

45th MEETING OF THE FOYLE CARLINGFORD AND IRISH LIGHTS COMMISSION

Wednesday 24th October 2007 @ 11am

Four Seasons Hotel, Carlingford

Attendees

Present

Peter Savage (Chairman)
Jack Allen
Tarlach O'Crosain
Dick Blakiston-Houston
Patrick Griffin
Jacqui McConville
Joseph Martin
Siobhan Logue
Frank Feely
Andrew Ward

In Attendance - Loughs Agency

Derick Anderson CEO
John Pollock
Gerard Mills
Barry Fox
John McCartney
Laura French (Minutes)

1. Apologies

There were no apologies.

2. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes were agreed with no amendments.

Proposed Jack Allen
Seconded Tarlach O'Crosain

3. Reserved Minutes

None

4. Matters Arising

None

5. CEO Report

CEO advised the Board on issues surrounding the draft net fishery. He explained that a number of letters of discontent had been received into the Agency from draft net fishermen in relation to charging for carcass tags. The Board were also informed that Minister Mary Coughlan has written to Eamon Ryan and Dermot Ahern asking for a public enquiry under the grounds of discrimination against the draft net fishermen. CEO went on to say that he has been trying to organise a meeting with Minister Coughlan but as yet has had no response.

CEO sought the Boards support to issue correspondence in relation to court cases in the Donegal High Court. CEO explained that if a case isn't heard within 2 years of the incident taking place then it is thrown out of court. CEO went onto say that we have always been ready for a case and haven't needed any adjournments but the Loughs Agency have had to suffer up to 10 adjournments on occasions. The Board supported CEO proposal to write to the High Court in Dublin in relation to this matter.

CEO sought approval from the Board for the Agency to take part in an RTE production called Ecoeye. This would include a 7 minute slot on the programme with its first viewing in March, it is shown on RTE on a Monday night at 7.30pm and is repeated on a Sunday and Wednesday evening. CEO advised that the total cost of this venture would be approximately €25,000.

Proposed Jack Allen
Seconded Andrew Ward

CEO provided the Board with a copy of the Restructuring of Environmental and Fisheries Governance for their consideration and apologised for providing this at short notice. CEO explained that this document has come out of the St Andrews Review and an alternative for the Irish Lights.

The Board agreed in principle with a few minor wording changes to be made before issue. CEO advised that he would make the relevant

changes and forward another copy to the Board before issue of said document.

6. Directors Report

The Board were provided with updates from the Senior Management Team each giving a brief overview on their relative areas.

Development

Gerard Mills advised the Board that since the last Board meeting the Agency submitted two bids to the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB); Marine Tourism and Angling Development (€20MEU) and Territorial Cooperation with the Scottish Centre of Ecology and the Natural Environment (SCENE). It is envisaged that in the remaining months of this year queries will arise in respect of the bids and any announcement is unlikely to take place before January 2008.

Gerard Mills added that all Development staff are currently reviewing their activities for 2007 and these will be submitted as part of the annual review. Under particular scrutiny is to evaluate why we do particular activities and does this present the best value for the public purse. Gerard Mills went on to say that as a significant part of the activity and as per the corporate plan for this year we have prepared 2 documents for your consideration; Marketing plan and budget for Riverwatch for 2008 and Draft Communications strategy for the Agency.

Aquaculture

Lough Foyle Oyster Fishery

Barry Fox reported that to date the fishery has produced approximately 120 tonnes of adult oyster at a value of approximately €4.30kg. This has been a welcome improvement on both '06 and '05 returns showing an increase of over 50% on catches in both years. There is still concern being raised regarding the fishing and exporting of undersized oysters from the Lough. Fishermen have been advised that if information can be passed to the Agency on who is exporting these undersized fish, the Agency will ensure that action is taken.

Seed & Mussel Fishery

Barry Fox advised the Board that the seed mussel fisheries in the Irish Sea are nearing closure. There have been good returns from the beds in the Wexford, Wicklow and Rosslare areas and also

reasonable returns from the beds at Skullmartin. An area closed at Wexford for research work was opened on the 16th of October and good fishing was available to boats that fished. An approximate tonnage fished from the Irish Sea this year is 30 thousand tonne. This has still to be validated by DCENR. There are no figures available from DARD at this time. The area at Donaghadee Sound remains closed. Harvesting has started in most areas of adult mussel. Prices have reduced this year and are ranging from €600 - €1700 depending on size and quality.

SEA

Barry Fox reported that the Strategic Environmental Assessment is nearing the tendering phase. It is envisaged that the documents will be completed and agreed by the committee over the next fortnight electronically and this will allow CPD to initiate the tendering process. The screening statement will be forwarded to the competent authorities (EPA/EHS) by close of play on Friday 26th. Please find attached the screening statement and cover letter.

Monitoring Vessel

Barry Fox informed the Board that the departments Policy and Economics Division have confirmed that they are happy with the economic appraisal updated by FPM in September and the application for funding through FIFG has been submitted. The tender process is underway and the final detail is being added to the tender documentation and should be with CPD by Friday 26th October. The Agency will be in a position to award contracts by January 08. Completion of the project is expected before the 31st August. Please find attached the timetable and weighting criteria from the tendering documentation.

Corporate Services

Finance

John Pollock advised the Board that a draw down of grant in aid has been requested from the Departments. He also added that the risk management register/profile would be updated at the next meeting which was due to take place towards the end of 2007.

Audit

John Pollock informed the Board that the Northern Ireland Audit Office and C & Ag audit for 2006 was now complete with the sign off imminent.

