

BGMCF - Meeting No.27

Date: 17/01/2024

Venue: MS Teams Meeting from BIM, Dún Laoghaire.

In attendance:

Geraldine O'Donovan -DAFM
Suzanne Brennan – DAFM
Martina McCarthy – DAFM
Bridget Collins – DAFM
Oliver Tully - MI
Bill Doré – MI
Patricia O’Kane - MI
John Kane - DAERA
Jim Watts – DAERA
David Thompson - DAERA
Heather Moore – AFBI
Alex Callaway – AFBI
Ciaran Mc Gonigle – Loughs Agency
Gavin Keirse – SFPA
Rory Campbell – BIM (Chair)
Joanne Gaffney – BIM
Nicolas Chopin – BIM
Patricia Daly - BIM
Martin Flanigan - BIM
Bram Jnr Verwijs – Industry member Belfast
Hugh Doyle – Industry member Carlingford
William Dingemans – Industry member Wexford/Waterford
Michael Havelin - Industry member Foyle/Swilly
Teresa Morrissey – IFA

Apologies:

Donna Lyons – DAERA
John McGuigan – DAERA
Arthur McCarthy - Castlemaine
Matt Service – AFBI

Meeting started - 11.30hr

1. Welcome

Rory Campbell (RC) welcomed all the attendees to the meeting , a round table of introductions was completed as there was a number of new representatives present.

2. Minutes of the Last Meeting

The minutes of the previous BGMCF meeting (10th May 2023) were accepted.

3. Modified Fisheries Natura Plan for the Irish Sea mussel seed fishery.

Oliver Tully (OT) gave a presentation providing an overview of the assessment process. The Marine Institute carried out an Appropriate Assessment of the draft Fisheries Natura Plan submitted by the Secretariat on behalf of the BGMCF industry members, under Article 6 of the Habitats Directive for DAFM. The assessment looks at the potential effects of the fishery on protected species and habitats and in particular the potential to negatively impact the conservation objectives outlined for each protected site.

The possibility of significant effects was discounted for all habitats and species except in the case of the Common Scoter. This species feeds on mussels and other bivalves at depths of <30m and with low flow of \leq to 0.6m / sec. Data collected in 2014 indicates the presence of this species in the Northern (Dublin to Carlingford) Irish Sea. In the Southern Irish Sea, the distribution of the Scoter overlaps with the seed mussel fishery.

The Public Consultation Document, prepared by DAFM, provided a number of maps based on habitat suitability and provided a number of options for protection of additional foraging habitat for this species. This is important as the numbers are documented as declining in the South Irish Sea and the activity of bivalve fisheries including the seed mussel fishery may be linked to this decline.

A small area is to be protected, there is some uncertainty of how effective this will be for Scoters, so new Bird Survey data is being commissioned in order to secure more information. Following this data, the Area may be altered.

OT further highlighted that the MI are currently gathering more data on this species and that new data may lead to the Minister's consideration of reopening currently closed areas or the creation of further closed or extension of closure areas presently in place.

The group were also informed that there are a number of new protected area designations of relevance to the Fishery and the Common Scoter, these are the large designations north of Dublin and the New "Seas off Wexford" protected area announced last week.

Other closures relating to reef habitat remain in place –e.g. Dalkey Sound.

William Dingemanse (WD) queried if the Scoter was in decline nationally or just in Wexford. OT said there was a reported widespread decline, but this conclusion is based on shoreline counts which is not the most accurate method for this species, ariel surveys are better and that is the method being used by the MI for the current survey.

WD asked if the fishery was being unduly penalised and was there evidence of any other reason for this decline. Also, he highlighted that Wexford Harbour has mussel biomass available for this species to feed. OT said the principle of the assessment was one where you must be able to discount any significant impacts from a given activity and that the burden of proof was very high. He further highlighted that scoters are not present in Wexford Harbour.

