

Minutes BGMCF - Meeting 12

Date: 24th July 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 Damien Clarke – DAFM
Mr Colm McKiernan – DAFM
Mr Kenny Parker – DARD
Mr Greg Griffiths - DARD
Mr Marcus McAuley – DARD
Mr Seamus Gallagher – SFPA
Mr Barry Fox – Loughs Agency
Mr George Golden – Industry Rep Carlingford/Dundrum
Mr Arthur McCarthy – Industry Rep Castlemaine/Shannon/Cork
Mr Raymond Dougal – Industry Rep Belfast/ Larne
Mr Michael Havelin – Industry Rep – Foyle

Apologies Mr Richie Flynn – IFA
Mr Stephen Kelly – Industry Rep Kinsale/Waterford/Wexford
Mr Keith Kelleher– DAFF
Ms Sarah McLean – Loughs Agency
Mr Michael O’Driscoll – Vessel owner and operators association
Mr Declan Quigley – SFPA

Donal Maguire (DM) 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. Castlemaine Harbour Mussel Seed Campaign (surveys, quantification, harvest)

DM confirmed that the initial seed survey had been completed by the T.Burke in Castlemaine and that Nicolas Chopin of BIM would be returning to Castlemaine to complete a follow up survey in the coming week.

Subject to the outcome of that survey and a certain minimum amount being found, then of the tonnages reported, 2/3 of the amount found will be available for fishing.

Damien Clarke (DC) gave an outline of the reports that must be completed in advance of the Castlemaine opening, specifically a 2011 fishing report, a report on the extent of the Zostera beds in the area and a report of the coverage from relaying in 2011. These reports should be completed in advance of the opening date and, hopefully, should not cause an obstacle to opening

3. Restriction for seed importations from Irish Sea to Castlemaine Harbour (Industry members are seeking an explanation for the restriction).

Arthur McCarthy and GG expressed concerns with the restrictions on importing seed from the Irish Sea to Castlemaine. This restriction is viewed as placing producers in the area at a further competitive disadvantage especially in the case where seed was not available in Castlemaine. DC and DM highlighted that the current fisheries plan agreed by the co-op does not make provision for seed imports from the Irish Sea. The assessment as it stands covers only those activities listed in the fisheries plan and making changes to the plan and the assessment at this time would be extremely difficult as it is not included in the current assessment schedule.

DM stated that overcoming this restriction should be possible but would not be achieved in the short term.

Joanne Gaffney (JG) further highlighted that invasive alien species was identified by NPWS as part of the consultation process as being of concern if imports were to commence from the Irish Sea. An agreed protocol would need to be developed to assess the risks posed by such imports, and such a protocol would take time to develop. JG highlighted that BIM, DARD and the Loughs Agency are currently working on an alien species project proposal and in tandem with that JG and Grainne O'Brien of BIM would start work on such a protocol for the mussel industry.

GG queried if the issue of alien species would again cause problems in the cases of assessments in other growing areas such as Carlingford and Wexford. DM stated that this is an inevitable outcome of those assessments and as such an agreed protocol is necessary for the whole industry. He confirmed that BIM would work on this issue in the next 6-8 months.

Action: BIM and the BGMCF secretariat to prioritise the development of an alien species protocol for the Bottom Grown Mussel sector.

4. Seed Mussel Fishery Irish Sea and NI Waters (surveys, harvest)

DM outlined the surveys done to date in the Irish Sea and confirmed that survey reports are available on the BIM website, future reports will similarly be published and skippers will be notified of new postings via the SMS system.

GG and MH expressed concern over the surveying arrangements in NI waters in particular the lack of industry engagement with the AFBI scientific survey. KP and GG noted industry concerns and agreed that there appears to have been a breakdown in communication on the surveying issue.

GG further stated industry dissatisfaction with the work completed by AFBI, particularly past recommendations to leave seed to "overwinter". In all cases this seed has been lost to predation and/or storms and that such wastage of seed is causing damage to the sector. MH stated that the practice of restricting the extent of survey to "boxes" rather than using the expertise of the skippers was further causing problems between industry members and AFBI.

GG also highlighted that project proposals have been submitted to AFBI in the past with the offer of co-funding and AFBI have not worked with industry members on these.

MMcA stated that he has met with AFBI and that they are willing to work with the sector.

