**DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, ENVIRONMENT AND RURAL AFFAIRS SALMON AND INLAND FISHERIES FORUM**

**Note of Proceedings-**

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE *SALMON AND INLAND FISHERIES FORUM* NI HELD VIA WEBEX VIDEO LINK ON **WEDNESDAY 19th October 2022**

**Present:** Maurice Parkinson (MP) acting chair

Robbie Marshall (RM)

Albert Keys (AK)

Pat Close (PC)

Gary Houston (GH)

John McWilliams (JMcW)

Paul Johnston (PJ)

**Apologies:** Owen Lyttle

Frankie Conlon

Jack Tisdall

Mark Horton

**DAERA Officials in attendance:**  Mary Toland (MT)

David Mann (DM)

Richard Hamilton (minutes)

Meeting commenced with Introductions as this was MT’s first SIFF meeting

1. **Apologies** – See above
2. **Appoint a new chairperson -** MT spoke of Jim Haughey’s recent resignation as chairperson and acknowledged the great work he had done. Some SIFF members stated that his resignation was due to lack of support from DAERA.

It was agreed to wait until more people are in attendance before agreeing new chair arrangements. In the interim, MP agreed to chair today’s meeting.

1. **Minutes of previous meeting (30th March 2022)**

Agreed - no formal objections

1. **Matters arising from the last meeting (Action Points)**

Action Point 1 *DMc to seek clarification from NIEA regarding the point - given the timescale difference in dates of the HRA being performed and policy changing to include a reduction in commercial licences, should another assessment not have been performed to support the new policy.*

DM – has been dealt with. A letter was issued to members that covered a couple of issues – the HRA process and a comparison between Lough Corrib and Lough Erne.

Action point 2 *DAERA to consider providing a view on Lough Corrib situation compared to Lough Erne.*

Also covered in the letter (as above). A question was asked about why we are not comparing issues between pike and perch. DM said there was AFBI input to the response but unable to do direct comparison as the ecological condition in both Loughs is different.

Agreed to discuss content of letter and put on a future agenda.

**Action -** **MT to speak to technical teams in the interim**

Action point 3*DAERA to issue a copy of draft Lough Erne Fishery Management Plan to SIFF members*

DM – cleared by minister in March. Recently recirculated. Discussion around consultation with SIFF on the Lough Erne management plan included comments that members were not consulted. Also the request by one member for a hard copy which he has not received.

**Action - MT to check if hard copy of report has been posted out.**

In relation to new plans to remove pike fishing in Upper Lough Erne it was commented that no assessment was done on the rivers. DM – a screening process was done but concluded there wasn’t a requirement for full assessment.

It was discussed that a link for management plans was circulated recently, published round the end of July. Members were working from draft document going back to 2015 and some changes between the two that one member was not aware had been discussed by anyone. This is particularly in relation to Lough Neagh. A few examples were given. Request that DAERA talk to the people involved.

Re management plans, if there are comments that SIFF feels incorrect is there a way to pass this on? It was commented there may be an issue whether people are feeding in through different channels. Need to know the current status of the documents. With Strategic plans all issues should be dealt with, and an example was given of what should not be included in a strategic document. It was said, this is not a plan, just a list of points which is not dealing with the issues. AK has produced a document and will send MT a copy. MT - Interim review would be a good approach.

Action point 4 *DAERA to seek getting a DfI representative to attend the next SIFF meeting. - To discuss the issue of dredging of Quays in Lough Neagh.*

A group of management team and reps of fishermen have had meetings with Rivers Agency and there was work going on to identify quays that remain active and those that are dormant. Lough Neagh partnership now involved. Regarding long term plans, nothing more to add at this stage. PC happy to continue and keep on the agenda.

DM - spoke to someone in department of infrastructure after last SIFF meeting and passed on PC’s contact details. They need to do some risk assessments which is partly due to the hold ups.

PJ asked if Waterways Ireland involved. PC confirmed they were not.

