



# Women in Scottish Fisheries: A literature review on experiences, challenges and opportunities for women working in the Scottish fishing industry



**AGRICULTURE, ENVIRONMENT AND MARINE**

## Women in Scottish Fisheries

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Figure 1 Women in Scottish Seafood Processing. Copyright Seafish:  
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Katja Hržić  
Marine Analytical Unit

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## Executive Summary

This report presents findings from a review of research literature, case studies and examples of good practice from Scotland and beyond, alongside existing government strategies, to provide insights into challenges and opportunities presented for women in Scottish fishing industry and fishing communities. It also considers what other characteristics, alongside gender, contribute to inequality in fisheries to emphasise the need for an intersectional approach.

The key findings from the report are set out below:

- Women in Scottish fisheries make significant contributions to the wellbeing and successes of local communities and the fishing industry through their paid and unpaid labour. Women are mostly employed in onshore roles such as administration and seafood processing. They are also responsible for domestic work and childcare. Their work is often undervalued and underappreciated because it is informal and less visible, but essential nonetheless. Therefore, there is a strong need to acknowledge, appraise, and highlight their contributions.
- Women are underrepresented in offshore and senior leadership positions in fisheries. Fisheries are culturally represented and imagined as male-dominated, which can discourage women from entry. There are also reports of sexist attitudes, behaviour and language. These issues have to be addressed by creating and promoting a culture of equality, specifically an industry safe, fair, and accessible to women and people from other underrepresented categories.
- Across society, women have been disproportionately affected by the Covid-19 pandemic by undertaking additional caring responsibilities, putting their careers on hold, and taking on ad-hoc work in communities and family businesses. Fisheries are no different, so it is important to consider women when developing projects to support fishing communities recovering from Covid-19.
- There is a lack of evidence and data on women in fisheries for a number of reasons, and steps are needed to improve this.
- Women face a range of practical, socio-economic and cultural challenges ranging from access to training, appropriate equipment and clothing, and associated safety issues, lack of vessel and quota ownership, unequal pay, caring responsibilities (where the lack of available childcare in rural areas limits their ability to participate in certain fishing activities), cultural assumptions about women's roles and identities within the fishing industry, and perceptions of what a successful industry looks like.

- Gender intersects with other factors such as nationality, race, age, class and disability which need to be accounted for in any discussion of inequality.
- The report draws on evidence and case studies from other places and other industries to suggest possible approaches that might help to enable more equal treatment and participation by women in fishing.
- There is a need to work with women in Scottish fisheries to establish priorities and projects which can best support them.
- Working to create equitable, safe and sustainable fisheries through engaging with underrepresented members within the industry can improve the resilience of the industry as a whole and make it a more lucrative career choice.

## Note on Key terms

**Fishing communities:** This report refers to fisheries, by which it means both the fishing industry explicitly (catch, processing, sales), and fishing communities more broadly. This is particularly important because women's contributions to fisheries often fall outside of the scope of formal employment in the industry (Frangoudes and Gerrard, 2018).

Defra (2021) defines and maps fishing communities as those which indicate a significant reliance on fishing based on available economic metrics and/or social characteristics. Brookfield et al. (2005) similarly define fishing dependent communities as "a population in a specific territorial location which relies upon the fishing industry for its economic, social and cultural survival". Meanwhile Ross (2015) argues that due to the mobile nature of fishing, fishing communities are bound more by common values like empathy with those involved in fishing, the value of freedom and autonomy and a closing of ranks against "external spectres of 'policy', 'science', and 'the public'" (p309), than by geography alone, indicating similarities between fisheries on a national and international scale.

**Intersectionality:** This report specifically addresses the situation of women in fisheries, because previous research has underlined that gender equality is an issue within the industry that needs to be prioritised (Gustavsson, 2019). It is important, however, to make an explicit connection to the broader equalities issues in fisheries. In fisheries and beyond, experiences of inequality intersect gender, race, sexual orientation, class, etc (Crenshaw, 2017). Section 6 of this reports addresses the importance of an intersectional approach to equalities amongst women and in fisheries more broadly.

## **1. Introduction**

This report is the product of a literature review on women in fisheries undertaken as part of a 13 week internship with Marine Scotland. Its findings underline the importance of acknowledging the existing presence of women across the industry and considering how creating a more attractive and supportive environment for women, more attuned to safety and work-life balance, might direct us towards achieving a more equitable, and sustainable industry overall. Women have participated in Scottish fisheries throughout history, playing various important yet underappreciated roles in an apparently male-dominated industry. Recent studies and reports point towards the need to recognise existing contributions of women in fishing communities, and the importance of creating a more equitable culture which could make the industry a safe, fair workplace for women who wish to enter it (Women-Fisheries, 2020; Gustavsson, 2019; Watch, 2020).

In order to seek ways in which women who wish to pursue a career in fisheries can be better supported, this report synthesises recent research by undertaking a literature review on the topic. By looking at case studies and examples of good practice from Scotland and beyond, alongside existing government strategies, the report provides insights into challenges and opportunities presented for women in the Scottish fishing industry and fishing communities. Furthermore, it considers what other characteristics, alongside gender, contribute to inequality in fisheries to emphasise the need for an intersectional approach.

## **2. Methodology**

The project comprised of a review of literature, government documentation, and research reports. It began in September 2021 with informal discussions with colleagues in Marine Scotland, DEFRA, Seafish and across the Scottish Government which helped to ascertain priorities and finalise decisions regarding the scope of the project. The following research questions were constructed:

- What are the perceived and lived challenges for women in Scottish fisheries?
- What opportunities have supported women in fishing communities in Scotland and beyond?
- Women are not a homogenous category – therefore, how do other intersectional factors contribute to the experiences of women in fisheries?

Following this, the in-house library was used to produce relevant literature searches. Literature suggested by the library was triangulated with additional literature searches through public engines (Google Scholar, SCOPUS) and with a discussion with colleagues to ensure the review covered a comprehensive range of literature and relevant reports. Due to a lack of literature focusing specifically on

women in Scottish fisheries, this overview includes literature on women in fisheries across the UK, elsewhere in Europe and in North America, as well as literature and reports on women in Scottish agriculture and other professions where women are underrepresented. In the literature review there was an attempt to be systematic (Denyer and Tranfield, 2009) and follow the process of:

1. Locating existing studies
2. Selecting and evaluating contributions
3. Analysing and synthesising data
4. Reporting findings in a way that addresses the posed questions
5. Identifying evidence gaps and areas for further research.