Action: JG to write to DARD outlining industry concerns with the surveying in 2012

Action: GG requested that DARD provide AFBI seed surveys for the last ten years to industry to track the historical recommendations and fishery outputs.

Following further discussion DARD agreed to consider industry proposals for a seed survey, with MH and GG seeking assurances that if seed is found it can be fished in line with the opening dates in the Irish Sea, and that sufficient technical personnel would be available to follow up on any seed detected and thus facilitate an opening.

The seed proposal would have the following characteristics;

- Skippers would use ground discrimination equipment and their unique knowledge of seed beds to identify where dredge samples are necessary.
- DARD will identify all areas where seed fishing would not be permitted for reasons of nature conservation and nursery grounds for other species. These areas will be excluded from any surveying. All other suitable areas will be subject to survey including the historical seed fishing areas in NI waters (Skullmartin, the Feathers, Donaghadee, the Reefs, and Burial Island).
- Industry activity would be further monitored through Black Boxes and VMS as currently required.

Action: JG to complete the seed survey proposal and submit to DARD for consideration

DM highlighted the industry and technical submission relating to the seed season opening in 2012, seed has been detected in the Irish Sea but it is recommended that the seed is still somewhat “weak” and that delaying the agreed opening date until the 06th of September would give the seed the opportunity to harden and thus maximise the ultimate yield.

Producers sought assurance that this is a technical recommendation and not recommended for any other reason. DM assured the group that this was a purely technical recommendation for maximising yield from the seed beds. All producers present agreed with the recommendation

Action: All skippers to be notified of the new fishing dates as a matter of urgency

5. MSC Certification

DM gave the group an update on the MSC process, provisional scoring has been completed based on the information submitted to date. The assessment is passing or narrowly failing on all of the 3 principles but with the submission of additional information available all principles should be passed. JG is working on compiling the additional information and it is hoped that the final reports, peer review and public consultation will be completed in the next three months.

6. Loughs Agency Aquaculture Implementation Plan

BF confirmed that the implementation plan is progressing at a slow pace. The Loughs Agency is not in a position to give a timeline for its completion at this time.

7. Norovirus

SG confirmed that following the recent European Food Safety Authorities' (EFSA) report on Norovirus that discussions are ongoing at a member state level to agree a testing protocol and regulatory limit for Norovirus in Seafood. This is less of a concern for mussels than oysters as mussels are cooked.

Action: SFPA to provide a more detailed update to the secretariat for addition to these minutes

(Please see link below for EFSA report)

<http://www.efsa.europa.eu/fr/efsajournal/doc/2190.pdf>

8. Election of Industry Members to Forum

DM highlighted that the Bottom Grown Mussel Consultative Forum has now been established for a period of three years. In recognition of the Rising Tide report which stated that industry members of the Bottom Grown Mussel Forum will be elected by the licence holders and will hold the position for a period of three years. The secretariat will be seeking all licence holders input into the regional representation process in advance of the next meeting

Action: Secretariat to proceed with consultation with the licence holders concerning the election process

9. Exports of seed – forum position on this practice

DM stated that the secretariat had received a request for the forum position of the practice of exporting seed. The Forum does not have firm information on the extent of this practice but invited industry members to comment on the practice. Industry members stated that this should not be taking place and that the basis of the industry should be maximising the volume and value of mussel exports from the island. As a first step the extent of the problem should be established.

Action: The Departments and the secretariat to advance the mussel production audit in an effort to track all uses of seed and assess the extent of seed exports

10. Allocation system review – request that there should be a limit on the amount of seed fished per operator of 1,000 tons until all operators have reached that amount or in the case of an operator having a less quota than 1,000 tons then when he reaches half or two-thirds his quota.

Industry members of the forum did not agree with this proposal citing that operators prepared to work hard and invest in vessels should not be curtailed by those who do not wish to fish at the same rate. DM again highlighted that the Rising Tide report recommended a review of the current allocation system but that the production audit must be completed in advance of this.

Action: The Departments and the secretariat to advance the mussel production audit and prioritise the allocation review

11. AOB - Non-Reporting

At the previous meeting of the forum DM highlighted the fact that there remained a certain level of non-cooperation with regard to reporting all catches within the industry. SG of the SFPA stated that all incidences of non-reporting had been followed up and

where a satisfactory explanation could not be provided formal warning were issued to the vessels in question