

# **Minutes of Aquaculture & Shellfisheries Focus Group Meeting**

**Tuesday 15<sup>th</sup> September 2014 at 2pm**

**Loughs Agency Offices, Carlingford**

## **Present**

### **Forum Members**

Francis O'Donnell	Chairperson
Paul O'Donovan	Vice Chairperson
Brendan McSherry	

## **In Attendance**

Barry Fox	Director of Aquaculture & Shellfisheries
Joanne Gaffney	BIM
Karin Dubsky	Coastwatch Europe
Laura McCready	Minutes

## **1. Apologies**

Liam Farren  
David Friel

## **2. Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

Chairman welcomed all to the meeting and asked if the minutes were a true reflection of the last meeting. All agreed.

## **3. Matters Arising**

Chairman asked the group if they felt they were working effectively. He added that there were very few items on the agenda and asked if a teleconference may be more beneficial. Barry Fox stated that he was aware that members were travelling from the 4 corners of Ireland so if they would rather do a teleconference meeting he would facilitate this.

Paul O'Donovan stated that he had not put any items on the agenda because as far as he was concerned the group were to be going through the objectives set at their first meeting. Barry provided the meeting with a hard copy of the objectives and asked if members had received an email version of these objectives from Sarah McLean. All advised that they had not. Barry added that he would forward to Laura McCready to send to all.

#### **4. Autumn Oyster Survey**

Barry Fox advised the meeting that Ciarán McGonigle had completed his autumn oyster survey and had estimated 138 tonnes of adult oyster on the main beds of the fishery. Barry added that the poor settlement has raised some concern.

There was a discussion in relation to the lack of clean shell for juvenile settlement. Barry advised that the Agency were looking at asking the fishermen to dredge over the shell to mix it up. Barry added that the fishery was not getting successful recruitment but was getting good spawning but there was very limited clean shell which was affecting settlement within the fishery. He added that the Agency were looking at approaching the old Foyle oyster coop for a project to reestablish the fishery.

Barry added that if the Agency allowed the fishery to open for the full season this would have continued impact where there would be no catchable stock remaining and therefore this would have a detrimental effect on the juvenile population. He added that the estimates for the last 4 years had been very accurate and therefore the Agency were looking at harvest control rules. Barry stated if the Agency allow 110 tonnes to be caught do the Agency then close the fishery?

Chairman stated that it wouldn't be prudent fishery management to keep a fishery open in this case. Barry agreed stating that the Agency have a conservation remit and currently the fishery wasn't sustainable but added that this would cause problems with the fishermen.

Joanne Gaffney asked what the general trend of the fishery was. Barry advised that the tonnage was going down each year and he believed that it may be under 100 tonnes in 2015/16 season. Barry reported that during last season 12 fishermen approached him and asked if the fishery could be closed early. He added that the Agency consulted with the fishermen which caused great ill feeling as the fishermen accused the Agency of trying to close the fishery early.

Paul O'Donovan stated that a decision should be made earlier but the fishermen should be informed as soon as possible instead of waiting to January. Paul also asked if there was any way of looking at the gear the fishermen were using, that maybe it was too intensive. Barry advised that this was an issue but legislation would need to be changed before the Agency could look into this.

Chairman asked if the Agency would like the Focus Group to put forward a recommendation to close the fishery early given the information that was presented to them. Paul O'Donovan said he would be hesitant to make any recommendation before he spoke to Raymond Dougal considering he was the only fisherman on the Focus Group. Paul added that the UK biodiversity needs to be conserved but the right approach must be made to the fishermen sooner rather than later.

Chairman asked from a conservation perspective could Barry close the fishery at any time. Barry advised that the CEO of the Agency can make a declaration and close the fishery giving 48 hours' notice. Barry added that he was due to meet with the oystermen on 17<sup>th</sup> September 2014 and would announce the intended closure then. He added that he was aware that there would be resistance from the fishermen. Chairman stated that this was a tough decision. Joanne Gaffney stated if the trend was down and there was no external factor then it was obviously internal issues.

## **5. Oyster Fishery Applications**

Barry Fox advised that there were 58 applications received and these were being processed subject to vessel documents. He added that he wouldn't know until close of play the following day how many licences were issued but he estimated around 48 licences.

