

Minutes BGMCF - Meeting 15

Date: 15th May 2014

Venue: BIM, Crofton Road, Dun Laoghaire

In attendance: Mr Donal Maguire – Chairman of the BGMCF
Ms Joanne Gaffney – Secretariat
Mr Michael Murphy – Secretariat
Ms Roni Crowley – DAFM
Mr Kenny Parker – DARD
Mr Greg Griffiths - DARD
Mr Declan Quigley– SFPA
Mr Barry Fox – Loughs Agency
Mr Michael Havelin – Industry Rep – Foyle
Mr George Golden – Industry Rep Carlingford/Dundrum
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

Apologies Mr Richie Flynn – IFA

Donal Maguire (DM) welcomed all to the meeting.

1. Minutes of the last meeting – 22nd August 2014

The minutes of the last meeting were accepted as presented.

2. Action Points from the last meeting

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

Outcome: Complete, no seed was identified

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

Outcome: Complete

Action: Industry members to be notified immediately of this decision

Outcome: Complete

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

Outcome: Covered under agenda item 7 below

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

Outcome: Complete

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

Outcome: Complete

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

Outcome: SFPA to update in note following today’s meeting

Action: DC to source information within DAFM on this issue. (Loughs agency)

Outcome: Covered under agenda item 10 below

Action: JG to convene a research group meeting.

Outcome: Covered under agenda item 9 below

3. Report on the Seed Mussel Fishery 2013

DM presented the stats below to industry; he confirmed that the 2013 season had been a very disappointing one and that surveys had started for the 2014 season.

NI Vessels	NI-NI	IRL-IRL	IRL-NI	NI-IRL
2013	0	230	40	0

IRL Vessels	NI-NI	IRL-IRL	IRL-NI	NI-IRL
2013	0	1566	620	0

He expressed the hope that the 2014 surveys will show substrate recovery toward that which existed pre – winter 2010 when the sandy substrate in traditional settlement areas was almost completely removed by winter storms.

4. Consideration of early 2014 Seed Mussel Surveys

The first seed surveys have been conducted in NI and IRL waters; with no evidence of substantive seed settlements found so far. It was agreed by the Forum members that an early opening of the season would be counterproductive and thus officials would not be recommending an early opening of the fishery

Action: Seed survey to be posted on the BIM website (JG)

KP stated that AFBI have done a preliminary survey and no significant quantity seed was detected

5. Tides and dates for the Seed Mussel Fishery 2014

This was an issue of quite lengthy discussion. DAFM indicated that given the small volumes of seed fished in the last few years and in line with fisheries management policies E.g. Article 2 of CFP that a more precautionary and evidence-based approach must be taken. Following a lengthy discussion it was suggested that a minimum biomass must be identified in the Irish Sea in advance of an opening being permitted. Industry members expressed the view that this new policy was a disturbing development and strongly objected to the proposal, especially as the operation of other bivalve fisheries, which are not enhanced by relaying, are not subject to such a restriction. This point was also refuted on the basis that, while not all shellfisheries are under active management regimes, other shellfisheries under management have different management controls including outtake limits E.g. cockle and clam fisheries. MH highlighted that given the difficulties being experienced by mussel companies particularly in the Foyle even small amounts of seed were extremely valuable to the operators.

The objective of securing continued MSC certification was highlighted by DAFM, in that it called for a greater evidence base for policy decisions, increased survey effort and therefore increased data in advance of opening. DAFM identified that greater evidence is required to demonstrate the sustainability of the fishery and to satisfy the conditional certification of the fishery in 2013 and noted that MSC certification was an important market access device for industry.

After much discussion, industry reluctantly agreed to a minimum survey biomass of 1500 tonnes being used as an opening threshold (Across NI and IRL waters) for the 2014 fishery. They noted that this should be seen as an economic rather than a biological criterion. They further asked that their concerns and unhappiness at the policy shift be noted in the minutes.

RC and DM stressed the need for industry to engage in more surveying effort to ensure that seed resources are identified in advance of opening; the T-Burke will be surveying the Irish Sea but has limited capability due to the small size of the vessel and its limited ability to operate in heavy weather.

Some industry members expressed the view that everyone should be obliged to survey as they felt that it was always the same operators that bore the brunt of the burden every year. It was also suggested that maybe a set period should be established when surveying should take place in order to have a

coordinated survey rather than the ad-hoc arrangements that exist at the moment. The Forum secretariat agreed to investigate how such arrangements might be brought to bear on the 2015 fishery.

Following discussion it was agreed by the members of the Forum that the arrangements set out below would be most suitable for the 2014 season and that this course of action would be recommended to the ministers concerned.

Unless a force majeure situation arises, the seed fishery will not open before the 17th August and the fishery will only open at that time if evidence of a reasonably quantity of seed resources has been identified by prior survey (1,500 tonnes estimate). It is extremely important that all industry members engage in as much surveying of the IRL and NI Irish Sea as possible in 2014 and that they report their findings to the relevant Department quickly if seed is found. As in previous years DARD will facilitate an industry survey if requested in NI waters. **If seed resources are not found and reported, then the fishery may not open at all in 2014.** The BIM inshore survey vessel will operate as usual but its capability is limited as a consequence of its modest size and additional survey effort from the sector would be important.

The decision-making role will rest with the DAFM Minister in the South and DARD in the North. Any decision will have to take account of the recommendation from the Forum but also other factors. Industry members will be notified of whether or not the opening will go ahead on the 17th not later than Thursday 7th August.

