



**MANIFESTO**  
SHETLAND FISHERMEN'S ASSOCIATION

# HOLYROOD ELECTIONS 2026



# Our Asks

We call on all candidates standing for the Scottish Parliament to champion Shetland's fishing industry. Here's what Shetland needs to thrive:

## Policy and Support

A fisheries strategy that recognises the diversity and economic importance of Shetland's fleet, and that fully acknowledges the specific needs and circumstances of Shetland's fishing communities.

Fair allocation of funding from UK and Scottish marine investment schemes, recognising Shetland's disproportionate contribution.

A halt to new offshore wind approvals until the full consequences for the fishing fleet are properly resolved, including a robust system of financial compensation for any loss of grounds or earnings, so that Shetland's vessels can continue to operate as viable and profitable businesses.

Where fishing grounds are spatially discrete and no alternative areas exist, they must be protected from development. This is especially true for scallop grounds, which are highly localised. Losing even small areas creates a ripple effect across the fleet, intensifying the spatial squeeze on remaining grounds and undermining the viability of responsible, sustainable fishing.

A commitment to recognise and reward the exceptional quality of fish landed in Shetland, supported by a national plan that strengthens both the fleet and the processing sector. The current Landing Target is contradictory to this aim. It must be fundamentally reformed so that investment, infrastructure and policy all align to grow value throughout the supply chain.

## International and National Negotiations

Support the views of Shetland fishermen in annual quota negotiations and international negotiations, ensuring the best possible fishing opportunities for Shetland's fleet.

Protection of Shetland's access to key fishing grounds, especially in post-Brexit arrangements and international agreements. Take a firm position that limits international access to areas relied upon by Shetland fishermen, protecting the long term sustainability and profitability of our fleet.

## Regulation and Marine Planning

A balanced approach to MPAs and Priority Marine Features, ensuring sustainable harvesting continues.

Ensure that Shetland's fishing interests are safeguarded within Scotland's new National Marine Plan, with meaningful local involvement in all marine spatial planning.

## Science and Sustainability

Investment in Shetland-based marine science, prioritising fisheries research and climate impact studies.

Support for a new community led, locally managed Regulating Order ensuring continued sustainably managed inshore stocks.

Increase investment in Marine Directorate Science and facilitation of improved collaboration between scientists and industry.

Secure multi year funding for the Marine Fund Scotland, including dedicated support for routine scientific work and the resources needed to deliver it, alongside a full review of the fund to ensure it meets the long term needs of the fishing and seafood industry.

## Workforce Issues

Continued support for a safer fishing fleet, with Shetland based training and resources.

Policies that encourage young people to enter the industry, including apprenticeships and maritime education.

Ensure training opportunities are aligned with school leaver schedules, so young people can transition smoothly into the industry.



# Background

Shetland is Scotland's rural and island fishing powerhouse. With just over 23,000 residents, Shetland consistently punches far above its weight in the national seafood economy:

Shetland accounts for around one third of all fish landed in Scotland by value, and a quarter by tonnage.

Scalloway and Lerwick are among the busiest fish landing ports anywhere in the UK.

One third of Scotland's pelagic fleet is based in Shetland.

One quarter of Scotland's whitefish vessels are owned and operated by Shetlanders.

One fifth of Scotland's inshore fleet—catching by far the majority of Scotland's inshore mackerel and finfish—is Shetland based.

Pelagic, whitefish, and shellfish fleets all operate from Shetland, making it one of the most diverse and resilient fishing communities in Europe.

Fishing supports over 3% of local employment, with many more jobs in processing, logistics, engineering, and marine services.

One in eight of Scotland's fishermen live in Shetland.



Shetland's fishing industry is not just economically vital, it is an indigenous industry and culturally foundational. Generations of Shetlanders have worked the seas, and the industry remains a cornerstone of island life.

Shetland is home to one of Scotland's most effective and respected inshore fisheries management systems, delivering sustainable harvesting and setting a standard of local stewardship that other regions look to. But continued success depends on secure, long term funding for data collection, analysis and management.

At the same time, Shetland's whitefish fleet operates in some of the North Atlantic's most abundant waters yet faces intense and growing competition for sea space from both UK based and non UK vessels. The post Brexit Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA) has exacerbated this pressure by granting access that has left local fishermen feeling exposed and disadvantaged. The need for stronger protection, fairer access arrangements, and a more balanced approach to spatial management has never been more urgent.

Shetland does not merely reflect Scotland's fishing industry, it typifies it. The islands are pivotal to Scotland's seafood success: diverse fleets, world class management, high economic dependency, and exposure to the full range of policy challenges. If fisheries policy works for Shetland, it will work for Scotland. That is why Shetland must sit at the heart of future fisheries decision making. Here, the stakes are highest, the pressures most acute, and the opportunities most significant. Shetland deserves stronger representation and support than it has received from previous governments.



