is invaluable to the future sustainability of the pelagic fisheries. It will therefore cooperate and assist in the gathering of such scientific information and will wherever possible undertake to:-

- Participate in voluntary self-sampling programmes of data collection through the Scottish Pelagic Fishermen's Association.
- Co-operate and participate in programmes focussing on scientific assessment, recruitment and fecundity of pelagic fish stocks.^{6. 7. 8.}
- Co-operate and participate in research, and provide data in support of academic programmes studying areas to improve knowledge and understanding of pelagic stocks and the levels of effort which contribute to the exploitation of pelagic fisheries.
 - The SPSPG now funds the annual servicing of tag scanning equipment in Scottish pelagic processing plants.^{9.}

- Conduct research to assess new fishing gears, and promote new fishing gears and practices which are consistent with sustainable fishing practices.
- Assist, initiate and participate in research programmes which support environmental protection.

To fully achieve and deliver on this policy the SPSG, through the Scottish Pelagic Fishermen's Association employ a chief scientific officer to work within the Scottish pelagic sector.

This has enabled the implementation of a scientific data collection strategy and ensured innovative and efficient use of data from the Scottish pelagic fleet in stock assessment and advice. It will also provide a stronger liaison between the industry and relevant marine science organisations including Marine Scotland Science to maximise the benefit of effective data collection between managers and industry.

Through this role the Scottish pelagic science officer has acquired a seat in the ICES Herring Assessment Working Group and inputs directly into the stock assessment work for herring, sprat and sandeels undertaken by this body.

The Scottish pelagic fleet maintains a close working relationship with Marine Scotland Science on various projects and may undertake studies through cooperation with government, management and scientific programmes; with international scientific institutes or through their own initiated desire with other co-funding partners including Fisheries Innovation Scotland; North East Atlantic Fisheries College and the University of Aberdeen.

Furthermore, the SPSG fleet undertakes to record any interactions during fishing activities and fishing trips with endangered threatened and protected (ETP) species. Member vessels participate in the Seafish Responsible Fishing Scheme and as such are committed to make every effort to minimise unselective fishing practice and minimise interactions with incidental by-catch. Concerns have been raised in some pelagic fisheries of interactions between cetaceans and fishing gear, the SPSG fleet has co-operated fully with cetacean observer programmes over many years with no observed bycatch incidents. However, as a measure of additional best practice vessels undertake to record any interactions, should they occur. Species included in this reporting scheme include whales, dolphins, porpoises, seabirds and turtles.

⁶. Since 2011, SPSG vessels have undertaken research charters, participating in the northern herring acoustic survey throughout waters in the northern North Sea (IVa) and to the West of Scotland (VIa).

⁷. In 2016 one SPSG vessel undertook three of the four egg survey research cruises organised by Marine Scotland Science which contribute to the comprehensive NE Atlantic mackerel egg survey.

⁸. Since 2106 the SPSG fleet has participated in the annual industry led acoustic herring survey for the West of Scotland

⁹. Scottish pelagic processing factories now participate in fully automated electronic scanning of tagged mackerel to improve the quality of scientific advice through the provision of fishery independent data. See: <http://tracid-fishmap.imr.no/map.aspx>

XII. Monitoring and compliance

Stakeholder compliance with national and international management regimes is fundamental to the sustainable policy of the Scottish pelagic industry. The industry recognises that pelagic fisheries are most effectively controlled by TAC's and quotas and believes that quotas must be respected if stocks are to remain healthy.

The monitoring of fishing activities is an essential part of the sustainable policy of any fishery. The main goals and objectives of any fishery monitoring programme will generally be:-

- The collection of information on catch; bycatch; protected species; discards and wider environmental data which is used for management and stock assessment purposes.
- The monitoring of fishing activity in adherence to regulations governing the fishery.
- The monitoring of fishing activity and effort to develop a better understanding of the operation of the fishery.

At-sea observers offer one means of gathering independent, cost effective data, and may be used to reduce conflicts between stakeholders; concerns regarding over-exploitation and to provide a better understanding of how particular fisheries work. Whatever their motivation for use, they should provide outputs that contribute to the development of international management measures that encourage good fishing practices and promote both stock and fishery sustainability. To this end the Scottish pelagic industry supports their use as one means to provide this assurance and information, and will work with scientific agencies, and industry groups to facilitate such programmes where considered appropriate.