Action point 5*Chair to draft a letter regarding the Reservoir Act Consultation and circulated to SIFF members for comment.*

Action point completed

Action point 6 *DAERA to seek an update on Animal Sentience Bill.*

Action point completed.

One member wished to point out there are differences to what is said in papers and social media re animal welfare.

MP – acknowledged point, but this is an issue for a different body to pursue as SIFF has no authority.

Action point 7 GH to email a formal request to DAERA regarding UAF Event regarding Lough Erne.

Action point completed.

In relation to this the need to do a follow up on the issues raised by that event was suggested. It was said that one of major issues is that DAERA/RA etc all do actions and nobody stops them.

DM – having an AFBI presentation tonight for Lough Neagh commercial fishermen

It was suggested there is a lack of technical information – keep getting presentations from AFBI but not the same as talking to them to get both points of view.

**Action - MT will take up with technical team**.

MT - review of licences and permits currently underway.

DM – have received the report from consultants but need to try and simplify the system as it is over complicated.

AK was involved in a review in 2010 on permits and licences. Everybody agreed to move towards one permit and one licence as that would simplify everything.

MT – re permits and licences, the computer system is currently being upgraded

Discussion followed regarding licence fees and permit prices and commercial fisheries. There had been a review but went on backburner with Damian’s absence. DM will speak to Damian and get an update. Consultant report was completed early 2022 and group would like to comment on it.

**Action – MT and DM to get an update from Damian McCann**

There was discussion around the Fisheries Act 1966 needing updated with input from SIFF. It was suggested things could be done without needing to legislate.

MP – regarding any initial reports/proposals re licences and permits, good to have those circulated to SIFF and if people want to comment then they could.

A discussion followed regarding the review of SIFF. Key points/updates,

* MT - still with minister (Edwin Poots) but nothing back at present.
* One member was annoyed that report said SIFF members disagree with each other.
* It was said that some inaccuracies were made by DAERA officials and would like to see the report that went to the minister.
* MP – important to get regular feedback.

**Action - MT will see if the report can be shared.**

MP referred to the minutes of the previous meeting under AOB - future action of single farm payment. Good to get on the next agenda and have someone update SIFF and also give some background detail.

**Action - MT and DM to look into this**

Another future action point was regarding issues with Glens club. DM believes there has been a meeting and will follow up.

**Action - DM to check and update at next meeting**

1. **DAERA update**

MT updated on the following, some of which had already been discussed earlier in the meeting.

* Jim Haughey Resignation as Chair of SIFF
* Review of SIFF still with the minister
* Bushmills Salmon and Whiskey Festival – very well attended
* LPE system updates
* The fisheries Management plans for Neagh and Erne have been signed off by the Minister and are available on the website
* Stocking Policy drafting is underway
* Review of Licences and Permits is underway
* Proposed Amendments to the Fisheries Regulations 2014 – Legislation changes CANNOT be progressed in the absence of an Assembly.
* The running total for Salmon through the counter at Portna on the Lower Bann was 4587 on the 5th October for the year to date. 2022 has seen poor returns/runs locally and in neighbouring jurisdictions. The river Bush has also had a poor return. Monitoring and research work continues with ongoing work commissioned through AFBI to apportion marine mortality

Members asked if they could get an update regarding DAERA personnel and where everyone fits in.

MT briefly stated that she is the DAERA lead for this meeting. Seamus Connor not part of this anymore (SIFF members not aware of this). A new grade 6 will be Kelly Mills who will be managing the operational side of marine and inland fisheries.

**Action – MT to provide full details of relevant DAERA staff**

1. **Members update**

Covered in previous points

1. **Any other business**

Members informed that David Houston passed away in January.

Concerns a meeting between ESB and DAERA not minuted.

Mentioned that people are cutting up commercial pike nets and posting on Facebook.

1. **Date of next meeting**

14th December 2022 (Bushmills)