

Minutes of Meeting of the Salmon, Inland Fisheries and Environmental Focus Group

Wednesday 8th April 2015 at 7pm

Silverbirch Hotel, Omagh

Present

Forum Members

Jim Haughey	Chairperson
Tony French	
Eamon Mullan	
Michael Stinson	
Declan Little	
Peadar MacRory	
Alec Rolston	
Peter Archdale	

In Attendance

John McCartney	Director of Conservation and Protection
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1. Apologies

Brendan McSherry	
Shane Colgan	FASTA Representative

2. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed as an accurate record with the exception of the attendance where Declan who as listed as not attending indicated that he had sent apologies and asked for this to be rectified in the minutes.

3. Matters Arising

Tony French highlighted that at the previous Advisory Forum meeting the areas indicated on the map supplied by John McCartney to the members showing illegal fishing also coincided with areas that were flooding hotspots and areas where flooding work had been undertaken. John McCartney also indicated that he had been approached by a group from Stranorlar in relation to meeting Council representatives in relation to flood control on the Donegal side of the Foyle catchment and in particular the Rivers Deelee, Foyle and Finn.

Tony French also pointed out that Northern Ireland Environment Agency had recently been reported in the Belfast Telegraph as trying to enter into a Memorandum of Understanding with the Ulster Farmers Union in an attempt to reduce the number of prosecutions against farmers. The group asked Tony if he could circulate the article to the group and he said he would leave it with John McCartney to do so.

4. Hydroelectric Power Schemes

John McCartney indicated that he was sitting on a working group on hydroelectricity with Northern Ireland Environment Agency and had asked that nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) be allowed to sit on the group or be allowed to have an input into the group. Jim Haughey reported that the Ulster Angling Federation had met with the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure Technical Advisory Group, however he did not see any significant change in the approach to the current schemes.

Eamon Mullan highlighted his concerns over the cumulative impacts of hydroelectric schemes on the River Roe system and asked that this be looked at and addressed.

Jim Haughey also highlighted that there was potential for cumulative impact on the Faughan schemes and asked if Declan Lawlor had looked at the appropriate assessments for any of the Faughan schemes to see if this had been mentioned. John McCartney said he would ask Declan for his comments.

Peter Archdale highlighted that there was no strategic planning policy statement for the new Councils particularly in relation to renewable energy and that this was an opportunity to influence the new Councils via Loughs Agency or the Advisory Forum.

There was also a discussion in relation to the effectiveness and whether or not appropriate assessments were being completed by DCAL and DoE Planning for proposed schemes.

5. Smolt Farm on River Derg

There was a long discussion in relation to the recently issued Donegal County Council licence for the Derg smolt farm and the ongoing debates and discussions in relation to the proposed aquaculture licence.

6. NASCO Update

John McCartney highlighted that the next NASCO meeting would be in June 2015. There was a long discussion into the proposed salmon fishery in West Greenland. John McCartney was told by Jim Haughey that Canada prior to the meeting has gone 100% catch and release for Atlantic salmon.

7. Salmon Management Policy

John McCartney was encouraged by the group to run a one day workshop to look at the Loughs Agency's Salmon Management Policy, Trout Policy and the Stocking Policy, particularly in relation to the fisheries management outcomes that may result from the IBIS project. John McCartney said he would try and arrange this after the IBIS 2 day event summarising the research.

8. Trout Policy

This was discussed under agenda item 7.

9. Excessive abstraction from River Derg at Ardstraw by NI Water, and delays in bringing in water from the new facility at Newtownstewart (Jim Haughey)

Jim Haughey indicated that the Mourne water had a variation in pH which has made it unsuitable to mix with Derg water and that there was a problem with this abstraction. John McCartney said he would write to Northern Ireland Water and ask for an update on the position with this abstraction point.

10. Donegal Wind Turbines

Jim Haughey circulated the Ulster Angling Federation's consultative response. John McCartney subsequently circulated the Loughs Agency's response. There was significant concern about the size of the proposed turbines in the Finn and Derg catchment and that the potential for damage to the fishery particularly during construction works associated with the turbines.

11. Update on Native Woodland Scheme

Declan Little gave an update on the Native Woodland Scheme and indicated there were grants in relation to planting in Special Area of Conservation (SAC) areas. John McCartney asked if he could circulate details of the scheme.

12. A.O.B.

There were discussions in relation to the stocking policy which was to be included in the workshop. John McCartney highlighted the recent correspondence from Enda Craig and there was a discussion into whether or not there was an approved scheme in the Moville / Greencastle area or whether it was part of the acknowledged integrated discharge application.

John McCartney pointed out that while this was previously with Donegal County Council it was now a matter for Irish Water and he had written to Environmental Protection Agency for an update on the issue.

Peadar MacRory pointed out that the recent discussions in relation to the report by Karin Dubsy had actually been included and assessed in the previous Environmental Impact Assessment.

John McCartney also highlighted the Regulatory Review process and the new Regulations to be sent before the Stormont Committee.

There was a long discussion in relation to funding cuts and changes to government structures in Northern Ireland.

Jim Haughey highlighted the salmon nets proposal that he had raised with the Board of the Loughs Agency and explained this to the members of the group.

Eamon Mullan asked for a breakdown of the poaching levels for 2014 which John McCartney gave him.

13. Date and Venue of Next Meeting

The next meeting will take place on Thursday 15th October 2015 at 7pm in the Silverbirch Hotel, Omagh.