

4. The operation and administration of the scheme

4.1 Administration

164. The administration of the decommissioning scheme has been co-ordinated by MAFF in collaboration with the other UK Fishery Departments. The fisheries officers in the ports are used to facilitate the applications, and the scheme is administered via the national offices in Edinburgh, Belfast, Cardiff and in London.

165. The principal flaw in the previous scheme was that it had allowed for the decommissioning of fishing vessels that had previously ceased fishing and transferred to offshore oil duties. Similarly, the requirement to scrap vessels was ambiguous and led to the subsequent re-emergence of decommissioned vessels onto the UK fleet register.

166. The 1993 to 1996 scheme has a number of set qualification criteria in place. These have already been outlined and appear to have had considerable support from within the fishing industry. The qualification criteria were set against the background of the past criticism, the need to satisfy the European Commission Regulation in order to qualify for the rebate (averaging at just over 50 per cent for the total awards given), and additional qualification conditions which Ministers and Fisheries Departments deemed necessary in order to ensure the efficient use of public money.

4.1.1 The design of the form

167. In order to test the design of the form there are two questions that need to be asked: Firstly, is it easy for the industry to understand? Secondly how does it compare with the design of the forms from other countries? The answer to the latter question, is that, the UK application form is extremely well designed.

168. In response to the question of the form's design, 90 per cent of those interviewed indicated that the form was easy to follow. The fishermen were asked if they understood:

- the eligibility criteria
- explanation of the restrictions to application
- explanation of the rate of grant
- what to do when the application was approved
- how to claim the decommissioning grant
- when will the grant be paid
- will the vessel be inspected
- the tax position
- the effect, if in receipt of capital grants
- the conditions if the vessel is mortgaged
- the position if the application is withdrawn
- the position if the vessel sinks after acceptance of the award
- where to obtain further information

169. The only area causing the 439 respondents trouble was the tax position. Otherwise they had no difficulty in understanding the forms.

4.1.2 Contact with Fishery Departments

170. More than 90 per cent of those interviewed were complimentary about the role of the Fishery Departments in administering the scheme, both in terms of facilitating the applications at port level and in terms of the assistance given to fishermen seeking advice on the completion of the form.

171. The District Inspectors were praised for their role in facilitating the applications by ensuring that the forms were readily available at the port offices, that those applicants having applied before were automatically contacted (a general course of action by the central administration as well), and that letters were sent out reminding would-be applicants of the closure date for application.

172. Following the submission of the application, 13 per cent of those interviewed indicated that they were subsequently contacted by the Fishery Departments in order to clarify some points. Clarification was needed on incomplete forms or where MAFF were not in possession of adequate records. For example, most were contacted about the number of days at sea the vessel had fished. However, only about 5 per cent of the vessels in the survey were contacted. In some cases where vessels do not have to complete a landing declaration or log book, details of the total number of days at sea were absent. Once evidence was provided by the vessel owner, and was subsequently checked by local fishery officers. The only other reason owners were contacted was to clarify their vessels' safety qualifications.

173. On the whole those interviewed (80 per cent) expressed satisfaction with the vessel details with which Fishery Departments were supplied.

4.1.3 Timing of the announcement

174. The only problem recorded in the scheme's administration came from the announcement of the details of the scheme. In this case, 20 per cent of those interviewed expressed dissatisfaction with the way in which they were informed. Criticism was strongest in Scotland and lowest in England. This issue was subsequently re-appraised. On examination, much of the problem was linked to those fishing vessel owners who remained at sea for long periods. Accordingly contact with fishermen in Scotland was noted by the SOAEFD administrators as a particular problem.