However, a large number of sources identified through literature searches and high variability in their relevance to the context of Scottish fisheries meant that some aspects of the review were subjective and guided by a critical assessment of the literature with the aim of finding the most updated and relevant information on the topic (Boell and Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2016).

Due to time constraints no new primary data was gathered over the course of the project, therefore future work on the topic should strive to engage more directly with women in fisheries and fishing communities to enable better nuance and further analysis of the Scottish context.

### **3. Current Context**

Tackling inequality is a top priority for Scottish Ministers and the theme is evident across much of the Scottish Government's work, such as the current Programme for Government and the National Performance Framework. Women in fisheries are not explicitly included in these papers, however, Scotland's Fisheries Management Strategy 2020-2030<sup>1</sup> supplements this by underlining the need to promote involvement across equalities groups in fisheries and fishing communities.

Employment in the fishing fleet surveys show that women are rarely involved in offshore fisheries work, but often undertake onshore work in administration and seafood processing. Conversations with surveyors indicate that women may be underrepresented through these surveys because there are no explicit questions about onshore employment in firms, which may disproportionately obscure the involvement of women. The value of unpaid work by women in fisheries is difficult

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<sup>1</sup> [Future fisheries: management strategy - 2020 to 2030 - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/future-fisheries-management-strategy-2020-to-2030/pages/1-introduction.aspx)



to quantify so it is absent from most statistical reports. This highlights the need for further evidence.

This section outlines existing policies and reports which describe the present situation of women in fisheries in Scotland. It begins by situating the topic within the current Programme for Government (ScotGov, 2021), the National Performance Framework (ScotGov, 2021) and Scotland's Future Fisheries Management Strategy (ScotGov, 2020), which emphasise the need for equality, fairness and sustainability in marine and agricultural sectors. It follows by summarising relevant statistics from Seafish fleet employment surveys (2018; 2021) and draws on reports from most recent UK studies on women in fisheries produced by Defra (2010) and Gustavsson et al (2020) respectively.

### **Policy and legislative context**

The 2010 Equalities Act provides the broader legislative framework for achieving a more equal and equitable society which is as central to the work of Scottish Government. The recently published "A fairer, greener Scotland, programme for government (2021-2022)" builds on this, specifically in relation to rural economy and food production.

The Programme for Government highlights the importance of supporting women in agriculture, through training opportunities, access to land, and improved rural childcare facilities. It does not explicitly discuss women in fisheries, but it does emphasise the need to create a strong marine economy, sustainable aquaculture, and develop a strategy for seafood. While the explicit link may be absent, the two topics are closely interconnected, and literature suggests that jointly addressing equality and sustainability can be a productive way of improving the industry on the whole (Gustavsson, 2020). Even though some needs of women in agriculture and fisheries intersect, including fisheries and coastal communities more explicitly in future government frameworks would ensure their specific needs are addressed.

Equalities in fisheries are discussed in "Scotland's Fisheries Management Strategy (SFFMS) 2020-2030 (2020) Equality Impact Assessment". This key document acknowledges that the role of women in fisheries is significant but often underappreciated. A key aim of the strategy is to "seek to recognise the important role that all parts of society make to the fishing industry, and to promote involvement across all genders and equalities groups in a positive and inclusive way" (SFFMS, 2020: 18). More broadly, equality is a key priority of Scotland's National Performance Framework (2021) which promotes "reducing inequalities and giving equal importance to economic, environmental and social progress". Again, fisheries are not directly discussed. However, achieving the goal of "quality

jobs and fair work for everyone” (2021) in fishing communities directly translates to supporting women and providing them with opportunities and skills in equal measure to their male counterparts.

These overarching aims can push the fishing industry towards creating better conditions for women considering a career in fisheries and those already working in the sector if appropriate actions are taken in practice.

### Summary of recent reports

Quantitative data on employment in the sector is gathered through Seafish surveys. Qualitative information is gathered through various research projects, such as “Women-Fisheries” (2019) and DEFRA’s “Women in Fisheries” (2010). They are all UK-wide and little data specific to Scotland are available, highlighting an evidence gap for both quantitative and qualitative data in the Scottish context. Existing data show a stark contrast between representation of women in onshore and offshore employment (figures 1 and 2).

