



NIFA

*National Inshore
Fishermen's Association*

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Our purpose is to make **measurable and sustainable impact** on the revenue and livelihood of Inshore Fishing Families. We achieve this by:

- Being focused on the needs and well-being of boat owners and their crews involved in Inshore Fishing
- Advocating on behalf of our members, for support and resources from State and European Institutions charged with supporting rural development and a sustainable industry
- Bringing our members insights to policy makers to ensure our members can compete effectively to sustain their families and to sustain our coastal communities.

The National Inshore Fishermen Association (NIFA) was established in 2017 and our growth has been slow but steady since then. We now have 150 members, who between them operate over 200 inshore vessels. In terms of membership numbers, that probably makes us the largest fishing organisation in the country but given that there are approximately 2000 inshore vessels in the Irish Inshore Sector (about 95% of the total fleet) we are under no illusions that we still have a long way to go to become a majority voice for the sector. That said we are happy with the progress to date considering we all work voluntarily for the groups and they are funded solely on modest membership fees. We are actively trying to grow our membership and to date have turned no one away. Geographically our members are spread right around the coast, our membership numbers are highest in Kerry, Cork and Donegal with members spread along the coast. Louth and Meath being the only coastal counties from which we don't have any members. The National Inshore Fishermen's Association (NIFA) welcomed its recognition as an EU seafood producer organisation (PO) in January 2023.

What we do and how we operate.

Basically that's up to our members and is evolving and under continuous review, we value their opinions and try to involve them as much as possible. It's a very much "bottom up" organisation.



Why we requested an audience with the Joint Oireachtas Committee:

Introduction to Inshore:

Ireland's inshore sector accounts for approximately 95% of the Irish Fishing fleet, all vessels in the sector are less than 18 meters overall length with the vast majority of them being less than 12 meters. The fishing boats in this sector almost all work within 12nm of the shore line with some exceptions due to various factors. Currently the sector provides in excess of over 50% of employment in Ireland's seafood industry, each job at sea accounting for 7 onshore including those in processing factories, transportation, ship chandleries, gear manufacturers, marine engineering companies, electronics companies to seafood chefs & waiters.

Inshore is an integral part of the economy to coastal communities. A combination of unforeseen events within the last four years including the Covid Pandemic, Brexit and the war in Ukraine has brought unprecedented financial hardship to the doors of the families involved in inshore fishing the length and breadth of our coastline. The huge reliance on the shellfish fisheries proved catastrophic when the brown crab and the shrimp markets collapsed for a second consecutive year towards the end of 2023. One fishery that could have alleviated some of the pain was the sustainable Pollack fishery (either gill net or hook-and-line) but to add further misery this became a bycatch-only species after the EU December council meeting. The reason for our over reliance on an income from shellfish stocks is because of previous governments decisions to prevent us from fishing species such as salmon, trout, bass, eels etc. These fisheries were once the bedrock of rural coastal communities but because of lobbying from anglers' representative groups and the tourism sector with no coherent organisation representing inshore fishermen. These vital revenue streams were taken from us, giving us little choice but to rely too heavily on lobster, crabs, shrimp, whelks etc.

Inshore strategy:

The end of February 2019 brought renewed hope to the inshore fishermen all around Ireland when Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine Michael Creed launched "Strategy for the Irish Inshore Fishery Sector 2019-2023" this strategy set out a vision for the future of the inshore sector to provide a prosperous and sustainable future. It revolved around four main topics;

- The organisation & profile of the sector
- Infrastructure & resources available
- The management of inshore resources
- Profitability of the sector

Amongst many issues to be addressed through the strategy was sustainable management of key fish stocks and the attracting and retaining of talent with a view to maximizing the potential of this sector to provide support to Ireland's coastal communities. A number of inshore fishermen dedicated a lot of time and effort on this strategy as it was also to include the targeting of financial supports available under the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund to programs and initiatives where it could be used most effectively. BIM were tasked by the Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine to implement the Inshore Strategy, but we have heard nothing since!!

