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 15 JANUARY 2020 AT 2 PM**

Present Mr Edward Montgomery – Chairman

Mr Robbie Marshall

Mr John Mc Williams

Mr Maurice Parkinson

Mr Gary Houston

Mr Mark Horton

Mr Aidan Hannon

Mr Pat Close

Mr Jim Haughey

Mr Michael Crilly

Mr Albert Keys

Mr Seymour Sweeney

Apologies Mr Paul Johnston

Mr F Conlon

In attendance

DAERA Mrs Fiona Lavery (Minutes)

DAERA Mr Seamus Connor

Mileage sheets were distributed to members for completion.

**AGENDA**

1. **Apologies -** as above. The Chair welcomed members and wished everyone a Happy New Year.
2. **Minutes of the last meeting 18 September 2019 for approval –** The minutes were accepted and approved.
3. **Matters arising from the last meeting**. All matters arising will be addressed in the Agenda.
4. **Meeting with NIEA**

Fiona Lavery advised that there had been a delay in getting the meeting organised, but she had been in contact with Peter Close and Greg McCleary who will meet with the SIFF sub group. The Chair suggested the NIEA premises in Lisburn sometime in February. **Action Point - Meeting to be arranged.**

1. **Correspondence – Members reviewed the replies received.**
2. **Regulation of Slurry Contractors**

**The Chairman outlined the NIEA Action Plan. Mr Albert Keys voiced concerns with the level of slurry spreading and suggested that action should be taken against Contractors. The Chair agreed that there was an increase in slurry spreading. Mr Jim Haughey felt the response was a positive move forward. Mr Robbie Marshall noted that DAERA had previously advised that this action plan would be carried out, but had concerns about pressure against this from the Ulster Farmers Union. Following discussion it was suggested that a letter should be sent to NIEA to keep the pressure on to implement the action plan. Mr Albert Keys suggested that NIEA were somewhat at fault instead of implementing plans to work with the UFU. The Chair noted the remit of SIFF in these matters. Mr Maurice Parkinson raised concerns re slurry treatment, this also causes problems. Mr Pat Close asked if members had any idea of what percentage of slurry is handled by Contractors vs Farmers. Continuing he suggested that farmers would resist changes, they may feel their hands are tied and are being pushed to get rid of slurry. It seems to be a broader issue, notwithstanding the impact caused by the slurry pollution problem. Mr Albert Keys noted that nitrates were a big problem, destroying land and suggested a 24 hour monitoring system to assess damage.**

**Action Point – Members agreed to a follow up letter to NIEA**

1. **Regulation of Weirs and Dams**

**Mr Robbie Marshall felt disappointed by the reply, noting the use of words such as ‘identify’ and ‘access’ was Civil Service speak which really said very little. It was felt that the reply lacked detail. In support Mr Crilly suggested that the reply was too general and did lack detail. The Chair suggested that SIFF should write to the new DAERA Minister highlighting the work carried out by SIFF. Mr Seamus Connor provided an update on the monitoring and assessment of Weirs and Dams to be undertaken over the next 5 years on Salmon Rivers. He highlighted the number of difficulties in seeking the removal of weirs and the many historic and complex issues with land ownership and lease agreements. The intention is to introduce changes through a Fisheries Bill at Stormont, but this will take time as there are a raft of changes to be considered.**

**Mr Pat Close queried if this work will include the Lough Neagh Management Plan which required a lot of legislative changes. He suggested that these amendments could be circulated to members for further discussion with SIFF and Commercial Fishermen. In reply, Seamus Connor clarified the process: consultation has already taken place and proposals and decisions were all agreed. Mr Pat Close acknowledged that discussion had been held and some changes introduced into the draft Plan, but a lot of further developments had taken place over the past 3-4 years since. Mr Seamus Connor outlined the legislative process noting the final draft will have to be approved by the Minister. It was suggested that SIFF may ask the Minister for further consultation given this protracted timeframe. Mr Pat Close highlighted the need for clarity over issues such as the introduction of the Lough Neagh permits. Members felt that the passage of time should allow for the Erne and L Neagh Fisheries Plans to be revisited. Returning to the correspondence, Mr Jim Haughey noted some items which indicated a lack of a joined up approach by Government to address the issues with weirs. Mr Seamus Connor noted the different roles within Government agencies, highlighting that DAERA Inland Fisheries are working with Angling Clubs and undertaking multiple site visits to address problems. Mr Gary Houston highlighted DfI Rivers’ actions following recent flooding.**