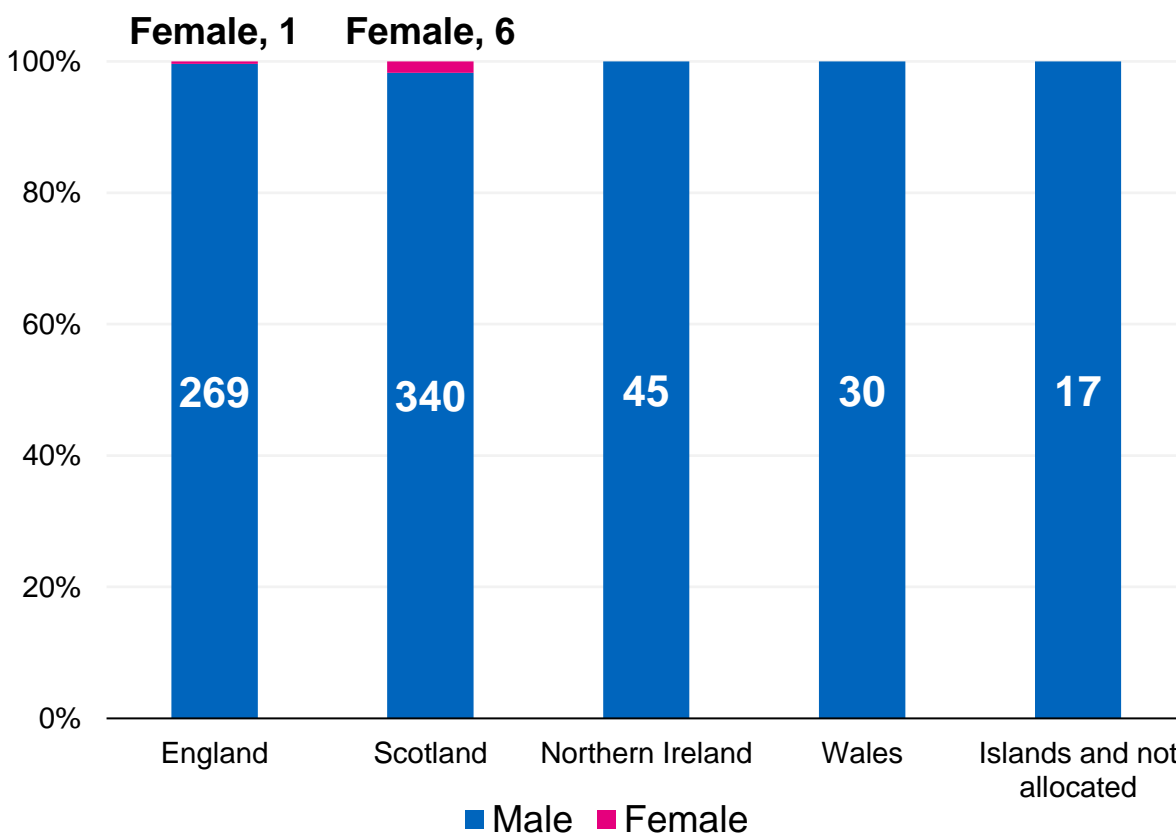


Figure 2 Bar chart of gender of employees in in the UK Catch Sector in England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales in 2018 shows very small number of female employees to male; Seafish Employment in the UK Fishing Fleet report 2018.

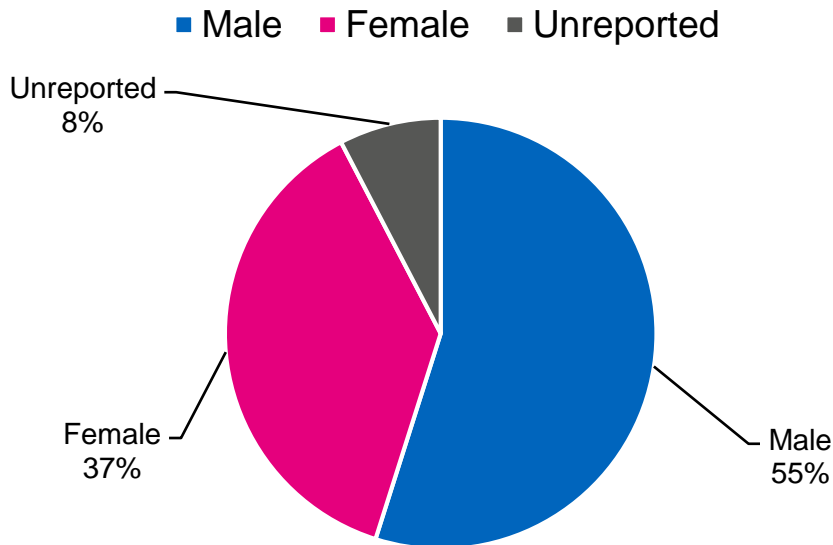


Figure 3 Pie chart of gender of employees in Scottish seafood processing in 2021 shows women make up just over one third of employees. Produced through Seafish' Tableau Public at [Processing Enquiry Tool | Tableau Public](#).

Out of 707 fisheries employers surveyed in the “2018 Employment in the UK fishing fleet survey” (Seafish, 2018), there was one female deckhand, 4 women in onshore positions and 2 women vessel owners, equating to approximately 1% of the surveyed fisheries workers (down from 2% in 2017, but no Scotland-specific data available)<sup>2</sup>. Through a conversation accompanying this project, Seafish have noted that women could be underrepresented through the surveying process as surveyed skippers have tended to under report onshore staff who are more likely to be women. The percentage of women working in fisheries would likely be higher if a survey specific to onshore work was conducted. For instance, the data from the Seafish (2021) survey of employment suggest that 37.5% of employees in Scottish seafood processing are women. Similar data for fishing firms and fisheries organisations would be useful to capture women employed in administration, sales, and leadership work. Following a comprehensive study of women in UK fisheries, Gustavsson et al (2020) estimate that approximately 15% of workers in fisheries overall are female.

Focusing primarily on England (with a few Scottish respondents) DEFRA’s “Women in Fisheries” project report (2010) echoes many of these statistics. Though somewhat dated, it is useful for its breakdown of women’s involvement in different

<sup>2</sup> Data for 2021 was not available at the time this report was written.

parts of the sector. It highlights that whether working on vessels or in administration, women often feel they have to work twice as hard as men to gain respect in the industry and are often neglected in policy discussions even though they have opinions and ideas to contribute.

The idea of fishers as male, and the term “fisherman” itself, are still widely used and scarcely challenged. Existing policy directives, alongside recent research (Gustavsson et al, 2020) urge us to consider and contest the perception of fisheries as a male dominated industry by looking at the current situation of women’s employment in the sector, paying attention to their contributions; paid and unpaid, offshore and onshore. The “Women-Fisheries” (2020) project describes how women’s work is often less visible as it takes place onshore, in catch processing, sales, and administration (Pettersen, 2019). Through the years, reports show that women in the UK and beyond are significantly involved in fisheries and undertake much of the unpaid work in fishing communities, such as net mending, childcare, homemaking, and other community-oriented labour (Watch, 2020; Power, 2000). The tendency of their work to be domestic and mostly taking place onshore can lead to economic inequalities within families and communities where men, as “fishermen”, are often representing the fishing industry in more formal reports and statistics. It is important to consider how this discrepancy between the formalised employment of men and the tendency of women to have more informal, unpaid contributions might lead to other social inequalities, through men having greater control over finances and more decision making power both within the industry and in fishing communities more generally.