Staffing Recruitment / Vacancies

John Pollock informed the Board that there were currently no vacancies and that the staff loading review was scheduled to commence by the end of 2007.

Banking

The Board were advised that we were on target and that work was ongoing on electronic payments.

2003/2004 Combined Annual Report & 2005 Annual Report

John Pollock advised the Board that the above reports were laid with the NI Assembly on 12th October 2007.

2006 Annual Report & Corporate and Business Plan

John Pollock advised the Board that said documents were included in the NSMC papers for the Sectoral meeting on 21st November 2007.

Pensions

John Pollock informed the Board that the pensions were currently under consideration with the Sponsoring Departments.

Conservation and Protection

John McCartney advised the Board that since the last update Loughs Agency scientific staff have finished the initial evaluation of the huge amount of data gathered over the Spring and Summer months, and have begun to identify areas throughout both catchments where degraded habitat, and both point source and diffuse pollution, are limiting the system in terms of salmonid production. This data has been collated in a manner that has allowed the programming of the field crews to investigate and assess the identified problems with a view to improving the productivity of each section.

John McCartney provided the Board with the first draft of the proposed agreement between the Agency and the on site Trade Unions in relation to unsocial hours allowance that the Board agreed to, in principle, at the last Board meeting.

Proposed Tarlach O'Crosain
Seconded Andrew Ward

John McCartney advised the Board that the hardship package for commercial fishermen has still not been paid out, and this situation is viewed as unacceptable to the Board or the Agency staff. The

situation remains that Agency and its Sponsoring Departments on both sides of the border have completed all that they needed to. The difficulty seems to be an administrative one within the State Aid section in Brussels, who have to administratively approve the scheme.

The Board expressed their concerns with the Hardship Package and also the lack of a Community Support Package. CEO advised that he would send another letter to the Departments in relation to the Community Support package. The Board agreed but also advised that they would make representation to the Departments in person.

John McCartney advised that Loughs Agency staff carried out a post season review with the commercial fishermen, and generally their comments and observations were positive. They did highlight a number of challenges that the Agency needs to face in the medium term, and in particular the perceived problems of a population explosion within the seal populations in the Lough.

John McCartney advised that at the last Board meeting the commercial catch figures were estimated, below is a table containing the final corrected data which was provided to the Board.

Year	Drift	Draft	Combined Drift and Draft
2000	23069	12628	35697
2001	13500	9476	22976
2002	28851	11917	40768
2003	15741	16991	32732
2004	12800	9490	22290
2005	13391	12143	25534
2006	6160	6031	12191
2007	2584	2774	5358

Enforcement actions

John McCartney advised the Board that since the 1st of January 2007 Agency staff have seized 65 rods and reels, 8 boats, and 62 nets, including 7 sea nets, 25 salmon and 1 trout. This has led to papers being referred to our solicitors for prosecution of 42 individuals for fisheries protection offences.

Summary fish counter data;

Counter Site	2007 January to Oct count
Faughan	856
Finn	3219
Sion Mills	3443
Roe	4641
Corrick	1124
Strule from 25/9	103

John McCartney provided the Board with the table above and advised that the Agency's counters are to be independently validated to ensure accuracy. The Agency has established new counters on the Clanrye River, at Newry, on the Strule at Omagh and has a project planned to refurbish a counter on the Culdaff River in Donegal.

7. NSMC Sectoral Meeting

CEO informed the Board that the Loughs Agency were having an NSMC visit on 21st November 2007. CEO advised that he would be out of the country but that John Pollock and John McCartney would be there in his place. CEO added that the papers that were presented to the Board at their last meeting would be presented to the NSMC during their visit.

8. Advisory Forum

CEO provided the Board with the minutes of the last Advisory Forum meeting and pointed out that although the Board had discussed their attendance at the Advisory Forum meetings that the Forum members were still discontent with this and were of the opinion that there should be Board representation at their meetings. It was decided that as the new Board will be appointed before the next meeting of the Forum then the new Board should make a decision on this.

9. Accommodation

CEO informed the Board that the Loughs Agency had made a bid for a site for the new Loughs Agency regional office in Carlingford in line with its value but the offer had been turned down. The Board agreed

that the Agency should look for an alternative site but still go ahead with the leasing of the temporary building as planned.

10. Unsocial Hours Allowance

Director of Conservation and Protection's report covered this item.

11. Hardship Package / State Aid

Director of Conservation and Protection's report covered this item.

12. Economic Appraisal – Angling

CEO provided the Board with a copy of said document and reported that it was drawn up by DCAL and Northern Ireland Tourist Board. The document provided the Board with amounts that visiting anglers spend per night when visiting the Loughs Agency area.

13. Letter from Northern Ireland Office

Gerard Mills provided the Board with a copy of a letter that had been sent to the Youth Justice Agency from the Northern Ireland Office. Gerard reported that the letter, from Paul Goggins MP, praised the excellent work done by the Agency in conjunction with the Youth Justice Agency.

14. Communication Strategy

Director of Development's report covered this item but the Board approved the Strategy which was;

Proposed Jacqui McConville
Seconded Tarlach O'Crosain

15. Marketing Strategy

Director of Development's report covered this item but the Board approved the Strategy which was;

Proposed Tarlach O'Crosain
Seconded Jacqui McConville

16. A.O.B

There was no other business.

17. Date and Venue of Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held on Wednesday 12th December 2007 at Loughs Agency Headquarters, Prehen.