

BGMCF - Meeting 19

Date: 28th April 2016

Venue: BIM, Dun Laoghaire

In attendance: Mr Donal Maguire – Chairman of the BGMCF
Ms Joanne Gaffney – Secretariat
Mr Michael Murphy – Secretariat
Mr Nicholas Hoffman – DAFM
Mrs Colette Connor – DARD
Mr Mark Mc McCaughan – DARD
Dr Matt Service – AFBI
Mr Declan Quigley – SFPA
Dr Francis O’Beirne – MI
Mr Barry Fox – Loughs Agency
Mr Michael Havelin – Industry Rep – Foyle
Mr George Golden – Industry Rep Carlingford/Dundrum
Mr Raymond Dougal – Industry Rep Belfast/ Larne
Mr Michael O’Driscoll – Vessel owner and operators association
Mr Arthur McCarthy – Industry Rep Castlemaine/Shannon/Cork
Mr William Dingemanse – Industry Rep Wexford/Waterford
Mr Richie Flynn – IFA Aquaculture

Donal Maguire (DM) welcomed all to the meeting.

1. Minutes of the last meeting

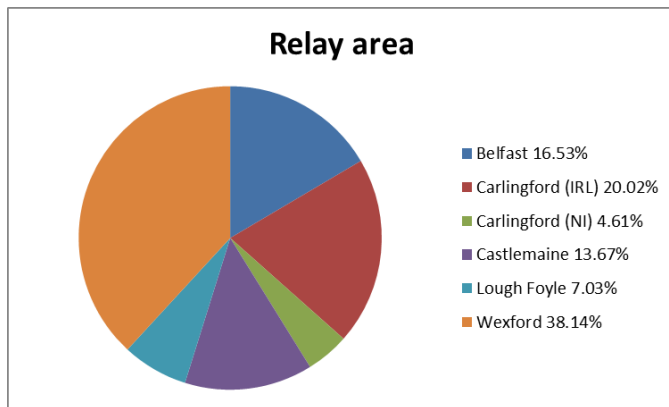
The minutes of the last meeting from the 22nd July 2015 were accepted as presented. Action points arising are discussed below;

- Results from the BIM surveys will be posted on the BIM website and alerts will be issued via the SMS system – Completed.
- All industry members are to be immediately informed of the proposed opening via SMS, updates to be circulated via SMS – Completed.
- JG to work with the co-op to finalise the fishing plan. – Completed.
- DAFM and DARD to convene a technical subcommittee – This item will be covered under agenda item 7.
- JG to invite Bill Dore to the next meeting of the Forum – This action was deferred due to the busy agenda for this meeting – JG to follow up for the next meeting of the forum.

2. Seed Fishery 2015

The summary charts (Data below) for the 2015 seed fishing season were explained by DM who gave an overview of their content. It was shown that there had been a reasonable recovery over the last two years, most likely due to the more usual pattern of direction of the winter gales.

Total Seed Fished	12154.7(Gross)	9333.5 (Net)
Fishing events	207	
Days Fished	50	
Vessels	23	
Sourced ROI Waters	81%	
Sourced NI Waters	18.68%	



3. Seed Fishery 2016

Administration

There have been a number of requests from industry that fishery paperwork be distributed early to industry so that they can be organised for when the fishing opens. The Departments agreed to do their best to facilitate this.

Tides/Surveying

DM suggested that as there was currently no data available on seed resources and thus a spring fishery was unlikely at this point.

Industry members asked for surveys to be carried out to establish if seed might be available for a spring fishery and until that data become available they felt that the possibility of a spring fishery should not be discounted.

MS said that some surveying work has been completed in NI waters but that an acoustic survey was now required to ground truth results from the initial survey and that he would expect to have a report produced in a week or so.

GG reiterated the need for both official and industry surveys to assist industry.

DM informed the meeting that the T Burke would be commencing its survey work shortly, depending on weather, as the time consuming work of tendering for a skipper had now been completed and the same skipper as last year was now in place.

BF stated that some surveying work had been completed in Lough Foyle with no positive results and that further work will be undertaken.

JG stated that a number of industry members have requested that the season be opened on a suitable slack tide, a tide of 7.0m is regarded as too strong and the opening should occur on a weaker tide. WD supported this proposal.

Tide tables were circulated and the suggested tides subject to seed availability are as follows

Spring opening - 27th May to June 1st, (if there was to be a fishery)

Autumn Fishery - 25th August.

With regard to industry surveys JG reminded all that in the case of ROI industry surveys that DQ of the SPPA must be notified and for NI, the industry would liaise with DARD Fisheries with regard to observers etc.

DM suggested that if and when surveys turned up viable amounts of seed then a Forum meeting would be called from which recommendations would be passed on to the relevant ministers.

Action Point: Following GG request that there would be initial feedback to industry from surveys within two weeks.

