DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, ENVIRONMENT AND RURAL AFFAIRS SALMON

AND INLAND FISHERIES FORUM

-Note of Proceedings-

MINUTES OF THE QUARTERLY MEETING OF THE SALMON AND INLAND

FISHERIES FORUM NI HELD AT DAERA FISHERIES, MAHON ROAD

PORTADOWN ON **WEDNESDAY 12 December 2018 AT 2 PM**

Present Mr Edward Montgomery – Acting Chairman

Mr Robbie Marshall

Mr John Mc Williams

Mr Maurice Parkinson

Mr Pat Close

Mr Jack Tisdall

Mr Gary Houston

Mr. Aiden Hannon

Mr. Francis Conlon

Dr Paul Johnston

Mr Jim Haughey

Mr Albert Keys

Apologies Mr Robert Murtland

Mr Seymour Sweeney

Mr Michael Crilly

In attendance

DAERA Mrs Fiona Lavery (Minutes)

DAERA Mr Barry Quinn

DAERA Mr David Mann

AFBI Dr Richard Kennedy- Presentation

AFBI Mr Denis Ensing

Mileage sheets were distributed to members for completion.

The Acting Chairman welcomed Dr Richard Kennedy AFBI and Mr Denis Ensing AFBI who were presenting the Draft NASCO Implementation Plan for the period 2019-2024. This document had been previously circulated. Dr Kennedy outlined the format of the presentation providing an opportunity to respond at the end. It was noted that the timeframe for feedback from SIFF was mid-January 2019. He stated that the Chief Fisheries Officer wished to focus this year on Barriers to migratory fish and the potential for habitat enhancement, subject to available resources.

Mr Albert Keys felt that the Plan was a waste of paper, citing Lough Erne objectives as having fundamental faults. Simple techniques were required, guided by the need to enhance the salmon stocks. Concluding, he felt that these plans were produced at a high level and nothing then happens on the ground. Mr Robbie Marshall suggested that it was difficult to comment as some of the wording was vague and required more content. In reply, Dr Richard Kennedy explained that the document was limited by word count but some further clarification could be included. Mr Denis Ensing provided an introduction and noted that NASCO did want more stakeholder engagement. Mr Jack Tisdall queried the review of the last plan and Mr Denis Ensing explained the five year overhaul of the plan and the need for continuous feedback.

* 1. Albert Keys disagreed with mandatory catch and release noting that anglers need to be on the river to deter poachers. Removing anglers from the rivers leads to bigger problems. Mr Gary Houston queried the definition of a Primary River. Dr Richard Kennedy clarified that they were listed in the DAERA Digest -16 in Northern Ireland, based on salmon stocks.
* **List to be circulated.**
  1. Dr Paul Johnston noted that Loughs Agency use Real Time Management and asked could DAERA legislation allow this also? In reply, Richard Kennedy confirmed that DAERA do not have the legislation for this. Mr Jim Haughey queried how conservation limits (CLs) are reached. Dr Kennedy explained the methods such as nursery habitat, walk over surveys, stock recruitment. Mr Gary Houston queried the detail of the Primary Rivers CLs MTs (Management Targets). Dr Richard Kennedy explained that most are now set, noting that the Erne & Melvin are IFI CLs. Mr Houston noted that the Lagan River was not included and it was clarified that this was a ‘recovering river’ with no CLs but that one could be established in due course.
  2. Denis Ensing advised that information is available on NASCO.int. Mr Robbie Marshall requested the context of the high risk rivers, it was suggested an appendix for the SIFF report would assist. Mr Albert Keys queried the inclusion of the Melvin River and not Lough Erne. Dr Richard Kennedy clarified the high level of the report and that inclusion is based on where the river flows in to. Discussion was held on the exclusion of some rivers.
  3. – Accepted.
  4. It was agreed that this section reflects what needs to be done and is a priority. Mr Robbie Marshall requested that weir/barrier removal be included in the report. Mr Albert Keys highlighted the increase in the number of weirs on rivers.
  5. – No comment.
  6. –Self-explanatory.

**2. Management of Salmon Fisheries – Dr Richard Kennedy.**

2.1(2) Mr Albert Keys noted that the words ‘output of smolts’ required clarification. It was agreed that ‘escapement’ was a better word. Mr Robbie Marshall felt that the use of the word ‘most’ was concerning and it was agreed to reflect this better.

* **Robbie Marshall to suggest new wording.**

Mr Jim Haughey suggested that the report was not sufficiently specific about the objectives requested by NASCO but instead used vague language of ‘strategies’, citing an example – “to achieve an abundance of salmon” rather than to achieve a conservation limit and fish everything above that. In reply, Denis Ensing explained the use of measureable objectives as abundance cannot be defined and must be realistic. Continuing, Denis Ensing clarified the scientific approach. Mr Albert Keys supported the abundance approach referencing Lough Erne. Dr Richard Kennedy noted that in the context of NASCO CLs must be used. Mr Jim Haughey suggested that CLs set the bar too low. Dr Paul Johnston suggested the CLs could be the red light, management targets the amber light and above that a green light.