Jim Watts (JW) asked is there an Invasive alien species (IAS) risk to seed coming from those areas in NI? Joanne Gaffney (JG) replied that after seed beds are found they are screened and reported on for IAS presence before the seed fishery can be opened.

4. Data requirements for the opening of further areas to seed fishing.

For the MI to be able to carry out an Assessment of the North Irish Sea, it needs more information on the location and timing of the proposed fishery.

The South Irish Sea has a lot more historical data, than the North Irish Sea.

WD asked for clarification of what area is included in the North Irish Sea. This was clarified as north of Dublin to Carlingford.

Action Point 1 - The Secretariat will work with the industry members to establish more detail on proposed fishing activity in the Northern Irish Sea.

Michael Havelin (MH) asked about plans for NI seed surveys. Alex Callaway (AC) highlighted that there is a plan to survey historical areas.

5. Seed Survey results 2023

Nicolas Chopin (NC) outlined how the BIM 2023 Seed Survey campaign did not find a suitable seed bed. Any seed found was very scattered or old. Nothing found in Castlemaine, similarly with Wicklow and Rosslare.

AC outlined a similar result from the AFBI seed surveys which found no evidence of seed settlement to facilitate an opening. This is the 3rd year in a row with no seed fishing in NI. One tow had some small seed, but it didn't become established.

6. Plans for Seed Survey 2024 – including the potential for a spring fishery.

WD asked if there could be an early survey in 2024 (e.g. March / April) to support a potential spring seed fishery? There has been anecdotal reports from inshore fishers of static gear having a late settlement.

JG said the plan is to get out as early as possible. The *T. Burke* boat still needs an engine refit, but there is an agreement in place to use a backup vessel from industry,

This early spring survey is weather dependent and will target the established / most likely seed areas.

Bram Verwijs (BV) asked, about the potential timeline for opening a spring seed fishery. For example, say something was found at the start of April?

JG outlined the typical milestones to open a seed Fishery.

- (1) Locate suitable seed beds.
- (2) Carry out IAS monitoring.
- (3) DAFM Administration process (e.g. beginning with Expression of Interest forms (EOIs) to be completed fully and submitted).
- (4) Completed BIM Survey reports and IAS report, to be followed by Scientific Advice.
- (5) Advising the Minister of a proposed fishery, Statutory Instrument to be prepared in advance of a fishery opening, Documentation prepared for Minister to review.
- (6) Ministerial determination and approval necessary to open a fishery.

Geraldine O'Donovan (GOD) pointed out that the processing of EOIs is often quite problematic. All the required information -on the EOI needs to be provided, usually this is not the case and it is time

consuming requiring lots of effort. For example, the checklist provided is important and should be used by all applicants, so that all details are submitted at once and the administration processes can be streamlined.

BV highlighted that spring and summer have different temperatures, if the fishery runs into summer temps this may decrease mussel condition and lead to poor survival during transport.

To ensure the best time for a potential seed fishery, JG highlighted that the industry members of the BGMCF are required to examine survey data and to make a recommendation to the Minister on the opening of any fishery. In this way industry concerns regarding movements are factored into the process.

WD suggested any fishery up to June would be regarded as a spring fishery, and that there are typically 2 good tides in May which may be suitable for fishing.

Rory Campbell (RC) stated that there is clearly a need for greater clarity on the steps required to open the fishery.

Action Point 2. Secretariat will prepare a document outlining the tasks that must be completed to open the fishery. Indicative timelines will be provided where possible.

MH asked if there is a prospect of a North Irish Sea fishery? Also, if a biomass level is required and what might that be?

GO'D said a level of 1,500t is the minimum level that must be identified to support any opening. Also, the North Irish Sea (Dublin to Carlingford) cannot be opened until the environmental assessments, including any Appropriate Assessment as necessary, have been conducted. This cannot be undertaken until industry members submit additional information and this will need more detail on the proposed fishery (See Action Point 1).

DAERA / AFBI, said the trend for the past 3 years has been no seed was found and the NI fishery has not opened.