1. **Review of SIFF Terms of Reference and MOU.**

The Chair noted that the SIFF had been in existence for 10 years, and membership needed to be reviewed. It was suggested that the SIFF membership should closely represent DAERA IF operational areas – Conservation, Protection, Management and Development of Inland Fisheries. The Chair suggested that Sport NI, Licence Distributors, Women Anglers, Disabled, Non National Clubs should all be represented and in addition the members’ terms of office should be more clearly defined. Mr Jim Haughey highlighted that the N I Angling Forum was a different animal and did not address the same issues as SIFF. Mr Michael Crilly noted that some bodies’ representatives had stopped attending meetings, and one had never started. Discussion was held on Angling tourism and promotion of the sport. Mr Michael Crilly suggested the inclusion of a clause that any member with a conflict of interest should leave the meeting, though it was agreed this already happened. Secondly, in the event of disciplinary action against a member, i.e. a Fisheries offence, it must result in them being asked to resign from SIFF, following a Committee decision. Reference was made to the Nolan Principles. Mr Albert Keys had an issue with the role of SIFF as they were not in his view properly consulted over the Lough Erne Management Plan. Continuing, he noted that the document was discussed and amendments made but that SIFF never got to approve the finalised document. Referring to point 2.2 he felt that SIFF have limited input into the legislative process. Mr Seamus Connor referred to the Lough Erne Management Plan and advised that no legislation had been passed and that it was wrong to suggest that SIFF were not consulted. Ultimately it is the Minister who will make the decision; the recommendations are submitted, but they make the final decisions. In reply Mr Michael Crilly outlined all the consultation events he had attended in relation to the Lough Erne Management Plan. Mr Seamus Connor stressed that the SIFF brief was to advise, which is limiting, but it has no executive powers. Mr Maurice Parkinson felt that Fisheries is not given the priority it deserves and that it was now more important to take consideration of the wider picture and look at climate change and eco systems. This was taking things to a different level and maybe include representation for e.g., the Ulster Wildlife Trust. Mr Seymour Sweeney felt that SIFF did achieve actions initially with the North Coast Salmon Net buy out, progress was made at the time but he feels that SIFF has taken on a different focus since. Mr Pat Close noted the issue of continued membership in the event of a personal fisheries prosecution. He asked that consideration should be given that in the event of a prosecution the representative is removed, but not the organisation. Members supported this view. Mr Mark Horton outlined the role of the Rivers Trust and the environmental issues faced by his organisation. Mr Aiden Hannon had no issues. Members highlighted some amendments to the wording of various points in all three documents. It was agreed that these changes would be made. Discussion was held on the Standing Orders – non-attendance and the inclusion of a clause on changes in personal circumstances. It was agreed to specify the class of Fisheries offence which may cause exclusion from the SIFF. A major offence vs a minor offence. Mr Pat Close stressed the need to review the circumstances for exclusion from SIFF membership. Mr Seamus Connor noted that Terms of Reference were drawn up 10 years ago and there was now a need to formalise membership. SIFF was primarily an Inland Fisheries Forum and DAERA supported the continuation of SIFF. It was agreed that a final draft would be submitted for the next meeting. Mr Seamus Connor suggest a Sport NI presentation at a future meeting, as angling was a sport. Mr Pat Close sought clarification on Seamus Connor’s role and it was confirmed that Art Niven would attend if Seamus Connor was not available. Mr David Mann covered fisheries policy matters, but was presently off work.

1. **Commercial Pike Fishing on Lough Erne**

Mr Seamus Connor advised that this was part of the review of Licences and Permits, which will require a full consultation in order to maintain a balance between recreational and commercial fishing and will be part of a much bigger piece of work. He assured members that SIFF will be involved in the consultation. In reply Mr Albert Keys felt that this has dragged on and nothing has been done to manage the fishery. Continuing he provided anecdotal evidence of the issues.

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

No further updates. Seamus Connor updated on the events of the last few months of 2019. Mr Seamus Connor advised that NASCO conference was being held on the first week in June 2020, in Edinburgh.

1. **Litter and Rubbish in Rivers**

Referring to the draft Environmental Strategy for NI, Mr Maurice Parkinson highlighted the poor state of water quality, noting that Planning Policy was inadequate to deal with this. These comments could be included in the response which can be completed on line or in writing. The Chair confirmed that he would meet with Mr Parkinson and complete the response as the deadline was 5 February 2020. Members discussed the impact of various pollutants to the waterways.

1. **Any other business**
2. Mr Albert Keys requested that Insects and Invertebrates should be included on the Agenda for future consideration. He highlighted that Lough Erne has some rare insects, which are key indicators to the health of the rivers.
3. World Fish Migration Day – 16 May 2020
4. Seymour Sweeney noted the harm from flooding across the Province.
5. Mr Mark Horton highlighted the issue of litter, noting the Rivers Trust has undertaken work with Lough Neagh Partnership to establish litter picking groups.
6. Aiden Hannon raised the issue of Zebra Mussels on Lough Neagh which are creating increasing problems with hard bottom fishing and water clarity; they have started to move into new areas of the Lough.
7. Jim Haughey requested Cormorants be put on the Agenda.
8. Mr Robbie Marshall noted a paper completed by Dr Richard Kennedy which highlights the issue of Pike congregating at a river mouth in Lough Erne and destroying tagged salmon smolts. He asked what the Department’s Policy was on this matter and in reply Mr Seamus Connor advised that it required further studies.
9. Mr Mc Williams queried the progress of the repair work on Carnroe Weir. In reply the Chair advised that Waterways Ireland had informed him the access lane preliminary work would be undertaken February/March, but the main in-river works were still at the planning stage.
10. Mr Michael Crilly requested that the SIFF Chair, Vice Chair and a small sub group should try to get an early meeting with the new Minister.

**Action Point – Chair to contact the Minister’s office and arrange a meeting.**

**11. Date of next meeting**

It was agreed that Dr Richard Kennedy would provide a presentation to the SIFF at the next quarterly meeting to be held **in Bushmills on 18 March 2020.**