DEPARTMENT OF CULTURE ARTS AND LEISURE

**-Note of Proceedings-**

MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL MEETING OF THE *SALMON AND INLAND* *FISHERIES FORUM* NI HELD AT DCAL FISHERIES, MAHON ROAD PORTADOWN ON WEDNESDAY 12 FEBRUARY 2014 AT 2 PM

**TOPIC – LOUGH NEAGH**

**Present**

Mr John Mc Williams

 M**r Michael Crilly (Chairman)**

#  Mr. Gary Houston

 Mr Aidan Hannon Mr. Francis Conlon

Mr Jim Haughey

Mr Pat Close

Mr Mark P Horton

Mr Maurice Parkinson

Mr Edward Montgomery

***Apologies*** Mr Seymour Sweeney

Mr Robert Murtland

 Dr Paul Johnston

# In attendance

DCAL Mrs Fiona Lavery (Minutes)

DCAL Mr Aidan Cassidy

DCAL Mr David Mann

DCAL Mr Seamus Connor.

AFBI Dr Derek Evans (Presentation)

Mileage sheets were distributed for completion.

1. **Apologies**

**-** As listed above.

Dr Derek Evans gave a presentation on Lough Neagh Eel stocks which covered the following topics:

1. Role of AFBI (The Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute)
2. European Recruitment overview
3. River Bann recruitment stats
4. Effects of eel farming and reason for decline
5. Current research and results
6. Recruitment/stocking measures
7. Yellow Eel fishery
8. Hydropower impacts
9. Trap and Truck methods
10. Swinbaldder parasites
11. Use of bait net/eel fishing methods
12. EU Perspective
13. Erne Eel fishery/ Neagh /Bann RBD
14. Silver Eel tagging
15. PGI – Protected Geographical Indicator – granted 2011

The presentation was followed by a Question and Answer session. Gary Houston queried the assessment done on the Lagan and Dr Evans clarified the work done and the stocking regimes of glass eels. Mr Michael Crilly raised a question with regard to Hydros and the mortality rates from these. Discussion continued on the need to ensure that the impact from Hydros is reduced. In response to Mr Cassidy, Dr Derek Evans confirmed that the fishery was meeting its conservation targets.. Mr Edward Montgomery noted the worldwide effort to undertake eel studies but queried the lack of some of the results presented. Dr Evans clarified that the vastness of the geographical area limits the work, but concluded that the Japanese have carried out a lot of genetic work and have the life cycle of the eel worked out.

Discussion continued on market value of the eel product and Mr Pat Close noted the need to conserve the stocks but highlighted that LNFC were intending to open a production line in the near future to add value to the production of the eels. Moving to the issue of the bait net, Michael Crilly clarified the current use of the bait net and Dr Evans confirmed that the Fisheries Act method does not work. Trials of the fishermen’s method worked. Dr Evans confirmed that this year they intend to investigate the use of bio degradable hooks. Mr Aidan Hannon asked if the bio degradable hooks have the same strength as the ones currently used. In reply, Dr Evans advised that he was not sure as trails will have to be done to assess their suitability. Discussion continued on the use of the older black hooks and the current silver ones. Mr Pat Close clarified some of the reasons for the change and Mr Aidan Hannon highlighted the number of black hooks which the eels could ‘spit out’ in comparison to the silver ones. Discussion moved to the issue of sand dredging on Lough Neagh and Dr Evans advised that DCAL are proposing to carry out research and confirm that he had seen sonar readings which showed that the LN bed had areas of peaks and troughs. Mr Aidan Cassidy gave advised that DCAL met with DOE Planning and NIEA in relation to the sand dredging and it was suggested that SIFF write to both parties with a view to having stakeholder engagement.

* **Action point – SIFF to write to DOE Planning and NIEA to arrange a meeting in relation to LN sand dredging.**

At this point Mr Michael Crilly thanked Dr Evans for his very informative presentation.

Moving to the topic of sand dredging, Mr Edward Montgomery advised that he has had to apply for a licence to clear a quay. Robbie Marshall outlined that sand extraction requires permission and DCAL should have involvement in this as over the years the dredging is leaving holes in the bed of the Lough. Lough Neagh is a RAMSAR site and no government action is being taken to regulate it. Michael Crilly clarified that initial contact was made with the DCAL Minister to raise awareness, but it is now necessary to identify the environmental impacts and define actions and importantly to provide scientific evidence. Mr Aidan Cassidy advised that the Minister has asked for advice and would have concerns on anything which impacts on fisheries, to date DCAL has held meetings with NIEA and Planning and concerns have been raised. Gary Houston suggested that the Department amend the disturbing of a spawning bed legislation to include Lough Neagh. The SIFF legislation working group agreed to include this as a possible legislation amendment.

* **Action Point – SIFF legislation Working Group to include this as a possible amendment.**

Mr Maurice Parkinson felt that it was necessary to keep everyone involved so a momentum would not be lost. It was agreed to undertake the following actions:

* Meet with Shaftesbury Estates
* Formally write to NIEA and DOE Planning and raise the issue of Lough Neagh being a RAMSAR site and highlight the SIFF concerns.
* A SIFF group to meet with DOE Planning and NIEA
* Prepare a list of all EU directives and topical questions for reply. (Robbie Marshall and Jim Haughey to provide this)
* If no response write to MLAs.

Mr Mark Horton suggested that Quarry Products Assoc should be approached and asked for the Environmental Policy and make them aware of any breaches. Seamus Connor advised that DCAL have asked AFBI for a survey outline, but it was an NIEA issue and given that LN stocks are good it may be difficult to prove determent to the Lough Neagh. Discussion centred on the effect of wildlife (diving birds) and anecdotal evidence seemed to indicate that wild life have moved from the shores, it seems to have impacted more than fisheries. It was agreed that SIFF would write to RSPB to raise concerns and ask for some information on their stocks.

* **SIFF to write to RSPB to raise concerns about sand dredging and ask for some information on their stocks.**
* **SIFF to write to Quarry Products Assoc.**

Mr Jim Haughey felt that it was more important to get a regulatory framework and establish permissions and accountability. Mr Edward Montgomery suggested that Shaftesbury Estates are contacted to get their position and any other information. It was agreed that the following group would meet with Shaftesbury Estates.

Mr Aidan Hannon raised the issue of the use of bait nets this year or will worms be used. Mr Seamus Connor advised that a Section 14 Permit will be issued to allow bait net holders to trawl for fish and provide scientific knowledge to DCAL i.e fry production areas and data collection. This is an interim measure to authorise fishermen to trawl the bait net and produce scientific data and all regulations will be considered. Mr Pat Close advised that this is in the early stages and there will be limitations and conditions to the use of the net. In support Mr Michael Crilly supported this and advised that details were not yet decided and SIFF do not need to input to the admin systems.

Mr Jim Haughey voiced concerns that it seemed that juvenile fish were no longer important and that the suggested strategy is not based on sound data. Mr Seamus Connor advised that DCAL had carried out an assessment of LN fish stocks – pollan larva and stock predictions continuing he advised that more pollan are wasted in floods than taken in bait nets, this was AFBI advice. In reply Jim Haughey advised that more scientific data on paper was required.

Mr Michael Crilly advised that he had written to the Minister requesting a meeting with SIFF to address certain items, on consideration he felt that they should not used the scheduled meeting but to arrange a separate SIFF meeting and discuss a pre planned agenda.

It was agreed that the Salmon Q &A will be discussed at the March meeting.

As there was no other business the meeting ended.

**Date of next quarterly SIFF meeting 12 March 2014 at 2pm in Mahon Road Portadown**