WD said the closed area of the North Irish Sea - Skerries to Carlingford Lough contains few areas of historical interest to the fishery. Howth to Skerries is historically the area of interest and requested that this area be surveyed.

7. Agenda 5: Draft Fisheries Natura Plan – Castlemaine

JG highlighted that since the autumn of 2023, DAFM have sought the submission of an updated Fishery Natura Plan for Castlemaine. Some responses from individuals have been received, but the Co-op have not indicated if they require any changes to the old plan.

GO'D then outlined the range of milestones required for a fishery in Castlemaine, which included a plan to be submitted to DAFM, MI then to screen it, so the Minister can decide if an AA is needed. The Plan and environmental assessments would also need to be consulted on.

The first step is a Fishery Natura Plan and there can be no mussel fishery without a plan.

In terms of the North Irish Sea, the detail required for a Fisheries Natura Plan was raised again. MH said quite a lot of information is available from on-board plotters, which should help provide details

on the where and when data points that are needed. JG said this would be part of the previous Action Point on this.

Action Point 3. BIM will follow up with the Castlemaine Co-op and its BGMCF industry representative. As communication is needed in order for a Castlemaine Fishery to be possible in 2024.

8. The UK's new SPS Import Requirements

Bill Dore (BD) outlined the new requirements from the UK for live animals on the GB landbridge. This requires a physical inspection and sign off by a vet.

Consignments need to be registered on the EU TRACES platform and scheduling of the physical inspection requires a notice period of 4 working days in advance of a shipment. The load is then validated with the inspection and paperwork then sent to the GB authorities for registration on the Import of products, animals, food and feed system (IPAFFS) systems. This final step must be completed by a UK based entity and also requires 24hrs notice.

This extended notice period is a major departure from the current arrangements. MI do not have the resources, for a quicker turnaround at this stage. Frictionless trade with GB is no longer possible due to Brexit.

Food 'Products' are covered by the SFPA.

Teresa Morrissey (TM) said that there was urgent need for more detail of what was required by Industry for this process. BD said that the MI has communicated to the BGM sector this week. The process is clear but complicated.

TM said more clarity is needed by the industry and they are very nervous and unsure of what is required, and that the current level of communication is not enough.

BD said part of the procedure is that certification is through the transport companies at the depot.

Patricia O'Kane said that if companies had questions / concerns about using the land bridge to contact her directly.

WD outlined how the paperwork asks for a licence plate number. But this is not known until late in the process. However, the trailer number is usually known earlier, can this be used?

BD said yes that there is some discussion with GB authorities about this.

David Thompson (DT) said that CEFAS have produced some explanatory information on this and DAERA could send this on.

Gavin Keirse highlighted that the SFPA have extensive support materials for exports on their website, - <https://www.sfpa.ie/What-We-Do/Trade-Market-Access-Support/Brexit-Information#1356366-information-notice---export-health-certification-to-gb-process-from-31st-of-january-2024> and <https://www.sfpa.ie/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=56xGDYCWNRs%3d&portalid=0>

SFPA said the main contact for questions on the GB SPS procedure with them was kevin.healy@sfpa.ie

GO'D outlined how DAFM have held [webinars](#), the most recent on 10th January 2024, and DEFRA are holding one today.

Action point 4– Secretariat confirmed that they will prioritise circulation of Minutes so that information is distributed widely.

BD said that GB did not inform IE of the detail of the inspection requirements until late 2023.

JW said that mussels from NI using the GB land bridge are not expected to have any changes applied, including if they are transported through a ROI port.

9. MSC

The assessment of the all-island certification is well progressed and problems are not foreseen at this point. There should be a public consultation out to the public by July.

The costs in 2023 for the certification were met by DAFM. But there needs to be NI funding for the NI part for the next fee, due in 2025.

10. Date of next meeting

The timeline document would include a potential meeting date. Possibly mid to end of April 2024.

Action point 5 – Secretariat will liaise with all members with a view to setting a suitable date

No AOB

Meeting ended 13:10 hr