

Action Points to be brought to the next NIFF meeting from the SE RIFF meeting of the 17th July 2020

1.1 SE RIFF Proposal for the establishment of a Subgroup of NIFF to advise on the protection of the inshore fisheries sector with regard to offshore marine developments such as offshore energy (windfarms etc.).

The South East RIFF propose to the NIFF that a subgroup of the NIFF be established to examine a national perspective to protect the interests of the inshore fisheries sector with regard to offshore energy and other projects/developments (windfarm etc.). This is ever more vital today with displacement fears on fishers from the potential fallout from Brexit.

The subgroup would aim to;

1. Advise on policy to protect the inshore fisheries sector from marine based activities such as windfarms, oil and gas etc. that have the potential to reduce the ability of fishermen to earn a living due to the loss of fishing grounds or other harmful impacts on the grounds and fish species (e.g. survey techniques and construction of developments)
2. Ensure greater awareness and engagement by all relevant stakeholders including the fisheries sector, plus the relevant departments and agencies responsible for the management, licensing, safety and development of the inshore fisheries sector.
3. Promote publicly the positive contribution of the seafood sector to jobs and the wider economy, and counteract the negative view that wind energy renewable marine projects are better than fisheries etc. from an environmental sustainability perspective
4. Ensure adequate resources are in place to assist the inshore fisheries sector, who feel that they have neither the time or expertise to defend their livelihoods
5. Seek to obtain the establishment of and participate within a recognised structure that has oversight of the engagement process between such developers such as the wind farm industry, the relevant government departments and agencies (as mentioned in point 2. above) and ultimately those impacted on the ground (seafood sector – fisheries aquaculture and processing) and other relevant stakeholders.

This 'Oversight' structure is not intended to replace the planning process, but would work alongside to ensure;

- Uniformity of approach with regard to consultations with those impacted,
- Attempt to address key common issues to avoid the level of fear and mistrust that currently exists, saving time and energy for all sides, where the seafood sector currently feels under siege having to meet each developer separately with key issues outstanding that need a State response/overview
- Independent verification of data on the impacts of developments on fisheries (other than that supplied by the developers), and
- Give greater certainty to the fisheries sector on unintended impacts (such as effective exclusion zones) that may not be a requirement of a windfarm developer, but occur downstream due to for example safety concerns by the relevant responsible department.

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- Ultimately avoid a backlash that would be harmful to both the developers of such projects and the seafood sector and other stakeholders.

The subgroup could/should comprise members of;

- Industry representatives of NIFF
- If not adequately covered by the NIFF industry membership, members of the RIFFs that have a direct concern or/and experience of the issues
- DAFM and its agencies
- Invited other individuals with relevant expertise and/or direct concern (would not have to be permanent members)

The South East RIFF propose that the subgroup be established before the new legislation (Marine Planning and Development Bill 2020) is formally in place.