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 19 JUNE 2019 AT 2 PM**

Present Mr Edward Montgomery – Chairman

Mr Robbie Marshall

 Mr John Mc Williams

 Mr Maurice Parkinson

 Mr Gary Houston

Mr. Aiden Hannon

Mr. Francis Conlon

 Mr Jim Haughey

 Mr Michael Crilly

 Mr Jack Tisdall

Mr Albert Keys

Apologies Mr Seymour Sweeney

 Dr Paul Johnston

Mr Pat Close

Mr Robert Murtland

In attendance

DAERA Mrs Fiona Lavery (Minutes)

DAERA Mr David Mann

DAERA Mr Seamus Connor

Mileage sheets were distributed to members for completion.

**Presentation on the Management of Agricultural Slurry.**

The Chairman welcomed Mr Gareth Greer and Ms Claire Hempsey from NIEA Water Management Unit who provided a presentation for members.

Gareth Greer outlined the role of NIEA Water Management Unit – Nitrates Programme. The following topics were contained in the slide presentation.

1. Current controls of slurry
2. Large Pig/Poultry Units
3. New controls in Nutrient Action Programme (NAP) 2019-2022; PPC certificates for larger farms
4. Fertilisation Plan and Record keeping
5. Anaerobic Digestate (AD)
6. Agricultural Regulations Team Priorities 2019-2020

Following the presentation a Q&A session was held during which the following topics were discussed.

* The use of solid manure vs slurry, spreading it evenly across farms and spreading to the edge of a waterway with a nozzle.
* Anaerobic Digesters and pig farm checks.
* Lack of action to reports of incidents.
* The difficulty of proving a breach had occurred.
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Gareth Greer noted that a new advisory service was being provided by CAFRE. Albert Keys sought up to date information about nutrient level results from Lough Erne. Other topics covered were, spreading in the close season and better controls for fertiliser distributors. Maurice Parkinson noted that only 8% of NI farmers had a soil analysis highlighted the need for regulation and licencing of contractors and suggested that SIFF should write to the Permanent Secretary and recommend some form of regulation of spreading contractors. In reply, Gareth Greer noted that there are issues with the “definition” of a contractor, but confirmed that this matter has been raised citing the Programme for Government targets. Jim Haughey raised the Anaerobic Digestion regulation noting the nutrient analysis of output which Claire Hempsey clarified. In response to a query from Robbie Marshall, bunding issues were discussed and the need for covers. The Chairman thanked Gareth Greer and Claire Hempsey for the excellent presentation and asked that the presentation be circulated to members.

**Action Point – SIFF to write to DAERA Permanent Secretary and propose the regulation of contractors.**

**AGENDA**

1. **Apologies -** as above
2. **Minutes of the last meeting 20 March 2019 for approval – Amendments:** Robbie Marshall noted Point 3 page 2 should read **non** spreading. Aidan Hannon asked that the last line on Point 7 should read ‘litter and rubbish everywhere especially in Toome Bay……’. Subject to these amendments the draft Minutes were agreed.
3. **Matters arising from the last meeting.**
4. **SIFF to make recommendations to the DAERA Permanent Secretary on the need for an integrated approach to issue of fish farm licences.** *Outstanding*
5. **Action Point: Letter to DAERA Permanent Secretary raising SIFF concerns on mining planning applications.** *Outstanding*

**Action Point – Retain DAERA Policy on Mining applications on the Agenda.**

**Action Point**: **Commercial Pike licences on Lough Erne remain on the Agenda.**

Robbie Marshall asked if these matters could be completed as a matter of urgency. It was noted that, reference point (a), a Co Tyrone Fish Farm escapement report has been circulated. (c) Management of Agricultural slurry presentation was arranged for 19 June 2019. (d) Circulation of SIFF Terms of Reference – **Completed**. (f) Seamus Connor advised that the Department do not have a Policy on Mining applications; they are a consultee, and are required to provide a fisheries impact on each application.

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

Albert Keys updated the meeting on historic events and queried the Department’s decision-making in relation to the Lough Erne Fisheries Management Plan. He felt that a review of commercial fishing on Lough Erne was required, noting the closure of private loughs in Fermanagh. In reply, Seamus Connor clarified the Department’s Policy both current and historic as contained in the Fisheries Management Plan but noted that the current draft management plan still requires sign off by a Minister and given BREXIT matters and the lack of a Government Assembly, this will not happen in the near future.

Continuing, Seamus Connor advised that currently Lough Erne commercial permits were being issued with no existing commercial fishermen restrictions and no limits. Albert Keys highlighted that most of the current fishermen are too old to continue to fish and the Department has no process to hand on the permit. Seamus Connor outlined that process, noting the development of a new policy on the issue of permits following a Departmental review of licences and permits. Discussion was held on the numbers involved in commercial fishing and the requirement to have an open and transparent process. Seamus Connor noted the decline in the market. Albert Keys highlighted again that there is no process in place and no discussion to develop the commercial fishery. In reply, Seamus Connor advised that the Lough Erne Management Plan did address long term plans for Lough Erne. It was agreed that this item would be retained on the Agenda. Gary Houston queried the full consultation process with SIFF and the need for Ministerial approval. Discussion was held on the proposals and the consultation process and it was noted that SIFF would be consulted as part of the legislative process. The Chairman sought clarity on the role of SIFF which Seamus Connor provided, highlighting the Forum’s input as a consultee and that it had provided input to the draft fishery management plans. The final draft has not been presented to SIFF as it has not received Ministerial approval. Mr Michael Crilly outlined the process undergone with the Lough Erne and Lough Neagh Management plans during his Chairmanship and felt that the process had allowed for full consultation, via workshops.

