

Draft Minutes BGMCF - Meeting 11

Date: 21st March 2012

Venue: BIM, Crofton Road, Dun Laoghaire

In attendance: Mr Donal Maguire – Chairman of the BGMCF
Ms Joanne Gaffney – Secretariat
Mr Michael Murphy – Secretariat
Mr Kenny Parker – DARD
Mr Greg Griffiths - DARD
Mr Keith Kelleher– DAFF
Mr Damien Clarke - DAFF
Ms Sarah McLean – Loughs Agency
Mr George Golden – Industry Rep Carlingford/Dundrum
Mr Michael O’Driscoll – Vessel owner and operators association
Mr Arthur McCarthy – Industry Rep Castlemaine/Shannon/Cork/Clew
Mr Raymond Dougal – Industry Rep Belfast/ Larne
Mr Declan Quigley – SFPA
Mr Andrew Verwijs – Deputising for Stephen Kelly

Claire Murray also attended the meeting to give an update on the MSC certification

Apologies Mr Danny Gallagher – Industry Rep Swilly
Mr Richie Flynn – IFA
Mr Michael Havlin – Industry Rep. Foyle
Mr Stephen Kelly – Industry Rep Kinsale/Waterford/Wexford
Mr Barry Fox – Loughs Agency

Donal Maguire welcomed all to the meeting.

1. Minutes of the last meeting

The minutes of the last meeting were accepted, and it was agreed that all action points would be addressed through the agenda

2. An update on the MSC project

Clare Murray attended the meeting to give an update on the MSC project, a copy of the presentation she gave is attached to these minutes.

Upcoming dates of importance are the scheduling of two SICA workshops which will take place on **Monday the 21st of May (Dublin)** and **Tuesday the 22nd May (Belfast)**. SICA stands for Scale Intensity Consequence Analysis, and the workshops are necessary for the assessors to gain knowledge of the industry directly from producers involved.

George Golden queried the title of the certification - Ireland & Northern Ireland Bottom Dredge Mussel (*Mytilus Edulis*) Seed Collection and Cultivation Fishery and suggested that the word Dredge be removed.

Action: JG to discuss this with Clare Murray in Global trust and report back to industry members

3. 2011 seed fishery

The following statistics were provided on the 2011 seed fishery

Total Seed Fished	13430 (Gross)	11519 (Net)
Days Fished	30	
Vessels	25	
Sourced ROI Waters	81%	
Sourced NI Waters	19%	
Relayed Wexford	37.25%	
Relayed Foyle	6.12%	
Relayed Cromane	4.71%	
Relayed Carlingford	35.68%	
Relayed Belfast	16.23%	

DM highlighted the fact that there remains a certain level of non-cooperation with regard to reporting all catches within the industry. Producers were reminded that submitting the statistics is mandatory and that it is not only a regulatory requirement but it is also of utmost importance in the completion of the necessary statistics on the sector especially for use in the MSC process.

4. 2012 Seed Season Possible dates

Donal Maguire queried if industry members were still in agreement with the opening pattern adopted in 2010 and 2011, with a short spring opening followed by a closed period and then opening again for a longer period in August.

Industry members advised that the pattern should be maintained. Dates were then discussed

It was proposed by the industry members of the Forum that the arrangements set out below were suitable for 2012, subject to final departmental and ministerial approval.

“The seed fishery will open on the 12th of May 2012. It will continue, subject to seed availability, through the following suitable tides:

- 12th May to 17th May (Inclusive)
- 25th May to 31st May (Inclusive)
- Possibility of an additional period

A close season will then ensue until the 24th August, when fishing will resume. Depending on seed availability fishing will continue through appropriate tides until 25th of November. As in previous years, a number of areas may remain closed to seed fishing due to considerations related to nature conservation”.

As in 2011, in cases where a seed bed is subject to heavy predation during a closed period, and it is clear that the seed will be lost to the industry unless fished, that opening such an area outside the dates agreed above could be an option. Such events would be treated on a case-by-case basis as they arose and on their individual merits. It should be noted that Natura 2000 designated areas would have to be treated separately if such a situation arises.