## Covid-19

Women’s experiences of employment in fisheries should be contextualised within current broader changes in the Scottish fishing industry affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, and by Brexit. These developments brought on challenges in the employment process for non-UK fishers, increased health and safety concerns, changed food production and processing chains, and altered the demands of the international seafood market (Ruiz-Salmon et al, 2021).

The challenges brought on to fisheries by Covid-19 make it all the more pertinent to enact changes in accordance with the Scottish Fisheries Management Strategy (SFFMS) which states that “We will promote fishing as an attractive and safe career of choice, with a focus on improving safety standards, fair work, supporting new entrants into the sector, and equal treatment regardless of national origin or gender.” (p26, 2020). Studies have shown that women have been disproportionately affected during the period of Covid-19 restrictions, often taking

on a majority of additional childcare and other caring responsibilities alongside their jobs (Alon et al, 2020; Richardson and Denis, 2020).

As fisheries and the provision of seafood constitutes essential work, women who have continued to work, or those whose spouses are fishers, have had to take on additional responsibilities at a very difficult time (Alon et al, 2020). In cases of furlough, women’s work in fisheries is more often irregular and informal, so it is possible some have missed out on furlough compensation. Research has shown that women often take on caring responsibilities as well as the responsibilities of providing supplemental income through casual employment in times of crisis (e.g. financial, health), leading them to put their careers on hold (Maneschy and Alvares, 2005).

More specific information on how women in Scottish Fisheries have been impacted through the pandemic would be beneficial when deciding on future actions.

#### 4. Challenges

The previous section demonstrated that women are an underrepresented and often under-appreciated group in fisheries. Current research indicates that women in fisheries and fishing communities face practical, socio-economic and cultural challenges, however, there is significant interest from top-level government and industry actors in improving the situation indicated from reports summarised above. The table below presents a brief overview of challenges which are discussed in greater depth in the rest of the section.

**Table 1: Challenges for women and steps for improvement**

Challenge	Steps for improvement
<b>Training/skills gap</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Identify what training women in fisheries need and wish to attend (e.g. practical skills related to fishing, safety, leadership, careers guidance).</li> <li>- Create opportunities for introducing careers in fishing and associated skills to people of all genders (e.g. in schools).</li> <li>- Develop training opportunities, ensure they are accessible through consultation with women (financially, practically).</li> <li>- Evaluate the success of any training opportunities.</li> </ul>

<p><b>Equipment and safety issues</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Assess the safety and accessibility of current equipment used in fishing and seafood processing.</li> <li>- Consult with industry and manufacturers on possible adjustments to equipment production (easier for things like clothing than changing heavy machinery).</li> <li>- Implement regulations that require provision of equipment suitable for the worker.</li> <li>- Prioritise safety in the industry overall.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Inadequate (rural) childcare provisions</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Identify specific needs of local communities.</li> <li>- Work with communities and existing childcare providers to improve access to childcare (e.g. seasonally flexible hours, transport, financial support, qualifications in childcare).</li> <li>- Develop alternative solutions (e.g. childcare cooperatives).</li> <li>- Address other caring responsibilities.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Succession and vessel ownership</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Encourage shared vessel and business ownership in families where both partners contribute to work related to fishing.</li> <li>- Challenge the norm where male descendants inherit family businesses.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Equal pay</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Gather data on the gender pay gap in the industry in Scotland.</li> <li>- Implement regulations on equal pay across the sector.</li> <li>- Increase pay and respectability of onshore work.</li> <li>- Develop a formal recognition of unpaid work in fisheries (see case study in section 5).</li> </ul>
<p><b>Gap in knowledge</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Undertake research into Scottish fisheries to gain accurate data about the work undertaken by women in the industry and community which centres on the perspectives of these women.</li> <li>- Create spaces where the voices of women and other marginalised groups are prioritised and where women can express their opinions and knowledge about the industry.</li> </ul>

<b>Work-life balance</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Assess the reasons why work-life balance is worse in fisheries than in most other industries in Scotland through consultation with skippers and industry representatives.</li> <li>- Introduce minimum measures for work-life balance in different fragments of the industry.</li> </ul>
<b>Invisibility and representation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ensure images in government outputs more accurately represent the diversity of current workers in fisheries and put more emphasis on onshore work in discussions surrounding fisheries.</li> <li>- Recognise and highlight the work of women in the industry to develop a positive fishing identity for women.</li> <li>- Develop mentorship schemes and networks between established women in the industry and new/potential entrants.</li> <li>- Use the gender-neutral word “fisher” in government outputs and encourage the use of the word externally.</li> </ul>
<b>Perceptions of the industry</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Identify perceptions of the industry held by women and other underrepresented groups in coastal communities</li> <li>- Asses to what extent perceptions are factual or imagined.</li> <li>- Challenge imagined false perceptions.</li> <li>- Address real perceptions (e.g. improve safety issues).</li> </ul>
<b>Broadening of career options for women in coastal communities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Provide training to work in other fields that are more lucrative, less dangerous. Including those that provide food security (e.g. aquaculture).</li> <li>- Facilitate inclusion in fishing and training provision across the sector.</li> </ul>

Women in fishing communities face challenges on several levels; challenges to entry into the industry, challenges to progression within it, and challenges in achieving equality within the industry. Specifically, women take on few leadership roles, they are less likely to inherit family businesses and vessels and are less likely to obtain skills related to fishing while growing up (Bennet et al, 2021).

Following a review of the most frequently emerging themes, they are divided into practical, socio-economic, and cultural. When considering these challenges, it is important to keep in mind that increasing the participation of women in fisheries employment will not directly lead to a better standing of women in fisheries

(Inbetween and Schmitt, 2004). Setting gender quotas and increasing awareness of work opportunities in fisheries to women can be productive, but may not immediately reduce sexist attitudes, behaviour or language, the gender pay gap, nor does it challenge a culture where a woman on a boat is still sometimes considered “bad luck” (Zhao et al, 2013). Rather, efforts have to be made to improve the situation on the whole. While some challenges can be addressed individually, they must be accompanied by a broader effort towards equality in the industry.

