

**Minutes**                      **BGMCF - Meeting 6**

**Date:**                              22nd of April 2010

**Venue:**                            BIM, Crofton Road, Dun Laoghaire

**In attendance:**                Mr Donal Maguire – Chairman of the BGMCF  
Mr Michael Murphy – Secretariat  
Ms Joanne Gaffney – Secretariat  
Mr Kenny Parker - DARD  
Mr Greg Griffiths - DARD  
Ms Roni Hawe – DAFF  
Mr Paul Duane - SFPA  
Mr Barry Fox – Loughs Agency  
Mr Arthur McCarthy–Rep Castlemaine/Shannon/Cork/Clew  
Mr George Golden – Industry Rep Carlingford/Dundrum  
Mr Stephen Kelly – Industry Rep Kinsale/Waterford/Wexford  
Mr Michael O’Driscoll–Vessel owner and operators association  
Mr Michael Havelin – Industry Rep Foyle  
Mr John McLaughlin – Industry Rep Swilly  
Dr. Bill Dore – Marine Institute

**Apologies:**                      Mr Raymond Dougal – Industry Rep Belfast/Larne

**1. Minutes of the last meeting**  
The minutes of the last meeting were accepted

**2. Seed Mussel Fishery 2010**

**(a) Castlemaine Harbour Seed Mussel Fishery**

DM outlined the current situation with regard to Castlemaine Harbour. A lot of work has been done in the area since last summer with NPWS, Marine Institute contracting out data collection in the area. Results to date appear to indicate that bird populations are at healthy levels.

BIM have recently undertaken an initial survey of the area in an effort to determine if a seed settlement has occurred this year. Some of last years seed present and early evidence of some very small seed at 1mm present. The seed is too small to make any judgement on whether it will survive in the area or will be of sufficient quantity for fishing. It is thought that the late settlement may be a result of the cold winter.

Dr Terence O’Carroll is of the opinion that the earliest that a useful survey could be conducted will be late May.

In line with last year the assessment process would begin with the survey and the preparation of the fishing plan, the assessment would then be completed and placed out to consultation by DAFF, responses would be considered and then a recommendation made to the minister. This process is a lengthy one (Min of 2 months)

Consultation will be with the environmental regulators and the NGO’s, and the consultation will focus on the issue of impact on the features of the protected site.

MOD stated that the positive impacts of the activity are never recognised e.g. the provision of food in the nursery relay area for intertidal bird species

DM said all scientific data would be considered by the Marine Institute. The aim of the assessment process is to provide a high standard of assessment that is robust and rational and that can stand up to scrutiny both from the NGO's and Europe.

GG and MOD queried whether the industry can undertake their own assessments - DM indicated that they could but that this would be an expensive process and that the assessment would again have to be robust and of a high enough standard to satisfy the Ministers technical advisors.

GG and MOD queried if assessment standards, approved consultants and guidelines could be provided for industry

DM suggested that the best approach to getting information on standards for Appropriate Assessment would be to invite the Marine Institute to give a presentation the next meeting of the forum.

**Action: JG to ask Dr Oliver Tully to attend the next meeting of the Forum**

KP suggested that Matt Service could also attend the meeting and give a NI perspective on the assessment process.

**Action: JG to ask Dr Matt Service to attend the next meeting of the Forum**

**(b) Seed Mussel Fishery in other NATURA Sites**

It was reported that in ROI waters, all seed beds in or adjacent to Natura areas will remain closed pending the completion of Appropriate Assessments for those areas. The assessment process will be undertaken in line with the procedures that are agreed with the National Parks & Wildlife Service and DG Environment and in accordance with the European Communities (Natural habitats and birds) (Sea-fisheries) Regulations 2009

It was noted that the 'Wicklow Box area was on the list of priority areas for fishery assessment along with a number of other sites, currently it is not an immediate priority and it stands behind Castlemaine and other inshore fisheries such as the cockle fishery in Dundalk Bay. Again a survey would have to be undertaken and baseline data collected and a fisheries Natura plan devised before any assessment could take place and industry must be aware that the amount of work that can be undertaken is limited as a result of resource restrictions.

In Castlemaine the process would begin with the survey and the preparation of the fisheries Natura plan, the assessment would then be completed and placed out to consultation by DAFF, responses would be considered and then a recommendation made to the Minister. The meeting was informed that this process would take a minimum of 2 months to complete.