In last year's distribution of the Brexit Blue Economy Scheme funds from the Brexit Blue Adjustment Reserve Fund administered by BIM there was up to €200,000 in individual grant aid for camping and glamping, grants for those who wanted to re-engine a whale watching or eco-tourism boat but NOT a fishing boat. Millions of euros have been spent on various tourism projects in Ireland's coastal communities. While the inshore sector may have benefited to a small extent from the fund, we feel that the sector was left behind to the benefit of other sectors.

Everyone is now aware of the unfair and disproportionate division of pelagic fishing quotas at EU levels. What is even more difficult to comprehend is the manner in which these quotas are divided amongst the Irish fishing sectors. Mackerel, the most financially lucrative species to the economy, varies in quota allocation between fifty and seventy thousand tonnes, of which 400 tonne goes to the entire inshore sector for a hook & line fishery, the most sustainable method of fishing on the planet. This equates to less than 1% of the 'National' quota for approximately 95% of the fleet. The herring allocation isn't much better resulting in 5% for inshore boats **with the dynamics of the fleet changing shouldn't the quota also change?** The current situation favours a tiny minority while the majority finds itself continuously discriminated against.

The European Coastal states common fisheries policy or CFP as it is more commonly known, is used as a stick to beat the industry with. Yet the one good thing in it for the inshore sector, Article 17, is not implemented by our government. Article 17 requires member states to allocate fishing opportunities using transparent and objective criteria focusing on social environmental and economic criteria including for example the use of fishing gear with low environmental impact and reduced energy consumption. In short the exact opposite to what is currently the case in Ireland. In short this might have something to do with the fact that NIFA are the only dedicated Producer Organisation (PO) for the inshore fisheries sector. IIMRO represent the Islands and four separate POs represent the remaining 4% of the fishing industry. Through an inadvertent (or not) coalition the minority of the fleet has become the 'representative' voice of the industry.

When NIFA was formed no one could have imagined that a large portion of our time and energy would be spent dealing with the fallout from offshore renewable energy. Our offshore fishing grounds were sacrificed when we joined the EU and our inshore grounds are now being auctioned off to multinationals developers. The minister for the environment has stated that Ireland has seven times more sea mass area than land mass and this must be utilised for the offshore renewable energy industry yet so far the only areas of sea mass we have seen designated for the windfarms are the areas closest to the shore used for the smallest fishing vessels.

On top of the ORE fiasco we are now told that 30% of our sea mass is to become Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) with certain marine NGO's calling for a ban on fishing in its entirety within some of these MPAs. Shortly Inshore fishermen will need an MPA of their own to work WITHIN.

NIFA fought alongside the environmental NGOs and the majority of the public who partook in the required public consultation necessary for a 6 mile limit around these shores a number of years ago. Boats over 18meters in length would work outside of this area and this in turn would lead to increased opportunities for

inshore boats. Because of court challenges and legal issues this has not progressed. However it's almost twelve months since the high court ruled against it on a technicality and the renewed legislation process on it needs to speed up considerably.

Bluefin tuna are swimming up and down our coast every year with no Irish fisherman able to avail of a fishery due to lack of quota. NIFA would urge the minister to fight for an Irish quota for this species. Because of its high value it has potential alleviate the problems faced by inshore to some extent. Currently, fishing vessels from the far southern hemisphere are travelling to our waters to fish these stocks.

Future threats to our industry include a looming bottom trawling ban and the decarbonisation of the fishing fleet. There is an urgent need for financial subsidies to be made available to the inshore sector immediately so that our members amongst others can play their part, stay afloat and weather the storm. Otherwise hundreds of primary food producers will be unable to continue in this industry.

NIFA would like to thank the chair and all committee members for allowing us the opportunity to explain our current dilemma.