Chairman asked if this was consistent with other season and asked if there was a limit on the number of licences issued. Barry advised that this was consistent with previous seasons but added that there was no cap on the number of licences issued, if a person invests in a vessel and can provide all the necessary documentation for this vessel then they should be granted a licence.

Chairman welcomed Brendan McSherry and Karin Dusky to the meeting.

## **6. Mussel Fishery Lough Foyle**

Barry Fox advised this was the first year in 5 years that seed mussel had been put into Lough Foyle. Joanne Gaffney added that 2013 was the first year, that there was a small amount put in.

Karin Dubsy asked where the Foyle mussel came from. Barry advised that they were from the north side.

Paul O'Donovan asked if there was any progress in relation to the mussel fishery becoming a legal entity in the Foyle area. Barry Fox advised that this was all tied up in the management agreement. He added that meetings were taking place with senior figures in the Department of Communication, Energy and Natural Resources but in his opinion this was still a minimum of 24 months away. He added if there is agreement between the Department of Food and the Marine and the Crown states Commission the Agency will then be licensing Aquaculture.

Karin Dubsy raised the issue of illegal trestles and asked whose responsibility they were. Barry advised that ultimately this lay with National Parks and Wildlife Service. Joanne Gaffney stated that if the activity was damaging then yes but it was below the mean high water make. Karin stated that this was causing serious damage and she was going to raise this again with Department of Food and the Marine and National Parks and Wildlife Service.

Joanne advised that there are a lot of operators calling for licences to be issued as they can't expand presently so this is not just an external matter.

Chairman asked who will determine who stays in the fishery and who has to leave. Barry Fox stated that this will be a huge technical issue.

## **7. Whelk and Green Crab Pot Fishing on Lough Foyle**

Barry Fox advised that he had raised the above issue with the Agency's Legislation Manager, Stanley Thorpe and this seems to be a double jeopardy situation where Loughs Agency officials cannot impede a person during opening times as their licences entitles them to pot crabs and whelks.

## **8. An update on the seed mussel status and seed dredging Coastwatch survey as relevant to shellfish.**

Karin Dubsy stated that in previous years she was able to access when the mussel seed fishery opened and for how many tonnes online but not this year. Joanne Gaffney advised that she could provide her with this information. Karin asked if Joanne knew the tonnage off hand. Joanne stated that she did not have the figures with her but added that it would be a better fishery than in the past as we were hit with westerly weather which is favourable to the fishery.

Karin Dubsy gave a short presentation on the 2 subjects below:

Citclops: (F7 project in which Coastwatch is a partner) for shellfish water monitoring for transparency and colour.

Karin advised that Citclops is an international EC cofounded research project. One Trinity College Dublin and Coastwatch task in the project is to raise public awareness of sea water transparency and colour, another to test phone apps to report on these parameters.

Inflow water quality alerts for shellfish areas: small inflows in Coastwatch results. The idea is that citizens can help identify small inflow water quality issues and need a quick way to report.

Karin advised that earlier that morning she tested 8 inflows in the Carlingford area and all were below detection which was great. Barry Fox advised that the Carlingford District Inspector David Clarke carried out full inspections on farms and many farmers now call David when they have a spill.

## **9. A.O.B.**

Chairman again raised the issue of few items on the agenda and people having to travel and again suggested teleconferencing. He also asked how many meetings there would be in the year. Barry Fox said he would leave the decision of the teleconferencing up to members but stated that he would like approximately 4 meetings a year. Paul O'Donovan stated that if this was the case he, Raymond Dougal and Liam Farren would still need to travel as their broadband connection was poor.

Chairman stated that the next meeting would include the objectives that had been set for the group following matter arising.

Karin Dubsky asked about the possibility of an oyster purification unit to clean oysters. Paul O'Donovan stated that this would only be required if the oysters were to be sold locally. Joanne Gaffney advised that Carlingford have 4 depuration units. Barry Fox stated that the Agency did look at this in the Foyle area but its domestic and the demand is not there.

## **10. Date and Venue of next meeting**

The next meeting of the Aquaculture and Shellfisheries Focus Group will take place on Tuesday 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2014 at 11.30am in Loughs Agency Headquarters, Prehen.