

Minutes BGMCF - Meeting 14

Date: 22nd August 2013

Venue: BIM, Crofton Road, Dun Laoghaire

In attendance: Mr Donal Maguire – Chairman of the BGMCF
Ms Joanne Gaffney – Secretariat
Mr Damien Clarke – DAFM
Mr Kenny Parker – DARD
Mr Greg Griffiths - DARD
Mr Seamus Gallagher– SFPA
Mr Barry Fox – Loughs Agency
Mr Richie Flynn – IFA
Mr Michael Havelin – Industry Rep – Foyle
Mr George Golden – Industry Rep Carlingford/Dundrum

Apologies Mr Michael Murphy – Secretariat
Mr Stephen Kelly – Industry Rep Kinsale/Waterford/Wexford
Mr Arthur McCarthy – Industry Rep Castlemaine/Shannon/Cork
Mr Raymond Dougal – Industry Rep Belfast/ Larne
Mr Michael O’Driscoll – Vessel owner and operators association

Donal Maguire (DM) welcomed all to the meeting.

1. Minutes of the last meeting - 24th July

The minutes of the last meeting were accepted as presented.

2. Action Points from the last meeting

Action: *Secretariat to draft a Fisheries Natura Plan in consultation with Industry members of the Forum*

Outcome: Covered under agenda item 4 below

Action: *Secretariat to advance the alien species work in consultation with the MI and Industry members*

Outcome: Sampling of seed beds taken place in advance of the seed fishery

Action: *Secretariat to request an update from the Loughs Agency and circulate (Implementation Plan)*

Outcome: Update circulated with previous minutes

Action: *JG to again raise this issue with the MSSC (Castlemaine)*

Outcome: Query submitted to the MSSC

3. Update on seed surveys;

DM outlined the work of the T Burke which has been surveying the ROI east coast and Castlemaine. All survey reports have been posted to the BIM website and all industry members are notified via SMS once survey reports are available.

BF stated that the Loughs Agency has conducted surveys in Foyle and Carlingford but that no seed sources have been identified to date. Given the late seed settlement it is intended to look again in Foyle over the coming weeks. Industry members will be informed of these results.

Action: *Loughs Agency to update seed reports if seed is found.*

KP outlined AFBI's survey work to date. Early signs of settlement have been noted at both Donaghadee and Skullmartin, however it is still too small to quantify. The AFBI recommendation is to monitor the settlements and see if we can get an accurate estimate of tonnage and condition later in the season.

GG suggested that it could be left for 4-6 weeks, but said that it is very important that the stock is not lost to starfish. Thus it would need to be closely monitored.

KP suggested that an industry survey may be required to validate the scientific findings.

NI waters will remain closed until seed resources are identified.

Action: JG to coordinate with AFBI and industry members to organise a survey

4. Irish Sea AA and opening;

The Fisheries Natura plan was prepared as agreed at the last meeting of the Forum and an assessment has been completed by the Marine Institute. NPWS, Birdwatch, Coastwatch and the IFI all submitted comments on the assessment during the consultation period and the MI have gone through these comments and have responded to NPWS. DC stated that while the Department is confident there are no remaining issues, it is not possible to say if the opening will be achieved in compliance with Natura 2000 in advance of the 27th of August.

If the assessment is passed the only restrictions that will remain is that a small proportion of the Wicklow reef site will be closed to fishing. Fishing will also be excluded from the Raven SPA, due to uncertainties surrounding the common scoter populations in the area. The closure at Wicklow reef will be monitored by Geo-fencing a 1km buffer around the closure area. When boats enter this area the frequency of reporting from the VMS system will be increased.

DC sought guidance from industry members as to whether it was preferable to open the Irish Sea on the 27th of August with The long Bank, Blackwater Bank and all other SPA and SAC areas remaining closed or whether it was preferable to defer the opening until the next tide to allow all areas to open at once.

GG and MH stated that they were unable to provide the Department with guidance on the opening as they did not want to leave themselves open to accusations of influencing the opening date's to suit their own businesses. They withdrew temporarily from the meeting to allow discussion.