At this point the Acting Chairman interjected noting that due to lack of time only the main points should be discussed, given that the report had been circulated in hard copy to members.

Following discussion it was agreed that the members would submit comments to Fiona Lavery for distribution and a sub-group meeting would be held to reach an overall view.

Dr Richard Kennedy outlined each action point 1 -10 at 2.7.

**3. Protection and Restoration of Salmon Habitat – Dr Richard Kennedy**

Dr Richard Kennedy outlined in para 3.4 Action Points 1 -7, highlighting H4 the Departmental objective to reduce the number of barriers in the primary salmon rivers (‘connectivity’).

**4 Management of Aquaculture, Introductions and Transfers and Transgenics.**

Denis Ensing outlined the action points. Mr Albert Keys queried the issue of monitoring the water quality, as DAERA wanted 24 hour monitoring and NIEA did not accept the need for this. Dr Richard Kennedy suggested that this was reflected in the report. Mr Edward Montgomery queried if all actions were existing; Denis Ensing confirmed that they were, there was nothing new.

The Acting Chairman requested that all individual members forward responses to Fiona Lavery to formulate a reply. It was agreed to arrange in early January a sub-group meeting of those members with an interest to collate a response.

Mr Jim Haughey mentioned fish farm ingress to wild stocks. Denis Ensing noted that NI have low levels compared to Norway and while levels in NI are 1% which is not good, they will continue to be monitored. Dr Richard Kennedy confirmed that no farmed fish have been found in the Bush traps.

Mr John McWilliams queried if there were any proposals for new fish farms and Denis Ensing advised that he was not aware of any.

The Acting Chairman thanked both Dr Richard Kennedy and Denis Ensing for the presentation.

**AGENDA**

1. **Apologies -** as above
2. **Minutes of the last meeting 4 July 2018 for approval -** Members approved the minutes.
3. **Matters arising from the last meeting.**

**Action Points-**

1. **Co. Tyrone Fish Farm escapement: Seamus Connor to circulate copy of the technical report.**
2. **SIFF to make recommendations to the DAERA Permanent Secretary on the need for an integrated approach to issue of fish farm licences.**
3. **Pig Farms – NIEA Presentation now to be arranged for March 2019 meeting.**
4. **Circulate SIFF terms of reference.**

Mr Robbie Marshall queried why these actions points were all outstanding. Mr Albert Keys requested that the original SIFF TOR be circulated also, so that any proposed updates could be noted.

As a follow on Mr Pat Close updated on the sand dredging on Lough Neagh advising that there had been no further developments. Mr Aidan Hannon advised that since the beginning of September the sand boats had started later each morning; it seems that migrating birds were the issue. Continuing, Pat Close updated on the Lough Neagh Scale Fishery.

1. **Election of New SIFF Chairman**

Members were advised that Mr Michael Crilly had notified the Department that he would not be available for nomination for the role of Chairman following the end of his current term on 31st December 2018. Following discussion, Mr Jin Haughey proposed Mr Edward Montgomery as Chairman for the 2 year period from 1st January 2019 and Mr Robbie Marshall seconded this. In the absence of any other nominations this was accepted by the members. The matter of a Vice Chairman was discussed and Mr Robbie Marshall nominated Mr Jim Haughey and Mr Albert Keys seconded the proposal. Members accepted these appointments to the SIFF and the Acting Chairman extended his thanks to Mr Michael Crilly for his work as Chairman over an 8 year period. It was noted that Mr Michael Crilly wished to remain on the SIFF and members welcomed this.

1. **Correspondence** - None
2. **Weirs**

Mr Jim Haughey noted some ongoing issues with Weirs and the NIEA approach and lack of monitoring of Hydro Electric Schemes. Mr Jim Haughey outlined the difficulties and members agreed to send a letter to DAERA Permanent Secretary. Mr Jim Haughey agreed to provide an outline/draft of the letter for the Acting Chairman.

**Action Point – Letter to go to DAERA Permanent Secretary.**

1. **International Year of the Salmon 2019.**

The Acting Chair advised that a Game Angling Seminar with this theme was being held by The Honourable The Irish Society on 31 January 2019 in the Lodge Hotel Coleraine at 6.30pm; all SIFF members were most welcome to attend. Dr Paul Johnston noted that the aim of this designation was to stimulate projects for the year and Mr Robbie Marshall suggested that for the March 2019 meeting, DAERA bring forward proposals for the 2019 Year of the Salmon. Mr David Mann advised that the Department had some projects in the pipeline.