# Economic Contribution

Shetland's fishing fleet remains one of the most productive in the UK. In 2024, Shetland vessels alone landed over £200 million worth of fish and shellfish, including mackerel, herring, cod, haddock, monkfish, crab, and scallops. This world class resource is the foundation of a thriving local economy and a vital contributor to Scotland's national prosperity.

The catching sector directly employs over 430 Shetland residents, with additional workers engaged through agency contracts. These jobs are rooted in island communities and support a wide range of local businesses. Fishing vessels and associated enterprises purchase equipment, engineering services, fuel, supplies, and professional support almost entirely within Shetland. As a result, the sector's £200 million in first sale value generates £344.5 million in total economic output, driving direct, indirect, and induced activity across the islands.

Shetland is home to one of Europe's leading pelagic processing facilities, alongside high quality whitefish and shellfish processors and modern fishmarkets. This integrated supply chain makes Shetland a major exporter of premium seafood to European and global markets. Crucially, these seafood exports are what make Shetland a net exporter of goods. That export volume helps spread and offset the high cost of running the ferry service, which in turn keeps transport more affordable for residents, businesses, and visitors across the islands.

The strength of Shetland's fishing sector is central to Scotland's marine Gross Value Added and underpins the viability of many island industries, from engineering and logistics to retail and hospitality. A stable, well supported catching sector is therefore not only essential for fishermen but for the wider economic resilience of Shetland and Scotland as a whole.

# Challenges Unique to Shetland

Shetland's fishing industry faces distinct pressures including:

Remote geography means higher costs for fuel, transport, and infrastructure.

The rapid expansion of offshore wind now adds further pressure, with turbines and their associated infrastructure, including export cables and exclusion zones, increasingly encroaching on traditional fishing grounds. With few or no alternative areas available, this spatial squeeze has a ripple effect across the fleet, threatening the viability of long established fisheries and the communities that depend on them.

Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and conservation zones must be managed with local input to avoid undermining viable fisheries.

Policy decisions made in Edinburgh or London often overlook Shetland's scale, diversity, and strategic importance.

Shetland's fishing fleet is made up predominantly of small, family run businesses, a different structure from mainland Scotland, where larger, corporate operations are more common. This makes Shetland's fleet far more exposed to sudden policy or economic changes. When regulations shift, the impacts are felt immediately and personally: on individual livelihoods, on long standing traditions, and across the social fabric of our island communities. What might be absorbed by a large company elsewhere can hit a family business here with full force.



# Blue Food for a Green Future

Shetland's fishing industry produces low emission, high protein, renewable seafood, a genuinely climate smart food source. The pelagic fleet, in particular, has one of the lowest carbon footprints of any major protein sector, far lower than beef, pork or even many farmed seafoods. This makes Shetland caught mackerel and herring some of the most sustainable animal proteins available anywhere.

Based on UK fleet emissions research and wider carbon footprint studies, our fleet produces significantly lower emissions than many other animal protein sectors. However, targeted support is essential to modernise and regenerate the fleet so it can meet future environmental standards and remain sustainable for the next generation.

In recent years, the fleet has also faced growing pressure from the increasing number of visiting vessels operating in Shetland waters. This additional effort places strain on local stocks, intensifies competition for fishing opportunities, and risks undermining the environmental gains achieved by our own fleet. Without appropriate recognition of this external pressure, local vessels are significantly disadvantaged.

It is therefore essential that fisheries management frameworks properly model and account for this additional fishing effort and the displacement effects created by it. When visiting vessels increase activity in Shetland waters, local vessels are often forced to travel further, fish longer, or alter traditional patterns of operation, all of which can increase fuel use, emissions, and economic pressure. Recognising and quantifying this displacement is critical to ensuring that environmental targets, stock management decisions, and fleet regeneration policies reflect the real conditions faced by Shetland's fleet.

Shetland's shellfish sector is also independently recognised for its sustainability, with long standing accreditations for scallops and brown crab through Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) certification. These are not just badges, they reflect decades of responsible management, local stewardship, and science led decision making.

Together with world class whitefish and pelagic processors, modern fishmarkets, and a highly skilled workforce, Shetland delivers premium seafood with a traceable, low impact footprint from sea to plate.

With the right backing, Shetland's fishing businesses can continue to drive Scotland's marine economy, support high quality jobs, and deliver significant export value for Scotland and the UK, all while providing some of the most sustainable protein on the planet.

**We urge all candidates to Stand Up for Shetland Fishing because when Shetland thrives, Scotland's seafood sector thrives.**



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