



[The Fisheries Development Scheme 2 (1973-1977)]

After the first 5-year period of involvement by the H.I.D.B. in the fishing industry, further proposals for a continuation of the Fisheries Development Scheme were submitted to the Secretary of State for Scotland in 1972, following publication of a study into the economic and social effects of the Board's involvement in fisheries. In January 1973 the Secretary of State approved the continuation of the schemes for the provision of fishing boats, as it was felt that these schemes made a very important contribution towards the development of the fishing industry in the Highlands.

In the second 5-year period up to April 1977 the H.I.D.B. were authorised to provide assistance to new owners for the purchase of 40 new boats between 40 and 80 feet, and loans to experienced fishermen for the purchase of up to 110 second-hand boats, and grant and loan assistance for the building of up to 110 shellfish/sea-angling boats.

The policy of the H.I.D.B. was to stimulate fishing activities in areas where it had not previously existed, to resuscitate fishing in places where fishing activity had run down, and to revive fleets where they failed to develop as they should have done. While the Board concentrated on the Outer Hebrides for the first programme, the second programme was more general but primarily aimed at Caithness and Orkney.

By this time the cost of boats escalated considerably, and the Board's interest rates had gone up. Also, the amount of grant assistance had reduced and three factors made viability of vessels operated by new entrants to the fishing industry very difficult.

The Board's assistance to Shetland was confined to islands that did not have a fishing tradition and that accounts for the small input to Shetland. The major input by the Board in the recognised fishing communities was by way of second-hand fishing boats. The S.F.I.A. did not assist with second-hand boats but assisted bona-fide fishermen in the Board area.

Participation by the local fleet in herring fishing in recent years is negligible. The herring-fishing ban of 1978 effectively spelt the end of the Hebridean herring fishing industry. The new Hebridean Minch fishery, dating from about 1960 concentrated mainly on prawns with a by-catch of whitefish.

As may be seen from the table, the level of landings of prawns in the 1980s was maintained at a high level, and prices were also good. The exceptionally high level of landings in 1987 can be attributed to favourable weather conditions which enabled the fishermen to increase the number of days by 20% compared to the previous year. There is also an even greater concentration of Western Isles trawler fleet on the Minch prawn fishing than was the case in 1980.

On the other hand landings of whitefish in Stornoway have declined steadily since 1980, and now the whitefish by-catch of the prawn trawlers is small and irregular. Fishermen maintain that the reason for the virtual disappearance of whitefish from the Minch is over fishing by large trawlers based on mainland ports. They claim the east coast trawlers based on Kinlochbervie freely admit that it is useless for them to fish for white fish in the Minch south of a line drawn from the Butt to Cape Wrath. Some fishermen also maintain that the commercial whiting-pout fishing did not help the fish stocks.

Landings of the main shellfish species by U.K. vessels in the Western Isles from 1980 to 1987 were as follows:

	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987
Nephrops	927	1360	1010	1344	1587	1722	1242	2080
Lobster	119	136	85	111	143	170	129	142
Edible Crabs	123	442	796	1021	969	1210	805	1297
Scallops	121	68	286	361	551	586	489	532
Velvet Crabs	-	-	-	-	160	136	187	481

(Weight is in tonnes. Source - Scottish Sea Fisheries Statistical Tables.)

The following table is of shellfish landings at each creek in the Western Isles from 1983 to 1986:

	1983	1984	1985	1986
1 Lochs	51	23	43	75

2	Stornoway	1441	1640	1583	1121
3	Portnaguran and Ness	109	84	78	59
4	Bernera - Lewis	380	360	433	349
5	North Harris	213	211	377	309
6	Scalpay	3	6	4	3
7	South Harris	81	103	78	44
8	Bernera - North Uist	24	37	29	33
9	North Uist	149	211	268	221
10	Grimsay	121	101	35	72
11	Benbecula	37	57	47	51
12	South Uist and Eriskay	159	470	411	221
13	Barra	376	524	707	550
	Total	3081.3	4127.8	5102.8	4567.8

(Weight is in tonnes. Source - Scottish Sea Fisheries Statistical Tables.)

The fishing plan of the Western Isles Islands Council, originally produced in 1979/1980, and updated in 1988, provides a great deal of information on the Minch fishery in recent years. It makes the point that the most significant diversification and expansion of effort in recent years has taken place in the creel sector, which in 1987 accounted for landings worth 3.6 million pounds, or 40% of the total value of landings in the Western Isles. There has been strong market demand for shellfish in recent years. There is also a seasonal sand eel fishery developing since 1980.

The fishery plan also makes the point that Western Isles vessels only accounted for a very small proportion of the total catches taken in West of Scotland waters, and that there is potential for Western Isles vessels to increase their fishing activities. They operate at present largely in the coastal waters close to the Islands.

The Western Isles fishery plan maintains that the key issue is the need for investment in the fleet in view of the continuing decline in its capacity and efficiency, which is largely a reflection of its age. Lack of investment will inevitably lead to further contraction of the Hebridean fleet. The fishery plan goes on to say that the licensing regime is increasingly restrictive and therefore fishing opportunities are at a premium. In the circumstances any loss of fishing capacity is likely to be permanent.

The Sea Fish Industry Authority (S.F.I.A.) is the statutory body for financial assistance for the fishing industry, and the H.I.D.B. operates in conjunction with the Authority, but they have financial restraints. Moreover, it is the E.E.C.'s policy not to enlarge the fishing fleet, rather would they prefer to reduce the number of boats, and because of that it is not likely that the E.E.C. or the British Government will provide money to extend the fleet.

The cost of new fishing boats is a serious impediment to young men seeking to acquire their first vessel at present. Also the difficulty of finding the 30% deposit is formidable. There is therefore the danger that the fishing fleet in the Hebrides at least might slip back to the position that existed thirty years ago. The average age structure of the Hebridean fleet in 1984 was over 20 years, and the first new vessel over 40 feet to join the Hebridean fleet since 1970 was in 1986.

E.E.C. policy seems to be to restrict the financial assistance for new fishing vessels as well as to restrict the sale of second-hand fishing vessels to buyer's outwith the fishing industry.

There is a school of thought that maintains that the Hebridean fishing fleet needs restructuring in order to enable the fishermen to diversify, and take advantage of the lucrative fishing off the west coast of the Hebrides and other deep-sea areas. Large modern expensive vessels are needed in order to participate in deep-sea fishing and the dilemma is that deep-sea fishing is already over fished at present, and because of that there are restrictions imposed from which the local in-shore fishing fleet suffer in the same way as the larger vessels that are guilty of over fishing the deep-sea fisheries. In that way the long term prospects for the Hebridean fishery is not very bright at present.

It was fishing that sustained crofting in the last two centuries in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland. Crofting is a way of life, and the part-time agricultural element in crofting cannot support a viable population without ancillary or additional employment. Depopulation has already made serious inroads into many communities in the area. Let us hope that the authorities will learn from the history of the fishing industry and endeavour to create conditions that will enable the vulnerable communities in the Highlands and Islands to work the natural resource of fish on their doorstep.

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