

BGMCF - Meeting 22

Date: 05/06/2019

Venue: Royal Marine, Dun Laoghaire

In attendance: Mr Donal Maguire – Chairman of the BGMCF
Ms Joanne Gaffney – Secretariat
Mr Michael Murphy – Secretariat
Mr Gavin Keirsc- DAFM
Mr Nicholas Hoffman – DAFM
Ms Roni Hawe - DAFM
Mr Brian McSweeney- DAFM
Mr Pascal Hayes – DAFM
Mr John McGuigan – DAERA
Mr John Kane – DAERA
Ms Adele Byod - AFBI
Mr Oliver Tully - MI
Mr Barry Fox – Loughs Agency
Mr Michael Havelin – Industry Rep – Foyle
Mr George Golden – Industry Rep Carlingford/Dundrum
Mr Michael O’Driscoll – Vessel owner and operators association
Mr Arthur McCarthy – Industry Rep Castlemaine/Shannon/Cork

Apologies: Mr William Dingemane – Industry Rep Wexford/Waterford
Ms Teresa Morrissey - IFA

Donal Maguire (DM) welcomed all to the meeting.

1. Minutes of the Last Meeting

The minutes of the last meeting from the 22nd May 2018 were accepted as presented.

2. Seed Fishery 2018

Provisional seed fishery data was provided to the group, this data has yet to be verified by the SFPA, final figures will be provided by SFPA and DAERA.

Fished NI –	1135	870
Fished IE -	5890	4801
Relay (Net)		
Wexford	1981	
Foyle	100	
Castlemaine	620	
Carlingford	885	
Belfast	2085	

3. Seed Fishery 2019

Tides

DM proposed the 1st or third week of September, with the first tide not including a discount for 7m tides

Industry members indicated that, subject to seed availability, Thursday 22nd was the preferred opening date. The first fishing day should not start on a 7m tide (This is too strong).

It was agreed that collectively all would work towards the 22nd August or the first tide in September. But this would be subject to seed availability, confirmed via survey results.

Surveying

AFBI indicated that there is some evidence of seed settlement in the Feathers and Burial Island.

DM confirmed that there is evidence of settlement at the Long Bank – South Shear and that the first Cromane survey is scheduled to take place next week

BF indicated that the Loughs Agency would coordinate an industry survey in Lough Foyle

Industry members expressed concern that the spring fishery has been overlooked and requested that more effort be put into looking for overwintered seed. Seed areas identified in autumn should be followed up early in the Spring, weather and vessel availability permitting.

4. MSC Certification

JG provided an update on MSC certification; recertification has been achieved in both NI and IE. Certificates have no conditions attached, which reflects well on the management system and the environmental performance of the fishery. This also means that the maintenance of the certification will be cheaper over the next four years.

Industry members commended JG on her efforts in this regard and highlighted the importance of the certification to the commercial sustainability of their businesses.

5. Clarification on vessel access, NI in IE waters

DAFM confirmed that the Sea Fisheries Amendment Act 2019 was passed. It is an Act debated through both houses of the Oireachtas and is not an inter-jurisdictional civil service agreement, as had been in place in previous years.

It commenced on the 23rd April and contains several conditions that need be understood by industry members

NI seed fishing vessels are allowed access to 0-6NM zone of the RoI, this is expressly set out in legislation. 0 is the baseline, not the shoreline, and the baseline runs between the mouth of Bays. This was always the case but is now formally defined.

Base closure lines are long established all along the west coast. Baselines for Dublin, Wexford, Dundalk have been formalised via SI No. 155 of 2019.

OT outlined that this appears to be causing confusion with Industry members and suggested that the SFPA seek to reinforce knowledge and understanding of the formal position with all vessel owners and operators.

6. **Brexit**

Mitigation actions have and are being undertaken in DAFM in relation to seafood trade and fishing ground access. Plans are being made for a disorderly exit, but a smooth exit will be required if access to the UK market is to continue uninterrupted.

DAERA articulated the position of the UK government and that is that, irrespective of the Brexit situation, voisonage arrangements will continue as they are.

Industry members raised concerns relating to border arrangements in Carlingford and Foyle, particularly in the context of fish health certification

DAERA and DAFM acknowledged these concerns but stated that it was currently impossible to predict the outcome of an ongoing political process.

