

Recommendation paper

Title: Fisheries Management approach for Vessels that have had positive Covid on-board

Date: 17th February 2021

Report of: Dr Andrea Clausen, Director of Natural Resources

1. Background:

- 1.1 The Falkland Islands Government has been managing the impacts of the global pandemic Covid -19 since early March 2020. There has been an evolving response determined by the level of risk that has been faced nationally. Currently the Falkland Islands remains Covid-free (regarding community transmission) and the only cases to date have been found in quarantining arrivals (contained) and one contained outbreak in the medical team at MPC.
- 1.2 It is clear, from known medical facts, that to reduce the risk of contracting Covid-19, personnel must be quarantined for 14 days, a policy that FIG has been following since mid-2020.
- 1.3 During 2020 DNR communicated with the fishing industry regarding their Covid business continuity plans, a number were provided. Prior to the departure of the fishing fleet from Europe for the 2021 fishing season, DNR requested covid plans for the fishing fleet, but to date have not received a full set.
- 1.4 DNR was advised of an outbreak of Covid-19 on a fishing vessel at the end of January whilst transiting to the Falklands.
- 1.5 DNR requested information on isolation and testing that had “actually” taken place for the crews for each vessel expecting to enter the fishery in 2021. Upon reviewing this data, it became clear that there was considerable risk that Covid-19 may have passed undetected on to some of the vessels despite isolation and testing regimes being implemented prior to departure.
- 1.6 To date there have been 3 vessels that have had outbreaks of Covid-19 on board since departing Europe.
- 1.7 The current FIG policy for release from isolation following a case of Covid is that there must be 2 negative PCR results within a 48-hour period. This policy is under review for a number of reasons.

- 1.8 DNR have been requested to allow fishing vessels that have had positive cases of Covid-19 on vessels prior to their arrival in the Falklands, to enter the fishery.

2. Presentation and consultations:

- 2.1. A briefing was provided to the fishing industry on 5th February regarding the current FIG regulations and policy on quarantine and release from isolation; known medical facts about the manifestation and passage of Covid-19 virus through an average individual and the requirements for quarantine upon arrival in the Falklands.
- 2.2 DNR presented the facts regarding fishing vessels and options to the Strategic Pandemic Management Group with a proposed solution on 15th February 2020. SPMG supported the approach suggested.

3. Recommendation:

- 3.1. Having considered all of the facts and reviewing these against existing FIG policies and regulations, the below protocol is recommended for **any fishing vessel that has experienced Covid-19 on board**:
 - 3.1.1 A Fishing Licence can be awarded remotely (using remote licence briefing and inspection) to a vessel where someone has had Covid-19 symptoms/positive Covid-19 test after they have completed all of the following stages:
 - 3.1.1.1 The vessel must visit a port outside of the Falkland Islands and all the crew must be tested by PCR.
 - 3.1.1.2 The tests need to be undertaken at least 14 days after the first symptoms appear in the crew, this will ensure no one onboard is an asymptomatic carrier.
 - 3.1.1.3 Taking as a start date the date and time when all the crew have tested negative, the vessel must then spend at least 14 days at sea without further Covid-19 symptoms emerging in the crew

At this point the vessel will be considered Clean and allowed to enter FI waters (within 12 miles), come into port and collect a Marine Mammal Observer. Until an MMO can be boarded, the SED should be deployed as per license conditions.

Permission to fish without an MMO is only given for Season "C". In the event we have vessels in similar circumstances for Season "X" the vessel will not be licensed to fish until an MMO can be deployed.

This recommendation is supported by elected members and officials who are keen to find solutions that ensure public health in the Falklands is not compromised, but that can facilitate the successful operation of the fishery. The key factor underlying this approach is the capacity within our healthcare system, we cannot afford to compromise our resource level unnecessarily.

The challenges for the crew and fleet managers are understood, but it is felt that the above approach can provide the assurances required to enable the fishery to operate with the lowest possible risk to all parties.

Approved:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "A Clausen". The signature is stylized and cursive.

Dr. Andrea Clausen
Director of Natural Resources