1. **Weirs**

Seamus Connor outlined the Department’s role which is guided by the Fisheries Act and noted that for this reason there is no ‘policy’ per se. NIEA are currently updating their guidance. The Chairman requested an update from members. Mr Haughey mentioned two weirs which are dry at present. Following a query from Gary Houston it was highlighted that fish passage remained a problem at a number of sites. Seamus Connor noted that DAERA has an enforcement role. Discussion continued on barriers and various pieces of legislation. It was agreed that a letter should be sent to the Permanent Secretary regarding the impact on fisheries caused by lack of regulation of Weirs and Barriers. Continuing, Mr Robbie Marshall suggested that DAERA should request the use of a Q80 flow marker in each case. Seamus Connor proposed that Anglers should collect evidence of relevant sites with photographs. He advised that the Department was currently undertaking a comprehensive review of sites in an effort to instigate repairs, i.e. by Road Service etc. In response to a request by Mr Gary Houston for water levels to be checked, Seamus Connor clarified that Inland Fisheries can only enforce powers within the Fisheries Act. Mr Albert Keys requested a copy of a presentation given by Dr Richard Kennedy in Fermanagh on 30 May 2019.

**Action Point: A letter to be sent to the Permanent Secretary regarding the impact on fisheries caused by lack of regulation of Weirs and Barriers and to include the Q80 recommendation.**

**Action Point: Copy of Presentation given by Dr Richard Kennedy on 30 May 2019 to be circulated.**

1. **Litter and Rubbish in Rivers:**

Following a letter to the Permanent Secretary and the receipt of a reply it was agreed to retain this on the September 2019 Agenda. The Chairman thanked Mr Parkinson for his input on this matter.

**Action Point: Litter and Rubbish to be retained on the September 2019 Agenda.**

1. **Review of SIFF Standing Orders and Membership**

The Chairman observed that SIFF had been established 10 years ago and that the membership structure and terms of reference were now long overdue for review. Members accepted the Standing Orders – effectively, how meetings were to be conducted. Mr Michael Crilly raised the issue of the original Memo of Understanding which was developed a number of years ago with the Department, but not implemented. It was agreed that this document would be circulated to members for further consideration. The Chairman felt that any review of membership should include consideration of participation by representatives of disabled anglers, ethnic minority interests, Rivers Trusts etc. Seamus Connor advised that the process would be that SIFF should make recommendations to the Department and that they would take the appointment process forward.

Following a mention of correspondence from Mr Seymour Sweeney requesting that he remain on the SIFF, and reference to other non-attending members, Mr Michael Crilly referred to the Standing Orders which stated that non-attendance at 3 meetings without good reason should result in de-selection. Seamus Connor advised that the Chairman could write to the Department (Inland Fisheries) and recommend a de-selection process, beginning initially with a warning letter, as an appropriate response to non-attendance.

**Action Point: Chairman to write to the Department and recommend initiation of a de-selection process.**

**Action Point: Circulated original SIFF Memo of Understanding**

1. **DAERA Policy on Mining applications**

Due to the number of items on the Agenda it was agreed to defer this item to the next meeting. Seamus Connor clarified that the Department does not have a policy on mining applications per se and suggested that a presentation from the Strategic Planning Department may give helpful direction. Mr Albert Keys recommended a Ground Water presentation which he had heard recently. He agreed to forward details to Fiona Lavery.

**Action Point: Mr Albert Keys to forward contact details re Ground Water Presentation.**

1. **International Year of the Salmon**

Seamus Connor advised that the Bush Open day was attended by 1600 visitors. A portacabin in Bushmills Salmon Station had displays, presentations and films. The Chairman suggested ‘angling schools’ for young anglers be encouraged during the remaining part of this year.

1. **Any other business**

Mr Robbie Marshall requested that the Rocks Lodge Trout Farm report is carried over to the next Agenda.

**Action Point: Include Rocks Lodge report on September 2019 Agenda.**

Mr Jim Haughey raised the issue of the UK Technical Advisory Group - water abstraction regulations concerns. Mr Haughey agreed to draft a letter.

**Action Point: Mr Jim Haughey to draft a letter re water abstraction issues.**

Seamus Connor agreed to circulate the Lough Erne fish stocks report.

**Action Point: Seamus Connor to circulate report.**

1. **Date of next meeting**

The next DAERA Salmon and Inland Fisheries Forum meeting will be held on **Wednesday 18 September 2019 at 2pm in DAERA Mahon Road Portadown.**