## Practical challenges

**Training provision:** Much of the learning in fishing communities is intergenerational and is oriented towards male descendants in fishing families who are encouraged to spend time on vessels from an early age, learning the skills required to operate the vessel and operate a fishery (Bennet et al, 2021). Women are less likely to experience this training in their youth, either due to a lack of interest or gender-based social factors, and would therefore benefit from further training opportunities. While limited training exists through college courses, apprenticeships, and short courses (e.g. Safety at Sea), these are geographically restricted to certain towns and offer little promise for future employment. Specifically, people undertaking these courses will be at the mercy of skippers, many of whom have noted that there is a reluctance to hire female fishers (Zhao et al, 2013, Northern England case study). This is most significant when entering offshore work which requires a myriad of practical skills and is often perceived as “dirty and dangerous” (Zhao et al, 2013). Nonetheless, providing more training opportunities across the sector would enable women access to the industry and better progression opportunities. Specifically, training for the work women already undertake may be useful. Ahead of developing any training opportunities, it is important that women themselves are consulted to assess what training they would most like to take on and how to make them accessible to them. Training provisions are currently being developed through Defra’s UK Seafood fund (UK Gov, 2021), but it is essential to ensure that these are relevant, accessible and promoted to women (e.g. to fit around childcare commitments).

**Appropriate equipment:** Most fishing equipment, from fishing gear, design of vessels, to toilets and clothing, has been developed with male fishers in mind. The consequences of this for women in fisheries range from inconvenience (e.g. incorrectly sized clothing) to danger, as certain equipment may be too heavy for safe use by smaller people (Women in Agriculture Taskforce, 2019). Manufacturers should be encouraged to develop a wider range of clothing sizes and equipment that is safe to use by women, an issue echoed in the Women in Aquaculture consultation (WiSA, 2021). Provision of toilets on board is also an issue



continuously cited in various sources. In practice, male fishers often urinate into the sea, while women use buckets “in the engine room” (Zhao et al, 2013), which is a big factor making offshore work less attractive to women. There is a clear need for better regulations for sanitary provisions aboard vessels to address this issue and funds would be needed to support this.

**Safety:** Fishing is dangerous work which is a strong factor deterring people from entering the industry (Gustavsson et al, 2019). Somewhat dated reports suggest that crew on UK fishing vessels are 115 times more likely to die at work than the average UK worker, a rate 24 times higher than in construction industry (Roberts and Williams in McCall Howard, 2017). Recent reports from the UK Health and Safety Executive (2021) consistently cite “agriculture, forestry and fishing” as the most dangerous occupations for loss of life or limb. A safer working environment, with updated equipment and the use of the best available technology to reduce potential for accidents, could make the industry more attractive to new entrants, including women. This is an increasingly significant challenge as some skippers undertake dangerous outings in poor conditions with underserviced vessels to cut costs in response to changes in regulations and loss of fish stocks in certain areas (McCall Howard, 2017). Irrespective of gender, addressing this is already a priority integrated in broader policy and regulation changes in the industry, demonstrated in the development of The Scottish Fishing Safety Group in 2019 (SFFMS, 2020). Safer options for seafood production (e.g. aquaculture, seaweed farming) can also be considered as viable options for desirable employment. Groups such as Scottish Women in Aquaculture may be effective in ensuring jobs in these sectors are accessible and inclusive to women.

**Challenges to research:** Methodological literature discusses difficulties in accessing female research participants in studies of the fishing industry and fishing communities (Gustavsson, 2021). There are several reasons for this, such as difficulties in accessing participants for studies, a small overall sample size, and difficulties protecting anonymity of those who do participate in smaller-scale studies. Research reports also indicate that it is often men who are asked to discuss issues as they are better represented in industry associations (Salmi and Sonck Rautio, 2018). Cultural factors mean that women often allow men to speak when families are interviewed together, even though they express their own opinions and wide knowledge of the sector when interviewed on their own (Ross, 2021). In line with previous recommendations, efforts should be made to close quantitative and qualitative evidence gaps on women in Scottish fisheries through engaging directly with women.

## Socio-economic challenges

**Quota and vessel ownership:** Male members of the community tend to inherit fishing quotas, vessels and businesses, while women tend to be encouraged to pursue education or non-fisheries work (Gerrard, 2008). This leads to inequalities in access to business capital. Similar research in agriculture has shown that the norm whereby sons inherit land is scarcely challenged and discussed, but in agriculture the calls for a shift in inheritance patterns seem to be louder than in fisheries (Women in Agriculture Taskforce, 2019). This is a difficult subject to breach for actors external to families and communities and may be best addressed through cultural shifts discussed later in this section.

**Gender pay gap:** Closing the gender pay gap is a government priority addressed in “A Fairer Scotland for Women: Gender Pay Gap Action Plan” (2019). Data on the gender pay gap in Scottish fisheries is limited, but there are indications from qualitative research that pay disparities exist in the sector in the UK (“Women-Fisheries”, 2020). More specifically, somewhat dated data from 2003 suggest that women in UK fisheries consistently earn about 70% of what men make across processing and aquaculture (in Zhao et al, 2013). The gender pay gap must firstly be assessed, then addressed by paying close attention to differentials between onshore and offshore work, as the latter is more likely to be undertaken by women. Furthermore, much of women’s work in fishing communities is unpaid, an issue which must be better assessed through further inquiries.

**Childcare and work-life balance:** Childcare provisions in some rural areas are lacking and there is a general lack of free childcare for young children under 3 in the UK (Gustavsson, 2020). This is an issue disproportionately affecting rural areas, as only 11% of rural local authorities in Scotland reported that they have sufficient capacity for childcare (Family and Childcare Trust, 2018). Insufficient provisions and costs of childcare often mean that women are stopped from entering or re-entering the workforce once they have had children. This is no different for fisheries, and is particularly true for offshore work that requires working outside of traditional working hours. Fishing often takes place around the clock, either through multi-day outings, or through early starts and late night finishes with unpredictable times of landing (McCall Howard, 2017). Not only does this impact those working aboard vessels, but also some supporting activities, such as sales and food processing. To address this, specific needs of communities need to be identified on a local and national scale. A similar inquiry has been done by the Women in Agriculture taskforce, where participants identified specific practical needs such as seasonally flexible hours, transport provisions, financial support, and better provision for qualifications in childcare for rural residents who do not live near a college. Furthermore, caring responsibilities for the elderly should be acknowledged

and addressed through similar consultations. In general, there is a need to balance more flexible childcare provisions in fishing communities with a move towards better work-life balance within fisheries in general, where possible.

