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 18 SEPTEMBER 2019 AT 2 PM**

Present Mr Edward Montgomery – Chairman

Mr Robbie Marshall

Mr John Mc Williams

Mr Maurice Parkinson

Mr Gary Houston

Mr. Francis Conlon

Mr Jim Haughey

Mr Michael Crilly

Mr Jack Tisdall

Mr Albert Keys

Mr Seymour Sweeney

Apologies

Mr Pat Close

Mr Robert Murtland

Mr Aidan Hannon

Mr Mark Horton

In attendance

DAERA Mrs Fiona Lavery (Minutes)

DAERA Mr Seamus Connor

Mileage sheets were distributed to members for completion.

**AGENDA**

1. **Apologies -** as above. After welcoming members attending, the Chairman noted correspondence from Mr Robert Murtland which confirmed that he wished to retire from the Forum due to ill health. The Chairman accepted his retirement and thanked him for his contribution to the SIFF, noting that his input and knowledge will be greatly missed.

The Chairman read an email from Mr Mark Horton which conveyed his apology for non-attendance but that he had a lot of work travel commitments and it may assist him if the dates for the SIFF meetings were pre-set. It was agreed that Mr Horton should remain a member of the Forum.

1. **Minutes of the last meeting 19 June 2019 for approval –** The minutes were accepted and approved.
2. **Matters arising from the last meeting**. All matters arising will be addressed in the Agenda
3. **Correspondence – replies from the DAERA Permanent Secretary**
4. **Extraction of minerals** – The Chairman noted the response from Ms Tracey Teague. Mr Jim Haughey referred to the paragraph which mentioned environmental bonds. He was aware that private companies were required to deposit considerable sums of money but queried if this was actually a legislative requirement. Discussion was held on the financial provisions from companies involved in industrial emissions. In reply, Seamus Connor felt that it may be contained in legislation. Mr Conlon highlighted that there are now plans to mine for oil around the shores of Lough Neagh. Discussion was held on the extent of these actions and Mr Conlon advised that objections were being raised by newly formed groups within the community. Mr Albert Keys believed that fracking was destroying the land. Continuing, he felt that NIEA were not addressing issues relating to underground water reservoirs, as deep wells were being drilled and no monitoring for contamination was being carried out. As an example he highlighted ground water contamination issues in Oman. Referring to the NIEA response Mr Michael Crilly queried the role of the TAG group. Seamus Connor clarified the remit and membership of the TAG group confirming that they have met on numerous occasions. In a response to a query about sand extraction, Seamus Connor confirmed that Lough Neagh did not fall directly under the role of this group but that the TAG Group did provide direct input to planning applications as one of many consultative bodies involved. Mr Albert Keys felt that NIEA did not carry out sufficient monitoring and have no follow up procedures for pollution incidents. Discussion was held on lack of restoration and breaches of the WFD. Seamus Connor clarified that the Courts issue the fines.
5. **Fish Farm Escapement –** Members acknowledged the Department’s response but felt that there was an un-coordinated response to the problem. As an example the Strule river incident was highlighted and the need for the Department to review the licencing regime within DAERA. Members felt that there was a lack of priority with this issue. Mr Jim Haughey raised a parallel with the more historic Glenarm escapement – noting that no plans were in place. Mr Haughey again referred to the Strule and Mournebeg incidents. In reply, Seamus Connor that a PhD student funded by DAERA was now involved in a research project in this area, and rejected the claims that there was not a joined up approach at Glenarm.
6. **UKTAG Proposed Biological and Environmental Standards for River Basin Planning. The Chairman asked Mr Jim Haughey to comment on the response. Mr Haughey felt that it was a procedural framework response and summarized the reply, noting the common standards and the permission for increased exemptions and lack of control with licence monitoring. Mr Albert Keys noted the current lack of enforcement with licence breaches. It was noted that as there are no methods to monitor the river flow it is impossible to monitor and record data. Mr Seymour Sweeney suggested that the meeting should take the positive from the reply and accept the offer of a meeting to address these issues. Mr Robbie Marshall noted the lack of a Q80 flow measure which would allow everyone to monitor flow. Following discussion it was agreed to have a sub group meet with NIEA. It was agreed that Edward Montgomery, Albert Keys, and Maurice Parkinson would meet NIEA. Seamus Connor agreed to attend. Continuing Mr Albert Keys stressed that fish migration was an issue highlighting the flow conditions needed by smolts especially the 3 week window in the smolt run when all weirs should be closed to allow the smolts to be flushed out and spillways open.**