DM queried if the opening of the autumn fishery should be on the 08th rather than the 24th of August in response to submissions by producers in the Foyle. Industry members in attendance indicated that the 24th was preferable.

AMC sought clarification if these dates would also apply to Castlemaine. DM informed him that subject to the required stock assessment being completed and seed being available that there was no reason that these dates would not apply.

Action: Secretariat to notify all industry members of the dates as discussed

5. Seed surveying arrangements

KP reported that AFBI will undertake a survey on behalf of DARD in April/Early May. RD requested that an industry member be included in this surveying trip. Greg Griffiths stated he did not see any reason why this could not be facilitated. KP requested that an industry rep be notified to DARD in advance so that arrangements can be made.

Industry members also stated that when seed is found, fishing should be allowed, too much seed has been left to "overwinter", and has in fact been washed away and lost to the sector. Given the scarcity of seed in recent seasons they did not want this to happen again.

Industry members expressed the view that they were concerned that DARD regards potting as more important than seed fishing. They pointed out that the seed season is short, as the 2011 report shows, and they pressed the point that the mussel sector must be given fair access to ground when seed is located.

KP and Greg Griffiths stated that no fishery takes precedence but that it is important to notify all other stakeholders so that conflicts, insofar as possible, are avoided.

Industry members requested that the seed surveys in NI should take place as close to the opening dates as possible

KP stated that he will discuss the survey schedule with AFBI, he added that where there are other areas that industry members think are worthy of investigation that they should please inform DARD or AFBI of these.

RD highlighted industry dissatisfaction with surveying arrangements in NI waters, where the industry's ability to search is excessively, in their view, curtailed by DARD notification and observation requirements. DARD defended their notification system but accepted that given current fuel costs that a more flexible approach may be possible once DARD gets sufficient pre-notification of desired surveying dates.

Action: Secretariat to liaise with industry members and DARD on surveying arrangements

DM informed the group that the T- Burke will be surveying Castlemaine Harbour and the Irish Sea in line with practices in previous years.

SML stated that the Loughs Agency will be surveying Carlingford and Foyle. Surveying dates will reflect the opening dates of the fishery

The industry were reminded that any vessel searching/surveying for seed in ROI waters outside the open tides for seed fishing should have a written consent from SFPA on board. SFPA should be informed 48 hours before any "searching" activity occurs. SFPA will issue the written consents through their Howth Office

5. Natura Assessments

DM briefed the meeting that the Castlemaine assessment for the period 2011-2016 had been completed. Work to date including that in previous years has not identified any significant risks posed by the seed fishery as outlined in the Fisheries Natura Plans for the area. Once the fishing activity remains within the terms and conditions outlined in the plan and the assessment, then fishing will be permitted to proceed.

DM also updated the group on the ongoing assessments in Dundalk and Roaringwater Bay. Lough Swilly and Clew Bay are next on the list for assessment, it is acknowledged that this is a slow process but the assessments are complicated and thus require quite a bit of time to complete. Both BIM and the MI have allocated considerable resources to the process in an effort to complete the required assessments.

Industry members queried what will happen if seed is found in a Natura area such as the Wicklow box. DM stated that to date this has not been an issue but if seed is identified in a Natura area, then the assessment requirements will be discussed by the Department and its agencies. It is impossible to give an answer on this until the situation arises.

6. Proposal for hand raking of mussels

DC informed the group that a proposal for hand raking of seed has been submitted to the Department and that the views of industry members on hand raking would be of value, particularly on the issue of whether hand raked seed should be regarded as being part of the allocation system or should be treated as a separate activity to the seed fished by vessels

Industry members requested details of the location of the seed and the applicant. DC stated that this information was confidential to the applicant.

AV informed the group that he had experience with hand rakers in the UK. He suggested that hand raking should be left outside the allocation system and that it should be easy to organise and legislate for in line with practices elsewhere both within and outside Natura areas. He opined that raking should not be subject to the closed season for seed fishing but should be subject to a separate permitting procedure.