## Cultural challenges

**Invisibility:** Many women work in fisheries, especially in food processing and administration, however their work is often under acknowledged and underappreciated relative to the work of those who catch the fish (Frangoudes and Gerrard, 2018; Zhao et al, 2013). Methodologies behind reports on employment in fisheries tend to underrepresent women as the work women traditionally do is not always considered “fishing” – even if their work is crucial to the running of the business and selling fish. Projects such as “Women in Aquaculture” (ScotGov, 2020; see case study in section 5.) which promote the work of women in fisheries, provide a space for them to connect with each other, and gives them a voice through consultations can serve to make visible the work women already undertake in fisheries, and in turn encourage more women to join the industry. It is important to note, however, that these community groups are not panaceas as each community presents specific internal dynamics.

**Representation and the need for a “positive fishing identity” for women:** Gustavsson (2019) discusses how the idea of a strong, successful male fisherman is well developed socially, but is heavily gendered and does not directly transpose to women’s experiences in fishing communities. Summarising previous research, she notes that women have often highlighted their roles as mothers, caregivers, and providers for the community as significant for their fishing identity. These ideas are often not sufficiently represented in discourse and policy, and there is a lack of role-models and mentoring opportunities. This can be addressed in a similar way as “Invisibility” above.

**Perceptions of the industry:** The image of a male “fisherman”, public perceptions of fisheries as an unsustainable, difficult and not financially lucrative means that they are unlikely to attract new entrants from outside of fishing communities (Zhao et al, 2013). Some of these preconceptions are accurate (e.g. see HSE statistics under “Safety”), so they should be evaluated and addressed before creating opportunities for new entrants. It is important to acknowledge **women’s agency** in deciding to take up work in fisheries or not, and in deciding how involved they want to be at different levels of management and decision making. The challenge is to ensure women are not prevented from entering the industry due to practical or cultural factors, but it is also pertinent to create other attractive, fair work opportunities in fishing communities, so women’s involvement in fisheries is by choice, not necessity.

Mentorship schemes and networks can begin to address these cultural challenges, but overall cultural change is difficult to achieve. While cultural changes related to gender roles can appear urgent from the outside, and some of these challenges are highly problematic, it is important to remember that traditional fishing communities are often proudly independent and resistant to external regulations, which can make it difficult to enact sudden changes from the outside (Ross, 2017).

## Language and representation

It is worth noting that the language used to describe people who fish has been changing. Increasingly, especially in European contexts, the word “fisher” is substituting the previously almost universal use of the word “fishermen”, usually with the aim of inclusivity. While a small practical change, this transition asks for a big cultural shift in the mindsets of many people involved in fisheries. The linguistic transition has been somewhat smooth in managerial and academic contexts, but the cultural and everyday use of language is slower to adapt to this change. It is also important to acknowledge the views of some prominent female fishers who prefer to be called “fishermen” (Telegraph, 2022). Branch and Kleiber (2015) state that language used in fisheries comes “loaded with history and meaning that can simultaneously be interpreted as terms of inclusion and validation, or exclusion and disrespect depending on the context” (Branch and Kleiber, 2015: 126). They urge us to respect the language people use to describe themselves and their own work, while understanding that their choice of words takes place in a social context which undervalues women’s labour. This report uses the word “fisher” to refer to all people who fish with the intention of avoiding “gendering” the subjects and thus excluding certain groups of people, and to encourage inclusivity in the sector – through language.

## 5. Opportunities and Case Studies

This section introduces three ambitious yet realistic projects that could be first steps towards achieving a greater cultural shift away from underrepresentation of women in Scottish fisheries:

- Research into the experience of women in Scottish fisheries, specifically local-level research focusing on women, akin to the Scottish Government project on Women in Agriculture.
- Formal recognition of women’s contributions that would give security and benefits to fishing spouses and other people not formally employed in fisheries who provide support to the industry

- Better representation and positive role models through mentorship and networking opportunities. For instance, through a Scottish umbrella group for women in fisheries and fishing communities which would amplify their voices.

It is pertinent to now explore how some of the challenges outlined in the previous section could be addressed. This section looks beyond fisheries and beyond Scotland to consider how other comparable industries and countries are attempting to tackle issues around gender inequality, increase the recognition of women's work and seek to make employment more inclusive.

## Learning From Women's Experiences

Comprehensive insight into the experiences of women in the industry is necessary to ensure that any future regulations of projects to support them respond to the actual needs. Reports such as this one can identify key issues across the sector and indicate direction, but they cannot give definitive guidance on future steps. Looking at an internal example of a Scottish Government project which looks to improve the standing of women in agriculture through evidence gathering (interviews, consultations), piloting support projects and trainings, and evaluation, is helpful in imagining what a similar project on women in fisheries may entail.

### **Case Study: Scottish Government Women in Agriculture Project (2017, ongoing)**

In 2017 the Scottish Government commissioned research into challenges faced by women in agriculture. The Women in Agriculture Taskforce published a report with a series of recommendations in 2019. These reports produced a series of specific recommendations and action points related to: leadership, training, rural childcare provision, succession, new entrants, health and safety, and the establishment of the Equality Charter for Scottish Agriculture.

Work on the project, which includes research training needs, consultations, research into needs of agricultural families, the "Be your Best Self" leadership training and unconscious bias training have continued to be undertaken and evaluated. Initial evaluation points to evidence of positive changes for women following skills-training and networking. They have resulted in reported increases in confidence, gaining practical knowledge and strengthened identities and aspirations. Results have also emphasised that there are strong connections between challenges experienced by women in agriculture and other issues facing rural communities, and shown that cultural attitudes and structural limitations (e.g. childcare) are significant factors in their lives.