**(c) Donaghadee**

KP informed the group that following the recent AFBI seed survey a submission had been put to the Minister on access to the resource at Donaghadee Sound by both mussel producers and fishermen wishing to develop a wild fishery. –The survey by AFBI indicated that there is at least 1000t of seed in the area. The decision to open the whole area or a limited part of the bed for seed fishing rests with the Minister and as soon as a decision is made industry will be informed.

GG and SK indicated that they felt that this arrangement was not satisfactory. They believed that decisions should be made well in advance of the opening date of the spring fishery. With ten days to go, they stated that the industry has no idea if it will be allowed access to the only currently confirmed source of seed ready for fishing around the coast of the Island. They were of the view that survey results and policy decisions relating to their livelihoods should be available much further in advance of the opening date of a fishery.

KP indicated that as soon as information was available it would be communicated to industry by DARD with the assistance of the Aquaculture Initiative acting as the secretariat to the BGMCF.

***Action: Industry to be informed of DARD Minister's decision on access to Donaghadee Sound as soon as possible***

### **3. Surveying in NI Waters**

The Aquaculture Initiative will convene a meeting between DARD, AFBI and industry members after the spring fishing is finished to discuss arrangements for the wider industry survey in NI waters in the summer of 2010

***Action: Surveying meeting to be arranged***

### **4. Growth Trials in Belfast Lough**

AFBI will undertake mussel growth trials on four sites in Belfast Lough with the aim of further populating the SMILE model with more accurate growth data and to ultimately identify the best areas for culture within the Lough. Growth trial areas will be outside of licensed sites and AFBI are currently in negotiation with the Crown Estate for leasing the ground. AFBI will undertake arrangements for commissioning a vessel to fish and relay mussels required for the trials.

GG stated that he had ten years data that can be provided to assist with this.

### **5. Surveying in ROI Waters**

Paul Duane (PD) stated that any vessel searching/surveying for seed outside the open tides for seed fishing should have a written consent from SFPA on board. SFPA should be informed before any "searching" activity occur and will issue these consents through the Howth Office.

SK and GG objected to this proposal as it is a further administrative burden on the industry and a further means of restricting operations

JG informed the group that she had discussed this issue with the SFPA and had been given assurances that this was not an effort to restrict activities or generate more paperwork. She explained that the SFPA feel that they need to know when vessels are active so if they receive complaints from other fishermen or the public they can inform those complaining that they are aware of the vessel operating in the area and be able to state that it has permission to do so.

***Action: JG to liaise with the SFPA on this issue to ensure smooth running of the new arrangement***

### **6. Stock Tracking**

The industry were advised that in 2010 all seed fished in ROI waters must be notified via SMS to **00353 87 9885116** as part of a stock tracking system prior to boats leaving the seed fishing areas. The phone number of the skipper must be notified to the Department prior to the fishing season and caller ID must be enabled on the skipper's phone.

SMS's must contain;

1. The Vessel Name

2. The source of the seed
3. The destination of the seed including aquaculture licence number and bay
4. Gross Tonnage
5. Net Tonnage

## **7. Alien Species**

### *(a) Crepidula*

GG stated that he felt that nothing was happening about dealing with the restrictions arising from the presence of *Crepidula* in Belfast Lough and that DARD should be assisting industry in finding a solution to the problems faced by the sector in this regard. He put forward the view that time was important and that something needs to be done on this issue.

As an example GG mentioned that he was still waiting for info from AFBI that he had requested months ago, JG stated that she had received some info from AFBI in this regard but had unfortunately omitted passing it on in the interim. She undertook to send it on directly to GG.

KP suggested that the Belfast Lough CLAMS group should submit a proposal for industry to undertake commercial trials on using brine solution to eradicate *Crepidula* from consignments of mussels.

***Action: JG to facilitate the CLAMS group to formulate a Crepidula project***

### *(b) Surveillance Programme*

KP stated that under the new 'Alien Species in Aquaculture' legislation stated that member states have a responsibility to monitor the movement of non-target species. A surveillance programme on seed mussel movements may be required to fulfil this obligation.

JG stated that such a programme would also be required as part of any attempt to gain MSC certification.