**Action Point: DAERA to present proposals for the 2019 Year of the Salmon at the next SIFF meeting.**

1. **Extraction of minerals – Environmental aspects**

The Acting Chairman outlined the extent of mineral mining in NI and the potential impact on the waterways and suggested a presentation to the SIFF may be beneficial. Mr Jim Haughey highlighted the quantities of water and dangerous substances required by mining operations and felt that this has not been sufficiently addressed by government bodies. Also, he noted the possibility of an incident which could cause a catastrophe. It was essential that an environmental bond was in place, as with large road schemes. Mr Albert Keys noted that monitoring by NIEA was not adequate and that the lack of monitoring would cause problems. Following discussion Mr Robbie Marshall requested that this item is retained on the Agenda. The Acting Chairman reminded members that the SIFF is only an advisory body. Mr Robbie Marshall suggested that DAERA Inland Fisheries’ views on responses to mining planning applications is requested and a letter sent to the DAERA Permanent Secretary raising concerns. Mr Robbie Marshall agreed to forward a copy of a presentation for circulation to members.

**Action Point: DAERA IF to outline Policy on Mining planning applications.**

**Action Point: Letter to DAERA Permanent Secretary raising SIFF concerns on mining planning applications.**

1. **Any Other Business.**
2. Mr John McWilliams raised the issue of BREXIT from the July 2018 meeting minutes. Following discussion, Mr Pat Close outlined the Eel management/BREXIT issues advising that DAERA officials gave a presentation to Eel fishermen in October 2019 and currently there was no further update. Mr Albert Keys raised the issue of eel fishing stopping if BREXIT occurs, due to loss of its current permitted status. In reply, Mr Pat Close clarified the position on NDF (Non Detriment Findings). Mr Albert Keys felt that Lough Erne had been excluded from BREXIT discussions.
3. **Issue of Commercial Pike licences on Lough Erne**

Mr Albert Keys requested a copy of the Departmental Policy for the issue of Commercial Permits. Mr David Mann advised that it was not the DAERA Policy to reduce Pike fishing. Continuing he advised that it was proposed to consult with stakeholders and said that the Commercial licence was not the issue; it is the requirement for a Permit, which is issued by the Department. Mr Albert Keys continued on the lack of information and replies from the Department regarding the commercial impact on the management of stocks.

Mr Robbie Marshall asked why the Department block applications. In reply, David Mann replied that an historic waiting list is missing and the Department will need to create a fair and transparent means to review the issue of Permits. Consultation with Stakeholders is essential. Mr Albert Keys suggested the need to retain local knowledge within Commercial fishing families. Mr Maurice Parkinson outlined the need to formulate policy fairly and a process must be followed. Mr Jack Tisdall raised concerns highlighting the lack of information contained in the Lough Erne Management Plan, highlighting the historic issues affecting this. Mr Pat Close added that the historic method of handing permits from father to son is not a suitable method to maintain the fishing industry. Mr Albert Keys highlighted that the Perch population requires management. Mr Jack Tisdall noted the 2016 AFBI report.

1. **Reservoirs Bill**

Mr Jim Haughey raised this issue in relation to the requirements for inspection of dams. It was felt that this would result in the loss of dams currently managed by fishing clubs. Currently there is no requirement for inspection by law (but there may be for insurance purposes). It was proposed, to write to the Permanent Secretary to suggest the establishment of a grant to meet inspection costs in order to stave off the loss of fisheries. Discussion was held on ownership/lease of local dams.

**Action Point: Letter to the DfI Permanent Secretary regarding the availability of a grant to cover inspection of dams.**

1. **Water framework Directive**

Mr Jim Haughey outlined the issues in relation to the NIEA planned targets which are not adequate. Mr Albert Keys outlined the impact on Rivers Trusts and the lack of continual water quality monitoring regimes. In support, Mr Jack Tisdall supported the suggestion to write to the DAERA Permanent Secretary and request a monitoring regime. Mr Jim Haughey agreed to assist the Acting Chairman to compose this correspondence.

**Action Point: Write to DAERA Permanent Secretary highlighting the issues and request a monitoring regime.**

1. **European Coarse Angling Championships**

Members were advised that 25 international teams will be fishing from Portglenone to New Ferry, from 24 to 30 June 2019. Mr Jack Tisdall provided a brief outline of the event, which has been given significant investment by Waterways Ireland and Mid Ulster Council.

1. Mr Maurice Parkinson requested that litter and rubbish in rivers be included in the next Agenda. Mr Albert Keys noted the extent of direct dumping.
2. **Date of next meeting**

The next DAERA Salmon and Inland Fisheries Forum meeting will be held on **Wednesday 20 March 2019 at 2pm in DAERA Mahon Road Portadown.**

**The Sub Group meeting to address the Draft NASCO Implementation Plan 2019-2024 will be held on Thursday 10 January at 2pm in DAERA Mahon Road Portadown.**