Following discussion it was agreed that that the fishery would remain closed until the next tide on the 12th of September to allow all areas to open at once.

Action: Industry members to be notified immediately of this decision

It was acknowledged that while this delay was in no way ideal, it should be borne in mind that the work done on the Fishing plan and the assessment covers a five year period and if adopted the Natura designations should not delay openings for the coming 4 years, so it was worth getting it right on this occasion.

5. Update on MSC accreditation, including future actions;

Since the last meeting of the Forum the MSC accreditation had been obtained and to date 15 companies have joined the client grouping. DM commended JG on all the hard work she has put into this project and noted that this is a very important achievement for the industry and the Forum.

JG confirmed that a formal contract will be agreed with industry members once the e-tender process for the maintenance of the scheme is complete. Contracts cannot be signed in advance of this as it will not be possible to predict costs to members until the contract has been awarded.

GG echoed the statements of DM and noted this is a marvellous achievement for the industry as a whole.

6. Husbandry review;

DM noted that this is a long standing agenda item, and that while progress has been made in designing the system, DAFF have a number of concerns regarding the legal considerations surrounding any review.

DC highlighted that any new allocation system must be non-partisan, transparent, and must be clearly outlined in advance. It is proposed that DAFM will consult with their technical experts to devise a formula for the new allocation system. Such transparency is required if industry is to engage with any new system. It is hoped that by the next forum meeting a draft proposal will be available.

Action: DAFF to convene meeting of technical experts to advance the review system

7. Cromane, movements from outside Castlemaine ;

A variation request has been submitted to DAFM, for the Castlemaine fishing plan which would permit movements of seed from outside Castlemaine for relay in the Castlemaine area. The request was submitted by JG following request from industry members in Castlemaine.

DC stated that DAFM had accepted the request and had passed it to the MI for their observations. It is hoped that the variation can be processed without major disruption.

RF stated that it is positive to see a variation request being accepted given that such variations will arise in other areas covered by 5 year plans.

RF queried the opening of the Cromane Fishery.

JG informed the group that initial surveys in the areas indicated the presence of seed but that it is very small and that it would be impossible to calculate a tonnage to set a TAC at this stage. Industry members in the area understand that the opening in Cromane must be delayed to allow the seed to grow on but they are seeking assurances that the area could be opened quickly once a tonnage is calculated.

DC stated that there is no reason why the area could not be opened in a timely manner once a tonnage is reported and that the fishing report on the 2012 fishery has been submitted.

Action: BIM to survey Castlemaine again before the end of September.

Action: JG to coordinate the completion of the 2012 fishing report

8. AOB- Radio Surveyors

DM highlighted that it has been brought to the attention of the Forum that the embargo on public sector employment had led to a situation where there is only one radio surveyor available nationally who could sign off radio systems in compliance with the COC's. Fishing vessels are experiencing difficulties in getting the required survey completed as the priority is being given to larger passenger vessels.

Action: The SFPA committed to contacting the relevant department with a view to establishing if assistance could be provided in sourcing additional surveyors.

9. AOB- Loughs Agency Implementation Plan

GG queried the status of the Lough Foyle Implementation Plan. A lot of industry members in Lough Foyle are waiting for the licencing system to be put in place so that they can invest in and expand their businesses. He felt that the Loughs Agency have failed to put the required management system in place despite having over 10 years to do this.

BF acknowledged that the delay was unacceptable but stated that this matter is outside the agency's control. He stated that the delay is caused by the lack of a management agreement between DAFM and the Crown Estate. With the Loughs Agency await responses from DAFM at this time.

Action: DC to source information within DAFM on this issue.

10. AOB - Research requirements

GG highlighted the problems with seed access currently faced by industry members and called for some research projects to be initiated on developing a greater understanding of certain key issues such as; the sources of the mussel larvae, seasonality and settlement patterns, substrate types etc, with a view to trying to develop more predictive ability within the system.

RF asked that Rope grown seed sources be covered in any research plan, this is a system of sourcing seed that has been shown to work but more research is needed.

JG informed the group that as part of the MSC certification programme there is an obligation to put a research plan in place and such projects could be brought forward.

Action: JG to convene a research group meeting.