The Scottish pelagic fleet already has strong relationships in this field with Marine Scotland Science (MSS); the Sea Mammal Research Unit (SMRU), St Andrews University and the Scottish Fishermen's Federation Independent Onboard Observer Scheme (IOOS), cooperating with monitoring programmes in place under agreed protocols to ensure that these goals can be met.

It is recognised that monitoring programmes help to provide evidence and demonstrate compliance of conservation, and helps support measures in place for the management of the fishery. The Scottish pelagic industry is an active participant of the Scottish Discard Steering Group (SDSG) whose role is to contribute advice to Scottish Government to help develop policy with regard to the implementation of the landing obligation

In Scotland, vessels may only land to buyers who are registered within the compliance regulations laid down by the Scottish Government. Under this scheme the buyers are obliged to keep records and be open to inspection by Marine Scotland Compliance at any time. This, added to the existing regulation on the catching sector, extends control throughout the supply chain. The Scottish pelagic industry regards this as an essential tool to deliver total and uniform compliance with all fisheries management regulations. It is however essential that there is parity within the EU and for all third countries.

A pelagic inspection protocol governing the inspection and monitoring procedures for pelagic processing plants has been agreed between Marine Scotland Compliance and the pelagic processing industry. This is essential to ensure widespread and total confidence in the pelagic monitoring and compliance regime.

The Scottish pelagic fleet also works closely with Food Standards Scotland and with local authorities to ensure the fleet is inspected in accordance with current hygiene legislation.

XIII. Optimising selectivity to promote conservation

Pelagic fishing by its very nature targets mid-water fish shoals and has very little impact on the seabed. Another feature of pelagic fisheries is that bycatch of non-target species is insignificant.

Cetacean bycatch has not been an issue within Scottish pelagic fisheries. This has been verified by studies carried out by SMRU, initially under a voluntary agreement, and now covered under regulation. Within the framework of Scottish pelagic fisheries, the methods of fishing and the natural habitat and characteristics of the target species mean that the incidental bycatch of other non target marine species is extremely rare ¹⁰.

The European pelagic industry has, and will continue to consider, how best to operate a total catch policy in order to mitigate discarding issues through fleet-wide measures.

A scheme already operates under the auspices of NPWG (Northern Pelagic Working Group) whereby any fishing vessel encountering unmarketable pelagic fish on the fishing grounds can communicate that information to the international fleet immediately and move on. Within the Vessel Operating Manual of the Scottish Pelagic Sustainability Group are instructions to the fleet on operating practices. This includes, the identification of shoals, pre-fishing sampling and guidelines for communication within the fleet in the event that small fish are encountered.

Slippage or high grading contradicts the whole ethic of the sustainable policy and has been prohibited since January 1st 2010 under control measures agreed by the Coastal States. Scottish pelagic vessels are required under the SPSG vessel operating manual to make every effort to avoid small undersized fish and do not carry grading equipment on board. From January 2015, all EU pelagic fleets are required to operate under the requirements of regional pelagic discard plans which will implement the landings obligation of the Common Fisheries Policy (1380/2013) across pelagic fisheries.

¹⁰. Protected Species Bycatch Monitoring in UK Pelagic Trawl Fisheries - A summary report for the Pelagic Advisory Council. / Kingston, Al; Northridge, Simon.

XIV. Conclusion

This “Sustainable Policy of the Scottish Pelagic Industry” lays out the current views of the whole industry and provides a statement of intent outlining a general policy and plan of conduct. The Scottish pelagic industry is committed to ensuring this policy is followed during all direct and indirect operations concerning the fishing, processing and business activities of all stakeholders to Scottish pelagic resources.

The Scottish Pelagic Sustainability Group will undertake to review this policy at regular intervals and will make this policy fully available and transparent to all parties within industry and to society in general.

The SPSG will welcome feedback and critical comment on this policy and will take into consideration any relevant suggestions received; amendments arising from such feedback will be published in the next review.

To submit any comments for review, please contact:

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