***Action: Group to be updated further if and as this issue develops***

## **8. Seed Mussel Allocation Review**

It was reported to the BGMCF that the review group met on the 21-April-2010. Eleven cases were considered, with the majority of cases being deferred due to insufficient data being provided, however a few reviews resulted in allocations being increased and there was one starter allocation granted to a site that previously had no allocation linked to it.

Although some anomalies have been addressed, it is evident that the system has become decoupled from the actual site and business management practices of the sector. It was concluded that the whole system of granting allocations should be reviewed and a new system linked to the activities of the sector be devised. It was accepted that an overall audit of the recent catching, relaying and harvesting performance of the sector would have to be carried out to underpin this initiative. However it was noted that current resource constraints may affect this issue.

It is hoped that this will be achieved in time for the 2011 season.

***Action: Features of the audit to be developed by the relevant Departments and Agencies***

## **9. MSC Certification**

JG reported to the forum on the preliminary researches she had carried out into this matter. She stated that if an all-island approach to funding MSC certification is to be taken then the Operational Programme in the ROI would have to come on stream. That way matching funding could be sourced to compliment that available in NI (Subject to application acceptance and examination). The assessment is likely to cost in excess of €100,000

GG stated that MSC is a priority and that we should continue to push the project forward, especially in light of the market indications that all mussels to be sold to the multiples on mainland Europe will require MSC by 2012

JG stated the currently she planned to meet with the DARD Grant Section, to discuss potential funding and grant application procedures in anticipation of EFF money becoming available in ROI in the near future. In tandem to this JG will also investigate the costs of separating the NI certification from the ROI certification

DM outlined situation where pre-spending was not allowed, but that the eco label from existing schemes may be useful in the interim in satisfying customers in the Netherlands.

**Action: JG to investigate a MSC certification and funding**

## **10. Loughs Agency Aquaculture Implementation Plan**

BF stated that there have been no developments on the implementation plan as an agreement has yet to be reached by DAFF and the Crown estate on lease terms and rates in Foyle and Carlingford

## **11. Viral Contamination of Molluscs**

Bill Dore of the Marine Institute gave a presentation on viral contamination in Molluscs to the group

## **12. AOB**

### **(a) UK registered fishing vessel being excluded from the ROI 6 mile zone**

PD stated that the SFPA have looked at the issues which led to the exclusions and can assure mussel producers that these will not affect the operation of vessels in the seed mussel fishery

### **(b) Black Boxes and Capacity Plans**

PD highlighted that prior to receiving an authorisation to fish by DAFF; each vessel has to be physically inspected by the SFPA to ensure that they have certified capacity plans and an operational "black box". No authorisations will be issued without these criteria being verified. It is incumbent on each vessel owner to ensure that these criteria are verified prior to the opening of the seed fishery.

It was further noted that prior to receiving a licence to fish from DARD, all producers must ensure that all relevant paperwork has been completed and submitted to DARD. It is incumbent on each producer to ensure that this paperwork is submitted in advance of the opening date.

### **(c) Interaction with other inshore fisheries stakeholders**

PD stated that although it is not within SFPA's remit to get involved in any dispute between mussel seed fishermen and other inshore fishermen (e.g. whelk & lobster), it is clear that contentious issues have arisen in the past and every effort should be made to avoid any potential conflict during the coming season.

SK stated that his skipper had been intimidated by a group of fishermen in Wicklow in the previous week and that this is not acceptable behaviour – the matter was reported to the SFPA.

He stated that the maximum time period that seed fishing occurred is 50 days per year – a maximum of 15 in the first six months of the year and a further 35 max from September to Christmas and that he felt that they should be allowed to conduct their fishery without being impeded by people looking to cause conflict and get compensation.

The industry members advanced the view that it is impossible to get a resolution because the mussel boat owners are always expected to turn up with ‘their cheque books open.’

The question was asked if the inshore fishermen operate under a permit system and why could they not be requested to remove pots when seed fishing is underway.

SK further queried the legal requirement for the specifications for pot marking buoys and whether or not there was any enforcement?

***Action: PD to supply JG with legislation for circulation to the industry members***

**13. AOB**

DM passed the groups condolences to John McLaughlin on his recent bereavement

**14. Date of Next Meeting**

Industry members suggested the third week in July and highlighted that the BIM office in Crofton Road was the most suitable venue for meetings, as it is the most central venue available.