While not all of the recommended action points have proven to be successful through the evaluation process (e.g. unconscious bias training has had limited success), this comprehensive approach which includes surveys, consultations, in-depth interviews, and rigorous continuous evaluation has been impactful in producing practical solutions to some challenges and supporting a broader socio-cultural shift for women in agriculture. Some of the project's points may be directly applicable to experiences of women in fisheries, however this project did not include fishing in its scope, therefore a similar comprehensive project on women (and other marginalised groups) in fishing and coastal communities may be similarly effective in guiding the direction for change in collaboration with women and community members themselves.

### **Formal Recognition of Women's Contributions**

Women already undertake a significant amount of work in fisheries, and even more work in wider fishing communities. They are more likely to be taking on caring responsibilities, doing ad-hoc or unpaid jobs around fisheries (e.g. book-keeping, net mending) and work for supplemental income when crises hit (Maneschy and Alvares, 2005). They take on many of the burdens, but often have an insecure status in terms of financial security and benefits. Attempting to shift the culture towards one where spouses share the benefits through joined business ownership could give women more security. A case study from France exemplifies one way in which the status of women in fishing families could be formalised.

#### **Case Study: Collaborative spouse status, France (Frangoudes and Keromnes, 2008)**

Many women in France who are married to fishermen undertake work such as selling fish, accounting, and occasional work aboard vessels. Despite this, they are not usually employed in their partner's businesses, so their work is not formally recognised and they do not qualify for any benefits or compensations. To address this, a new system requires women who undertake any type of work in artisanal fisheries to register for one of the following statuses, depending on the nature of their involvement: employee, enterprise associate or collaborative spouse. This allows them to access benefits such as maternity leave, personalised pension funds, right to training, and enables them to run for representation in industry bodies. It also provides some protection to women in cases of conflict or divorce.

This format has some drawbacks and challenges. After a trial period, this type of formalisation became mandatory, placing a lot of pressure on families to discuss and formalise the role of fisher's spouses. As often the case with new regulations, there were difficulties in spreading awareness about the application process, so



many found themselves in breach of regulations. Furthermore, fishers need to apply for the status on behalf of their spouses, which means that the very feature developed to foster greater independence makes women further rely on their spouses.

Further difficulties arise in a similar case in Canada where women's formalised entry into offshore fishing in family businesses was seen as suspicious as it gave them an opportunity to apply for employment insurance and income in non-fishing season (Grzetic, 2004). Their traditional role as onshore crew did not qualify them for these benefits, which put pressure on women to be visible in undertaking fisheries work. This often resulted in rumours and accusations about abusing the system and triggered monitoring within communities, and from the government.

Both examples outlined here demonstrate that there is necessity and interest for women undertaking fisheries-adjacent work, especially in inshore fisheries and fishing families to have a recognised status. It poses significant warnings, however, about how this formalisation process is designed and regulated.

### **Representation: Mentorship, Networking and Positive Role Models**

From Scotland to Japan, different types of women's groups can serve to provide support and guidance to other women in the industry. This increases the visibility of women's contributions, offers structures for mentorship and networking and can help campaign to raise awareness of issues facing women (and others) in fisheries. In Japan, for instance, there is significant emphasis on women's fisheries groups which promote local food in schools and around the area, especially to encourage the use of seafood which does not sell on the global market (Soejima and Makino, 2018). Similar groups exist across the UK, for example the Women in Welsh Fisheries Group exists to support women in fisheries and fishing spouses in Wales through organising (online) coffee meet-ups and promotes employment in the industry in local schools. The Women in Scottish Aquaculture network is a relatively new development in Scotland and is the basis of the final case study.

#### **Case Studies: Women in Scottish Aquaculture; Women in Welsh Fisheries (2021)**

Women in Scottish Aquaculture (WiSA) is focused on representing the growing aquaculture industry as a viable career opportunity for women and other people in Scotland. It was established by the Scottish Aquaculture Innovation Centre in response to an industry survey and aims to help people connect with others across the industry and develop training and mentorship opportunities. While inclusive to all, its aim is to encourage more women to enter the sector and support them to

progress to all levels within the industry (WiSA, 2021). The group's events and programmes have received positive feedback, although a more comprehensive evaluation of the group's work would be beneficial.

A similar initiative for Women in Welsh fisheries was established by the Wales Seafood Cluster in Summer 2021 as a support and networking vehicle for women who work across the fisheries sector (Business News Wales, 2021). As with WiSA, the intention is to raise the profile of women already working in fisheries and to encourage entrance into the sector. Currently their events run online and are discussion centred, but there are plans to run events in schools to raise awareness of careers opportunities. They are keen to establish a network of such groups. Members of the group have stated that involvement has been significant for them, emphasising the benefits of having a space where they can discuss the specific issues and challenges they and their communities are facing, as well as for social and support purposes. Finally, it is explicitly inclusive to women from fishing families who are not employed in fisheries which can be invaluable for validating the unpaid labour of women in fisheries.

These are just a few examples of actions which could create opportunities for a more equitable involvement of women in fishing and recognise their contributions to fishing communities. They are not comprehensive solutions, as more evidence is needed to gain a better understanding of what women themselves would find useful.

### **Intersectional Approach to Equalities in Fisheries**

Intersectionality is important in addressing people's experiences with fisheries. Factors such as age, disability, race, nationality, sexual orientation, marital status, caring responsibilities can compound with gender and make people more vulnerable to experiencing inequality or discrimination within a workplace and within a community. Further research is needed to gain comprehensive knowledge of how these affect people's experiences of the industry in Scotland.

So far, this report has established that gender inequality is an issue in fisheries and suggested some actions to improve the situation for women so that those who want to pursue a career in fishing are able to do so. It is important to emphasise that gender is not the only factor that increases inequality within the industry. Rather, it intersects other factors, such as nationality, race, age, class and disability, which influence the experiences of people in fisheries and fishing communities. Some of these factors have been researched specifically in the context of fisheries, while others discussed below draw on other industries.