4. Castlemaine Harbour

JG updated the meeting on progress to date with regard to the fishing plan produced in collaboration with the producers in Castlemaine. Since the last meeting a draft plan had been produced which (following consultation with the Co-op) had been submitted to the Department. Additional queries from the Institute have also been addressed in consultation with the Co-op

Once the assessment is completed by the MI the draft plan and assessment will be subject to consultation with the NPWS, relevant NGO's and other stakeholders but indications are that bird numbers have increased in the past 5 years which gives comfort that the first fishery plan was not impacting.

AMcC asked the forum whether further work was required to allow Castlemaine fishermen to bring in seed from outside the area. JG pointed out that the new fishing plan draft currently includes the potential for taking in seed from outside the harbour.

RF stated that it was hoped that further procedures and obstacles would not be put in place by NPWS or others. JG outlined some work that Grainne O'Brien and she were undertaking at present on a risk assessment model with regard to alien species. She further mentioned an alien species workshop that is currently being organised for boat skippers and others to assist in identification of alien species.

5. Cork Harbour Fishery

The BGMCF have received a large amount of correspondence relating to the seed fishery that occurred in Cork Harbour in December 2015

DM stated that the seed bed was identified as part of routine GMIT graduate training work being undertaken in Cork Harbour on the Celtic Voyager. FO'B stated that this training course is conducted annually in the area but that this, to his knowledge, is the first time that a seed bed was identified.

WD pointed out that when he became aware of the seed being present in Cork Harbour he incurred significant costs in surveying the area and then went through normal channels and requested relevant permits

On foot of the seed survey and after consideration of the Fish Health requirements, there were queries from industry to MI, BIM and DAFM regarding, *inter alia*, the presence of alien species, fish health considerations, algal toxins etc. However, the MI conducted a survey to look for alien species and examined the issue of toxins – no problems were identified.

Learning from this experience it was agreed that a protocol be established in the event of a seed bed being found during incidental or non-targeted surveys. It was agreed that the secretariat of the Forum and the Department would be notified immediately by vessel operators of such finds. DM agreed to write to the Marine Institute regarding this suggested protocol requesting that vessel users/operators be asked to action the protocol:-

AMcC queried whether Cork Harbour would be included in this year's survey schedule and was informed that this would be so. GG pointed out that the harbourmaster in Cork must be contacted regarding any survey work proposed.

DAFM also received queries regarding the fishing activity in Cork Harbour from a number of sources including mussel farmers, other fishermen, concerned members of the public and the media. Some queries raised concerns about the compliance of the fishing activity with the policies and regulatory provisions in place for the fishery. DAFM sought advice from the relevant competent authorities in each of these cases and was satisfied in light of the advice received that the relevant policies and their regulatory provisions were being complied with.

Action: DM to write to Marine Institute regarding protocol for notification to the Department if seed is found.

6. MSC Certification

JG updated the meeting on the current situation regarding MSC for the sector. She pointed out that the industry was behind with regard to some performance indicators. The annual assessment for 2016 has been deferred to November to allow for the relevant work to be undertaken during the fishing season this year. More work is required on monitoring the catch as well as alien species and to achieve this, a more coordinated working relationship is required with the boat skippers. DM asked industry assembled whether MSC was still required and was told emphatically by GG that yes it was very important.

7. Mussel Husbandry Review.

The Action point following the last meeting of the Forum concerning the technical sub-committee remains open. DM said that the forum will work with the two Departments in progressing this item.

8. Water Quality Belfast Lough

JG brought it to the group's attention that there are industry concerns with regard to water quality in Belfast Lough.

CC said that concerns regarding poor water quality had been brought to the attention of Executive Ministers. CC advised that DARD will be restructuring on 9 May to a new Department (DAERA) which will include the Department of the Environment and the Inland Fisheries functions from the Department for Culture, Arts and Leisure. Water quality is likely to be top of the new Minister's agenda. She mentioned that at the last Aquaculture Representative Group (ARG) meeting in NI held in December that two officials were present, from DOE and NI Water and that this issue was being followed up on. MS informed the meeting of some work currently being undertaken in Carlingford Lough which was attempting to distinguish between e coli contamination from human sewage or animal origin. RD pointed out that at present it was very hard to tie down both NI water and DOE for meetings on this issue. MMcC said that they hope to use the format of the new Department to work on this issue internally and to see what progress can be achieved in the short term as it is not expected that there will be major improvement in infrastructure in the interim.

9. Licensing – Lough Swilly

DM informed the meeting that there had been some representation from industry of concern that mussel seed areas in the Lough would be licensed. It was accepted that there had been no know beds of seed found for a number of years. There was no comment either way from industry at this point. RD pointed out that there was still a gigas fishery ongoing in the Lough. MH said he had requested permission to survey in the Lough last year and was restricted from going beyond Bunrana up the Lough.