7. **Draft Discussion Paper - Review of Management Arrangements for the Irish mussel seed fishery.**

NH gave a quick overview of the discussion paper. Key points were;

- The document focuses on the Irish Sea fishery, Cromane will continue to be managed separately due to Natura considerations.
- An overview of the current arrangements
- Access requirements
- Discussion paper looks at possible limitations to the assumptions underlying the management system and possible revisions

The discussion paper arose from concern arising over the following issues:

- Concerns have been expressed that volumes authorised are currently significantly greater than that biomass either available or fished.
- MI provided advice that raised concern about the Irish Sea fishery and the classification of the Irish Sea stock as a single stock

- MI recommended that the harvest strategy be developed further as the current arrangements are too simplistic
- That the allocation system does not limit harvest
- Some new licences have come into the system, complicating the matter
- BIM surveys cannot identify all of the beds occurring each season, industry vessels have been involved in surveying but concern was expressed that the data from these surveys is not of a scientific quality that could be used to reliably underpin and support the management system
- That the population dynamics of the Irish sea spawning stocks are still not adequately understood

Some possible revisions to the management system could be;

- Industry survey methodology could be standardised and enhanced
- Greater research effort could be focussed on the spawning stocks, and that the stocks that exist within Natura 2000 sites should also be factored into the equation
- Develop a TAC, align seed fishing opportunities to stock availability in a given year
- Greater investment in REM. GSM VMS system will be put in place in coming fishing seasons

NH completed his presentation by outlining the DAFM plan to bring the discussion document to public Consultation later this year

A general discussion followed, and the following topics were explored.

Industry members sought a further assurance that Castlemaine is not forming part of the review. DAFM confirmed this, as the harvest strategy there is already different and not subject to the same concerns about the Irish Sea that have driven the development of the discussion document

Industry members expressed the view that given the MSC certification of the Fishery, it is difficult to understand where the sustainability concerns felt by DAFM were coming from and that these matters would need careful consideration over the coming months. The general feeling from the members of industry present was that the document in its current form was going to cause a lot of issues for the operators of the fishery. Reducing allocations was seen as a retrograde step for the industry. They pointed out that although spatfalls have been low for the last several seasons, the volumes in the allocation system do reflect a reality that has been experienced in the relatively recent past and that may well occur again.

DAFM expressed the view that it would be a more credible position for all concerned if there was a direct link between the survey data and the allocations, especially in years when much lower biomass is available. It was felt that the system would be easier to explain and defend if the allocation were to reflect what the surveys were showing in a given year.

Industry members queried if DAFM, MI, SPPA and BIM had the ability to manage the new system as suggested in the revisions, as they felt it would require survey activity right up to the opening of the fishery, if biomass estimates were to be accurate, and that such a scenario would require an ultra-rapid turnaround for paperwork

RH reiterated that DAFM were of the view that the management tools that are currently in use are out of date. The record of the fishery in terms of biomass available to fish has not been great in recent years. There was a risk that the fishery could be regarded as an unsustainable one because of the apparently declining catches, and that well thought-out changes to the management regime now could protect against that perception.

Industry members again highlighted that in their view this is a well-managed fishery. RH responded that while DAFM have had a largely positive experience in dealing with the industry in the Forum, other stakeholder groups existed who had a very different position and view on the fishery, but stressed that this issue is not the only factor driving the need for a review process.

OT outlined the position of the Marine Institute, who are required to provide advice to the Minister on the fishery. The MI see contradictions within the system, most notably that allocations are a multiple of the available biomass. There is also a failure to understand why the current allocation system is used at all. He suggested that an annual assessment of biomass, matched to the permitted outtake, is a much more reasonable proposal.

He went on to say that the MI have no current position on what the harvest rate should be following survey- 100%, 80% or any other split. OT reported that the MI have concerns about the possibility that stable/overwintering beds are being fished

Industry members responded that while some beds overwinter in some years, seed has been left in many areas and has not overwintered successfully and been lost. They highlighted the example of NI beds which remained closed due to low biomass, and then having no mussel in the subsequent years (Skullmartin)

OT commented that the MI believe that the seed populations in beds are mixed between adults and new recruits. More information is required on the population structure and this data once collated and analysed should inform the harvest strategy

Industry members rejected this assertion and expressed concerns that in a small fishery, leaving significant volumes of seed behind for no good reason, would create a significant problem for them. They further queried what effects fishing has on bed stability. They highlighted that many other factors also affect bed stability and storms, eider duck, starfish, crabs were cited in this context. They went on to point out that other fisheries also significantly disrupt the seed beds. Fishing activity such as shooting pots over mussel ground, scallop dredging were put forward as examples. Industry queried if DAFM and MI planned to protect the beds from these activities, if their ability to fish was to be restricted under possible new arrangements?

The conversion ratio of seed relayed to mussels harvested was also discussed, the MI highlighting that the current outtake translated to a very high mortality during the relay process and the first winter on the licensed aquaculture plot. It was postulated that by taking greater care of the transplanted seed the industry would see improved results in terms of better returns.

DAFM stated that in the policy development process being undertaken with regard to this fishery that all voices will be listened to and views noted. They stressed that they are committed to bringing the discussion document to public consultation. Industry members

were requested to submit comments on the document in the coming weeks which will be considered, before the final discussion document is released for public consultation.

In tandem with this review process, the current north/south bilateral discussions will continue on the issues raised and with regard to the Brexit preparations.

The industry members present acknowledged the DAFM position and committed to returning a combined response to DAFM within the timeframe requested.

8. AOB

No items were raised

There being no other matters to deal with, the chairman thanked all for attending and closed the meeting.