## **Race and Nationality**

Approximately 35% of all workers in seafood processing in Scotland are from outside the UK, most of whom are women from Eastern Europe (Seafish, 2021). According to the DEFRA “Women in Fisheries Study” (2010) these workers tend to be on average more educated, often possessing university degrees, and usually come to work in the industry for economic reasons. Beyond food processing, nationality and race are also important factors for pay inequality in the catch sector. Evidence by Jones et al (2019) shows that migrants who work in Scottish fisheries have significantly lower levels of remuneration compared to their Scottish counterpart undertaking the same work. These workers are often from outside the EU, most frequently from the Philippines and Ghana, and mostly male.

## **Marital status and caring responsibilities**

Women married to fishers are at times in better economic positions, especially in cases of joint vessel ownership, and cases where male partners inherit a successful businesses. Single women rarely do so. However, this often makes women economically dependent on their spouses which can be an issue in cases of separation or conflict (Frangoudes and Keromnes, 2008). Furthermore, fishing spouses often undertake precarious employment within the sector to earn supplemental income (Maneschy and Alvares, 2005).

Caring responsibilities were more widely discussed in the “Challenges” section, but it is worth restating that women with caring responsibilities face barriers to entry into many segments of the fishing industry, especially the catch sector (Gustavsson, 2020; Women-Fisheries, 2020). Long unstable hours mean that fishing is not a viable source of employment for women who are taking on caring responsibilities within families and communities. A better insight into what kind of childcare could best support fishing communities is needed, to alleviate one factor restricting choice and opportunities for their career and employment.

## **Age and class**

Young people experience barriers to entry due to existing succession practices. In families owning successful fishing operations and quotas, sons tend to inherit the business from their fathers (Women-Fisheries, 2020). For others seeking work at sea, oil, gas or shipping industries are significantly more lucrative, offering better pay and somewhat more stable work patterns. Young women are less likely to take on offshore work in other sectors, so they take on lower paying jobs on shore. It is worth noting that this varies across the country. In Shetland, for instance, there is an established route into fishing through formal and informal training opportunities for youths (still mostly centering on boys). Shetland fisheries often employ

traditional crew ownership practices in pelagic fleets, which provide better security and more lucrative employment. However, these are also difficult to access for new entrants because of the high costs of quotas (Cardwell and Gear, 2013). Indeed, the cost of quotas presents a big barrier to young people without capital, because even schemes designed to support them require a relatively large initial investment that youths from poorer families cannot afford if they enter the industry on a deckhand salary. The Shetland model is comparatively successful and therefore attractive, however Shetland fisheries are considered quite specific (as they experience fewer crew shortages, a smaller decline in fish stocks, and high profitability) and would be difficult to replicate in other communities.

The catch sector workforce in particular is aging (Seafish, 2018), which also impacts those at the other end of the age spectrum. Fishing is gruelling work that takes a toll on the body and the lack of attractive opportunities for young people to replace older fishers means that they are placed at higher risk of injury or long-term health effects in their retirement. Older fishers nearing retirement might also be more likely to leave the industry in the face of an economic shock such as Brexit or COVID.

The intersectional factors mentioned here are just some of the most discussed ones. Other protected characteristics, such as disability, sexual orientation, or religion, may influence employment conditions and social experiences of people working in fisheries. Due to a small sample size in Scotland it is difficult to speculate, but a general equalities approach to future policy developments should be prioritised.

## 6. Conclusions and Recommendations

There is an overall lack of data pertaining to women in Scottish fisheries. More evidence is needed on:

- Local-level insight into how women in fishing communities would feel best supported, including a discussion of career aspirations relative to existing opportunities.
- Qualitative insight into how women in fisheries were affected by the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Views of men (of different ages) working in seafood jobs towards women and how these are changing.
- Qualitative insight into experiences of other underrepresented groups in fisheries.
- Evaluation of employers' needs in fisheries, to find out what parts of the sector can provide fair employment to new entrants in the industry.
- Evaluation of the views of women in fishing communities towards the fishing industry, to find out their attitudes toward different types of employment in fisheries and beyond.
- Quantitative evidence on the representation of women across the sector, especially related to onshore work in sales/finance for which there is little data.
- Updated quantitative evidence on the gender pay gap in fisheries across the sector.

### Key recommendations based on findings for the literature review

This concluding section provides a summary of the report in terms of key recommendations for future work on women in fisheries and highlights the most important gaps in evidence for the Scottish context.

- Develop comprehensive research and action plans to assess and address the situation for women in fisheries.
- Develop a sector wide network that connects women within the industry, including training and networking opportunities, mentorship schemes, and a space to raise concerns.
- Continue to prioritise safety across the sector to minimise the occurrence of accidents at work, and develop alternative safe, fair, and sustainable opportunities for employment in fishing communities.
- Provide financial security and support for fishers' spouses.

- Strengthen rural childcare provisions through training more practitioners and developing pilot childcare programmes that suit specific needs of fishing communities.
- Develop incentives to encourage better work-life balance.
- Challenge traditional succession practices and other cultural factors which influence gender inequality in fisheries.

## **Equality and Sustainability**

Scottish Government programmes emphasise equality and sustainability across the board. In the context of fisheries it may be helpful to consider the view that the two goals can be addressed alongside each other (Women-Fisheries, 2020). An industry which promotes equal access to resources and training, provides safe workplaces, is inclusive to people of all genders, those with caring responsibilities, and has diverse representation in leadership, will be more resilient to future challenges. In turn, it can garner more support and investments, become more sustainable, attract workforce from a wider pool of people, and become more resilient and creative in adapting to regulations developed to address the ongoing environmental change.

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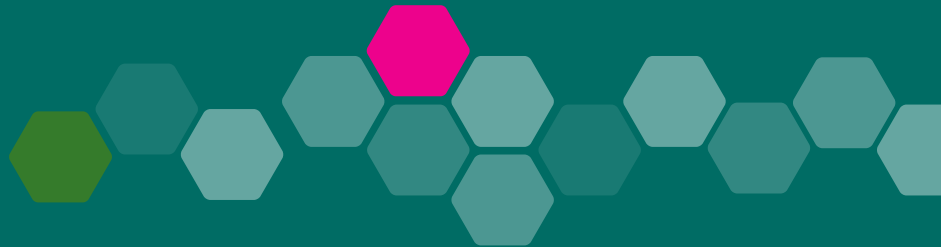
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