As in previous years in cases where a seed bed, which has been found, is subject to heavy predation during the closed period, and it is clear that the seed will be lost to the industry unless fished, then the opening of such an area outside the dates agreed above could be an option as a force majeure type situation. Recommendations on such an eventuality, if and when it arises, will be considered on a case-by-case basis taking into account all relevant considerations of the situation.

Action: JG to notify all industry members of the proposed arrangements for the seed season

6. Southern Irish Sea Natura Assessment and implications for the 2014 Season

JG outlined the MI concerns with the areas proposed in the fishing plan for the southern Irish Sea and stressed that the assessment area should best reflect the areas suitable for seed fishing. Industry members were consulted over the maps and additional shallow/rocky areas were excluded

Action: JG to submit updated maps to the MI

7. Castlemaine Harbour 2014 seed mussel fishery and 2013 Natura reports (Including variation request)

DAFM expressed surprise at the letter submitted to the secretariat concerning the MI comments on the variation request. It was suggested that the best course of action was for industry members to meet directly with the MI and to discuss the issue. This course of action was agreed with AMC and MOD

Action: JG to organise a meeting

8. Mussel Husbandry review, Seed allocation review

A draft of the proposed consultation on the husbandry review which was circulated in advance of the meeting was discussed. Industry members were content that the consultation should issue but noted that the timing of this is not ideal, given that seed supply has been low for the last number of years; it was viewed to be more appropriate after 2 or 3 years good seed supply.

The Departments highlighted that this review has been discussed for a number of years and that it must be progressed to better align the available resource to the amount allocated. This was a key recommendation in the Rising Tide report, will contribute to fulfilling MSC certification conditions and as such must be progressed.

Minor amendments were suggested to some of the questions.

Q1- This should clarify that it is for both NI and IRL waters.

Q6 – Remove

Q7- Rephrase

Action: JG to amend draft consultation document and circulate to DARD and DAFM for clearance

9. MSC

The upcoming annual surveillance audit was discussed. Dates (8/9 July 2014) were communicated to industry and Department members of the Forum and Forum members confirmed they would endeavour to attend. JG may be contacting industry members to gather all the required information for the assessors.

10. Research Plan 2014

Following industry consultation, BIM circulated the proposed research plan in 2014. An additional area of research was suggested (Genetics) and this will be incorporated into the plan.

The Loughs Agency confirmed that they will be looking for a greater industry focus in the proposed IBIS 2 research plan and that it is hoped that BIM will be a project partner.

Action: JG to amend research plan

11. Loughs Agency Aquaculture Implementation Plan

There have been a number of legal hurdles that have been delaying the LA implementation plan, however there has been some recent progress and the LA are confident that the issue is now being worked on. There will be a high level departmental meeting at the end of the month and an update on progress will be provided after that.

12. Alien Species

MOD queried the concerns over alien species, it was acknowledged that it was extremely unlikely that alien species pose a risk from the wild beds in the Irish Sea; this is supported by the lack of any nuisance species in growing areas where transplantation has been taking place over the last 10 or 20 years. JG agreed that this is the case but that data will be required for the upcoming Appropriate Assessments in the growing bays.

13. Norovirus

An update was requested on current IRL and EU policy on Norovirus testing.

DM had recently attended a European conference in Dublin where this issue was discussed. It appears that the EU is still considering the issue with no firm decision as of yet. However it appears that a risk based approach is favoured over the setting of a numerical limit due to the limitations of the testing methodology. The risk based approach will move towards the minimisation of the source of Norovirus in the population and the treatment methods employed by the sewage treatment works.

JG noted that local authorities must now consider shellfish culture when drawing up their local development plans.

14. AOB

Radio Surveys

The delay in obtaining a cert for radios on aquaculture vessels in the South remains a problem and this in turn is delaying the final sign off on COC's.. The issue is thought to have arisen as a result of the recruitment embargo which prevents the MSO hiring additional radio surveyors. Industry members requested that the SFPA look into this matter.

Action: Declan Quigley to investigate

Biotoxins

AMC raised the issue of closures as a result of biotoxins and requested more information and movements on the issue of multiple zones in the growing bays. GG also queried the policy approach to movements of

mussels from closed areas to open areas. DM stated that this is a matter for the MSSC (Molluscan Shellfish Safety Committee) which is composed of reps from MI, BIM, SFPA and the FSAI.

Action: DM to bring this issue to the attention of the BIM reps on the committee

Whelk pots

Industry members highlighted that there appears to be a marked increase in the number of pots in areas that may contain seed mussel. They sought assurance that pot owners would be notified in advance of the fishing season.

Action: DAFM confirmed that this will take place, DM also stated that BIM regional officers will also be notified so they can also spread this information

Frequency of meetings

Industry representatives suggested that Forum meetings should be scheduled held more regularly to allow greater discussion on key issues. DM agreed to this as the group chairman.

Life Jackets

Industry members were made aware of the schemes both in NI and IRL for new life jackets. Mussel producers were urged to make applications

VMS updates – NI

GG reminded all NI vessel owners that there is currently a time-limited scheme to fund the purchase, installation and warranty of a dual function satellite tracking device. The new VMS terminals are now available and can be ordered from DARD who are able to pay grant aid for the purchase, installation and warranty of this device and DARD have arranged to pay the authorised supplier, AST, direct once the system is installed. This means that there will be no “up-front” costs for the fishing vessel. He noted that a number of the mussel vessels have not applied for this and asked that application be put in as a matter of urgency.

Action: JG to contact vessel owners who have not yet applied

