

BGMCF - Meeting 24

Date: 06/05/2021

Venue: Remote Online Meeting, Microsoft Teams, hosted by BIM

In attendance: Mr Rory Campbell – Chairman of the BGMCF (BIM)
Ms Joanne Gaffney – BIM
Dr Gary McCoy – Secretariat (BIM)
Mr Nicolas Chopin - BIM
Ms Carol Collins – DAFM
Ms Bridget Collins – DAFM
Ms Roni Hawe – DAFM
Mr Pascal Hayes – DAFM
Mr Gavin Keirse – SFPA
Mr John McGuigan – DAERA
Mr John Kane – DAERA
Ms Fiona Clarke – DAERA
Dr Mathew Service – AFBI
Ms Teresa Morrissey – IFA
Mr Michael Havelin – Industry Rep – Foyle
Mr William Dingemanse – Industry Rep Wexford/Waterford
Mr Raymond Dougal – Industry Rep Belfast/ Larne

Apologies: Ms Adele Boyd – AFBI
Mr Mark McGuigan – DAERA
Mr Jim Watts – DAERA
Mr Jim Hayes – DAERA
Ms Donna Lyons – DAERA
Dr Oliver Tully – MI
Mr Declan Quigley – SFPA
Mr Barry Fox – Loughs Agency
Mr Arthur McCarthy – Industry Rep Castlemaine/Shannon/Cork
Mr George Golden – Industry Rep Carlingford/Dundrum

Rory Campbell (RC) welcomed all the attendees to the meeting and apologised for the rearranged meeting date due to unforeseen technical issues the week previous. RC introduced himself as the new Seafood Technical Services Business Unit Director and has taken over as the Chairman for BGMCF Meetings from Donal McGuire, who retired in 2020. All attendees were asked to give a brief introduction on themselves and who they are representing prior to the start of the meeting.

1. Minutes of the Last Meeting

The minutes of the last meeting from the 21st May 2020 were accepted by everyone. There was one action point from the last meeting minutes regarding the Post Fishing Survey.

Joanne Gaffney (JG) gave an update on the post fishing survey carried out in the Irish Sea in 2020. She noted it was successfully carried out and commented on by the Marine Institute. It is now a published report on the BIM website. It generated interesting data on the biomass remaining on the seabed's post fishing. This will be repeated for the 2021 survey season, but more targeted on our biomass assessments.

2. Seed Fishery 2020

Gavin Keirse (GK) provided the seed mussel figures for 2020:

Gross: 11386T.

Net: 8921T.

In terms of the bays transplanted to, the net figures are broken down as follows:

	Sum of Net Tonnage
Belfast Lough	2155
Carlingford	940
Castlemaine	
Harbour/Cromane	1216
Wexford	4475
(blank)	35
Lough Foyle	100
Grand Total	8921

William Dingemanse (WD) provided comments:

In the last seed fishery, the Rusk Channel received a lot of damage from starfish due to the unforeseen but necessary late opening of the fishery due to Invasive species screening. However, it is important to note that the force majeure is still a very important mechanism to be able to avail of if a similar situation of high numbers of starfish are observed in the seed mussel areas.

WD provided figures of potential losses to Industry due to the impact of starfish predation on the 2020 season. Potential loss of approximately 1,000 Tonnes of seed in the Rusk Channel and about 400 Tonnes in Rosslare due to starfish. During WD's own previously applied search permits, there was no starfish observed on the Rosslare bed, right up till the day of the fishery opening. This shows how quickly starfish can move into an area and how quickly they can significantly decrease the viable seed mussel available from the pre-survey estimated tonnages reported on.

WD suggested that if starfish are identified on a seed mussel bed that the fishery should be opened on the next suitable tides?

WD, if you put a figure on the loss that 1,400 tonnes of seed mussel can have on a marketable site the following year or the year after, it is an estimated loss of 2 million euro. This is a big loss to roughly 16 companies who take part in the seed fishery each year. DW noted this is not anyone's fault but it is something to consider for the future.

GK, commented that last year's figure were 10,345 Tonnes (2019) and this year's figure (2020) were 8,921 Tonnes. He suggested that there might possibly be a link in WD's estimated figure of 1, 400 Tonnes of seed lost due to the impact of the starfish predation.

JG, BIM have learned lessons from last year's survey season and the invasive screening surveys. JG commended the NWPS, regulatory services and DAFM for last year. When there was an issue with invasive species, everyone worked quickly in terms of surveys, providing solutions and decisions to move the fishery forward. BIM plan to do the invasive species screening earlier in the 2021 season to mitigate against any potential delays.

3. Industry representation following election letter

Gary McCoy (GM) provided an update regarding the election letter responses. On the 12th of October 2020, election letters were posted out to all bottom grown operators. There was a total of 49 letters sent out. A total of 6 response were received back by email or post.

One signed election letter was returned using the form supplied, this was from Andrew Verwijs who nominated himself to be the Belfast Lough Forum Member. This will now trigger an election in Belfast Lough as set out by the Rising Tide Report.