Action Point;- the forum would enquire as to possible surveying in Lough Swilly this season and enquire as to why there was a restriction to surveying by boat last year.

10. Aquatic Animal Health – TTX, Norovirus, Authorisation

TTX

Tetrodotoxin (TTX) is a neurotoxin responsible for many human fatalities, most commonly following the consumption of pufferfish. Whilst the source of the toxin has not been conclusively proven, it is thought to be associated with various species of marine bacteria. Whilst the toxins are well studied in fish and gastropods, in recent years, there have been a number of reports of tetrodotoxin occurring in bivalve shellfish, including those harvested from the UK and other parts of Europe (May be one study from Belfast Lough)

In

January 2015 CEFAS reported that tetrodotoxin (TTX) was found in bivalve shellfish: "TTX is present within the temperate waters of the United Kingdom, along the English Channel, and can accumulate in filter-feeding molluscs."

Under AOB at the last European LBM working group the Dutch authorities made reference to a paper published in January 2015 which reported the first detection of tetrodotoxin in European shellfish. The Dutch had concerns about tetrodotoxins and has included sampling in its official monitoring of its's production areas. The Dutch expressed a wish to have more discussions on this and hoped for a uniform approach to address possible risk to consumer safety. At that point the Commission highlighted that there is no recognised

regulatory level for this toxin and that the Commission could ask EFSA for an opinion. In addition, at the next working group meeting in May/June the Dutch agreed to present more details of its approach in the context of official controls in the Dutch production area.

The UK report led to an investigation of Dutch shellfish samples over the summer of 2015 by the RIKILT (food safety research centre from Wageningen University). They discovered that TTX was present in Dutch waters as well (so far, only detected in the Oosterschelde). The findings of the RIKILT in turn, led to a risk assessment, commissioned by the Dutch Food and Consumer Product Safety Authority (NVWA).

Based on their own risk assessment, the NVWA has decided to impose a limit of 20 µg/kg, and to monitor the Dutch shellfish production-areas for TTX. If TTX is found above the limit, they will close the area until the amount of TTX is below the self-imposed norm.

RF explained that the presence of Tetrodotoxin (TTX) could become an issue regarding exports to the Netherlands. He did point out that following enquiries in Brussels that the legal situation was that a member state can impose restrictions on their own produce, but that they can't restrict imports unless agreed by Europe. The current situation is as follows:

- There is no restriction at present.
- The Commission is awaiting a response from the Dutch on this issue.
- Following this response a meeting will be convened to discuss.
- If required a specialist will be commissioned to investigate further.

Aside from the official line the big potential issue is public opinion and how they would react to this issue. There are still questions as to how this issue arose in the first place. No risk assessment has been done. It is very expensive to undertake the assay required to find this toxin.

GG thanked Richie on behalf of industry for all the work and effort put into investigating this issue to date. RF said he is following on the suggestion that the toxin was found in Belfast Lough. MS said that that Seafish was in touch with him two days ago and that he is following this up as well. RF suggested that a plan of action is required in case this does become an issue regarding public perception as industry should not be caught off-guard. DQ suggested that there had been an increase in the presence of puffer fish in more Northern waters in recent years.

Action: RF to investigate suggestion that TTX found in Belfast lough. MS to follow up with Seafish.

Noro virus

On the 4 March 2016 the European Food Safety Authority published a call for assistance in devising the technical specifications for a European baseline survey of norovirus in oysters (Not researching mussels) The European Commission requested scientific technical assistance in the preparation of a survey protocol for a European Union (EU) coordinated monitoring programme on the prevalence of norovirus (NoV) in raw oysters.

The objective of the survey is to estimate the European prevalence of norovirus-contaminated oysters at production areas and batches of oysters at dispatch centres.

Fish Health Authorisations

The MI/SFPA/Secretariat will be in contact with all industry members regarding the fish health authorisations for the 2016 season. The 2015 season was seen as having been difficult in this regard, there will be an effort to improve the administrative flow this year, it was suggested that the situation would be improved by early distribution of fishery paperwork to operators, as had been requested by industry.

11. Loughs Agency Implementation Plan

BF said that the Department of Foreign Affairs and the Commonwealth Office have been having discussions recently, more so than in the past as a result of increased aquaculture activity in Lough Foyle.

12. AOB

MS mentioned the ongoing seed collection trials being undertaken in Belfast lough by AFBI. Collectors were successful in collecting spat last year and it is planned to deploy them again this year with the hope of utilising

the seed gathered. This work is being encouraged as a potential means of supplementing current sources of seed rather than replacing other methods.

DM noted that Bill Dore had not been invited to attend this meeting as there had been a very full agenda but that he would be invited to the next one.

DM thanked all for attending the meeting which was then closed.