George Golden expressed some concerns about how hand raking would be conducted, particularly with regard to use of mechanical vehicles on beaches, and how this may give rise to negative comment on the industry as a whole.

7. Audit of allocations and use

DM informed the group that the audit of allocations and seed usage as presented in the Rising Tide was a priority for completion in 2012. An audit is required to link seed inputs with product output, and should be a straightforward exercise.

RD stated that industry members already submit a range of data and that any audit should not require a duplication of effort and paperwork by industry members. JG assured the group that an increased administrative burden is not foreseen as part of this process but industry input may be required where previously submitted paperwork does not cover all the data needs.

DM informed the group it was in everyone's interest to have accurate stats on the fishery in order to maximise returns from the valuable seed resource.

Industry members will be updated on this process as it proceeds.

8. Crepidula

KP informed the group that populations of Crepidula continue to be found in Belfast Lough and that the proposed protocol for inspection of movements for relaying will not be possible in light of the increased detection of Crepidula and objections from the Northern Ireland Environment Agency and the Loughs Agency.

AV confirmed that Crepidula was detected on test sites in Belfast Lough where seed was laid in 2009. In 50 tonnes of mussel inspected 120 Crepidula were found.

KP highlighted the proposed Life project on alien species where it is proposed to again examine the Crepidula population in Belfast Lough. DARD, the Loughs Agency and BIM are all partners in this project.

9. Electronic logbooks

DQ outlined the current reporting system, consisting of the log sheets, spat sheets, SMS system, Blackboxes and VMS. There is a strong control system in place but there remains a certain level of non-compliance with any and indeed all the systems. The SFPA is a shore based organisation and therefore the system must be somewhat based on trust, backed up by inspections of loads moving from ROI to NI.

He cautioned that even a low level of non-compliance will necessitate the introduction of the electronic logbook system at the expense of the vessel owners, both DARD and the SFPA are undecided about this issue at present but agree that if there is continued persistent non compliance, then electronic logbooks though expensive may be necessary.

DARD and the SFPA will keep this issue under review during the 2012 season.

10. Norovirus

GG raised the issue of norovirus. Mussel operators are aware of the current limitations in the testing methods for norovirus and the issues some Irish oyster producers are currently facing with closures and product recalls.

There is concern that buyers will start focussing on noro-virus levels in all shellfish and that this may become an issue for Irish companies accessing the European markets, with exporting countries being held to a higher standard than domestic producers on mainland Europe.

DM indicated that this is a priority issue for the Molluscan Shellfish Safety Committee which will be meeting in the coming weeks. DM will pass the groups concerns to members of that committee and report back to the group if there are any developments on this issue.

11. Election of Industry members to the forum

DM informed the group that since the BGMCF has been operational for 3 years that industry membership of the forum must be reviewed in line with the recommendations of the Rising Tide. If possible this will take place in advance of the next meeting.

12. AOB

Licence moratorium in NI

AV queried the basis for the licence moratorium in NI and proposed that if the moratorium is based on a concern about limited seed supply, DARD should consider licensing sites outwith the seed allocation system. In that a licence holder must source seed from alternative resources.

KP asked that a proposal be sent to him and that he will consider it.

Seed imports from Foyle to Belfast

GG queried DARD restrictions on seed movements from Foyle to Belfast. KP indicated that he would investigate the matter and revert to the group.

Circulation of Minutes

MOD requested that minutes be circulated to all industry members as quickly as possible, especially given the important issues discussed at the meeting. JG confirmed that she would make every effort to get the minutes out as fast as possible. Notwithstanding, pending full minutes, an information note will be sent to all licence holders before the end of next week.

Loughs Agency Research funding

The Loughs Agency has received funding for 12 PhD's and 34 masters. The Loughs Agency want to use this research capacity to answer questions of use to industry such as means of maximising seed survival. Any industry members with an idea for such a project should contact Sarah McLean or Paddy Boylan in the Loughs Agency

Date of Next meeting

The date of the next meeting was set for the last week in June