The other 5 responses were relation to the transparency and management of the forum and these issues will be discussed in the next agenda point.

RC, confirmed for clarity that there will now be an election process in Belfast Lough.

JG, added that she would like to thank the sitting industry members, including Raymond Dougal for all your contributions to the forum and for agreeing to continue representing their areas. It is much appreciated.

4. Transparency of BGMCF

Following correspondence received relating to the transparency of the BGMCF, the secretariat is looking at methods of providing information to the Industry. One of these approaches would be to put information up on the BIM website, such as potential opening dates of the fishery and additional links to seed survey reports.

There will also be a renewed effort to update electronic information of the Industry such as email address and mobile numbers, so future information can be disseminated as quickly as possible.

Michael Havelin (MH) commented that this would be very helpful and a useful approach moving forward.

5. Access arrangements Post Brexit

JG, gave an overview of the situation and where things stand at the moment Post Brexit.

Following Brexit, there are now additional administrative requirements for EU boats entering UK waters and vice versa. This requirement for administrative arrangements does not just affect the bottom mussel fleet. It is a matter of discussion between the Irish State, UK authority's and the EU commission, but at the moment there is no method in place to facilitate IE boats entering or accessing NI waters or vice versa. This is something that is being worked on, and when there are developments on this area, the industry will be notified.

MH, asked if this complication might be resolved prior to the opening of the seed fishery.

JG, we are not able to make a prediction at this time.

WD, asked does this also effect IE boats working in NI bottom mussel culture sites and vice versa.

JG, this issue of discharging mussels or operating aquaculture sites within the baseline has been sent for updated legal advice. Once legal advice is received, the industry will be updated.

WD, said that this is a very big problem.

6. Potential opening dates for the seed mussel fishery 2021

GM, gave an update on the potential opening dates for the 2021 season. Saturday 28th August 2021 was agreed as a suitable date.

It was highlighted that this is a bank holiday weekend in the North.

Raymond Dougal (RD), I would not like to think that the bank holiday would have a bearing on the opening date. Since the Industry have only a short window of days to trawl for seed, I would like to think that there would be some concession given for that bank holiday.

7. Survey Plans 2021

JG, gave an update on the survey plans for 2021.

Nicolas Chopin (NC) started the survey season today on board the T-Burke II. Water temperatures are currently quite cold, so we don't expect to see too much new settlements at this stage. However, Nicolas will start by going back to look at the last years seed mussel beds and to see what is remaining on the ground and to determine if mussel survived over winter following post fishing survey. When results are available, they will be made accessible on the BIM website.

BIM will be undertaken the invasive species screening earlier in the 2021 season to ensure there is no delay in the opening of the fishery. BIM are also planning to repeat the post fishing survey that was carried out last year. It is looking like there will be no delays with the survey season this year.

MH, repeated that if there is a lot of predators on the ground such as starfish, like in the situation of previous years, that there would be a consideration to open those grounds earlier, and he wanted to emphasise that this be kept in mind.

Matt Service (MS) covered Northern Ireland's survey plans, there is no official date on when this will start, however they plan to use similar methods from last year. A combination of dredge, video and acoustic equipment to estimate biomass. Dredge sub-samples will also be used for any Invasive species screening. MS will forward the survey dates as soon as he has confirmation from Adele Boyd. They also plan to carry out a post fishing survey this year which was unable to be carried out last year due to Covid-19.

8. MSC Certification

JG, provided an update regarding MSC management.

BIM hold the certificate for the IE and NI seed mussel fishery. In order to make sure the certifications remain in place; a decision has been made that BIM continues to hold both the IE and NI certification for 2021. This will be reviewed in 2022 to determine whether or not it is still appropriate for BIM to hold both certification in the long-term or who the NI cert should be handed over to in NI.

No major changes for 2021. BIM will manage the two certs this year with the remote audits and surveillance next scheduled for July 2021.

9. Health and Safety check in with Industry

RC, asked Industry members if there were any key problems they came across over the year and if there were any areas where additional supports are needed due to the impact of Covid-19.

MH, noted that last year during the fishing that everyone was very helpful and supportive during the pandemic and that they got through the fishing season safely. He hopes that the same courtesy is kept this year and that we should be OK.

Teresa Morrissey (TM). Last year was a very difficult year to do many things logistically due to Covid-19. All the help and support that was given was very much appreciated and was badly needed. Not only for Bottom mussels, but for aquaculture in general, and there were many innovative ways of getting around how we could do our business.

10. AOB

Roni Hawe (RH) on behalf of DAFM, that they would really appreciate if everyone in the Industry could use electronic formats this year for their electronic applications of communication. DAFM's intention is to email out all the forms and they would appreciate if they would be returned in the same format. Due to the current Covid-19 situation the returning of staff to the office will be staggered, so in order to facilitate the fast, smooth running and dissemination of information to Industry please provide DAFM with an updated email address if they have not already done so. They can inform DAFM by sending an email to inshore@agriculture.gov.ie and DAFM will update their operator list.

No other items were raised.

RC thanked all for attending and then closed the meeting.