**Action Point - A meeting to be requested with NIEA.**

1. **Regulation of Slurry Contractors – The Chairman advised that an acknowledgement had been received but no response. Mr Robbie Marshall updated members on a presentation he had attended and noted that the regulation of slurry contractors had not received support from UFU. Mr Albert Keys highlighted the use of direct drilling and suggested that solid manure should be allowed.**
2. **Attendance and Terms of Reference SIFF - The Chairman recapped on the need to review the SIFF membership and TOR. The old draft MOU had never been finalised. Seamus Connor advised that the MOU is an internal matter. Returning to the need to review the current membership it was noted that the membership was not diverse. Seamus Connor noted that the local Government Representative post had been vacant for some time. It was agreed that the MOU needed to be updated, circulated and approved by members. Albert Keys queried the role of SIFF members and Michael Crilly clarified that its role was advice and scrutiny of DAERA policies. In reply, Albert Keys challenged this suggesting that the Ombudsman dictates the powers and level of advice. Seamus Connor advised that the Minister set out the TOR for SIFF which was Fisheries Policy only. Albert Keys highlighted the Lough Erne Management Plan which had been changed after consultation. The chairman summarised that the MOU needs to be reviewed and discussed at the next meeting. Seamus Connor agreed to update the MOU and it will be circulated. Discussion was held on council member representation; it was confirmed that currently 4 posts were vacant. Seamus Connor advised that the recruitment process was via advertisement, interview and appointment and outlined that the remit was first and foremost with Inland Fisheries. During the discussion Mr Albert Keys suggested that an NIEA member could be included but Seamus Connor clarified that it is an Inland Fisheries Forum. It was confirmed that Ministerial approval was required to change the membership and members suggested that Disabled anglers, Non-nationals and females should be represented. Seamus Connor suggested that the next meeting would mark 10 years of SIFF and the meeting could be held in Bushmills and include a site visit. Members agreed to this.**

**Action Point Seamus Connor to review SIFF TOR and draft MOU and circulate.**

**5 Review of SIFF Standing Orders and Membership**

**Members agreed to move this to the January 2020 meeting as above.**

**6 DAERA Policy on Mining applications**

**It was agreed to retain this as an agenda item and discussion was held on the use of cyanide and unregulated mining. Mr Conlon highlighted ongoing issues on Lough Neagh. Members agreed to bring any additional information to the Forum. Seamus Connor reminded members that DAERA was a consultee as part of a wider consultation process. Mr Albert Keys again highlighted NIEA lack of monitoring and non-compliance with WFD regulations.**

**7 Commercial Pike licences on Lough Erne.**

**Discussion was held on the paper circulated. Seamus Connor updated on the historic events in relation to Lough Erne eels and the continuation of the issue of commercial licences on Lough Erne. Seamus Connor confirmed that a draft policy would be in place by March 2020 which will allow regulation of the commercial fishery on Lough Erne. Processes and procedures will be formulated. Mr Albert Keys advised that only 3 commercial fishermen operate on Lough Erne and Pike numbers are increasing. Continuing, he noted that as Lough Erne Commercial representative, no one has discussed this with him, nothing moves forward and Pike stocks are expanding, which attracts English Pike fishermen. It was proposed that Perch should be caught commercially to decrease stocks. Mr McWilliams suggested that the introduction of BREXIT may cause further problems. In reply, Mr Albert Keys noted that Perch would have an open market across the world. Mr Jack Tisdall queried the issue of commercial permits and Mr Seamus Connor confirmed that the issue of commercial permits will be reviewed and a public consultation undertaken. Continuing, Seamus Connor noted that the Lough Erne fishery is primarily a recreational fishery with a commercial interest. Mr Albert Keys highlighted Lough Erne data and suggested that 4-5 Pike per day should be allowed. Discussion was held on mesh sizes and takeable pike sizes. Mr Jack Tisdall outlined his recollection of previous discussions with Lough Erne commercial fishermen. Seamus Connor advised that the Policy requires consultation prior to formulation and will need Ministerial approval. Seamus Connor advised that a draft policy will be circulated to SIFF. Mr Robbie Marshall queried the calculation of the tonnage. In reply, Seamus Connor noted the historic figures and also highlighted the issues with the marketing of Pike. Mr Robbie Marshall requested evidence of the agreed tonnage. Mr Albert Keys raised historical data re the capture of Pike and highlighted the abundance of Pike in Lough Erne. It was agreed that DAERA need to supply accurate information. Members suggested that an AFBI presentation may be useful to clarify perceptions.**

**Action Point: Draft Lough Erne Commercial fishing Policy to be circulated on completion.**

**Action Point: Presentation on Lough Erne Pike stocks to be arranged.**

**8 Weirs (Fish Barriers)**

Seamus Connor outlined the content of the paper circulated to members. Mr Jim Haughey queried the date, which was confirmed as 2015-2016. Continuing Mr Jim Haughey noted that barriers are continually being built, citing Road Service works. Mr Robbie Marshall gave an example of the Kesh River where nothing has been done to allow fish passage. It was recommended that DAERA Inland Fisheries address this with DfI Roads Service. In reply, Seamus Connor confirmed that compliance has been improved over the years and that he has raised the barrier issue with the DfI Permanent Secretary. Discussion continued on the issue with bridges. Maurice Parkinson suggested a letter to the DfI Permanent Secretary outlining examples of failure to comply. Mr Albert Keys suggested that a bigger problem caused by barriers was blockages preventing smolts coming down rivers.

**Action Point: Gary Houston agreed to draft a letter to the DfI Permanent Secretary.**

**9 Year of the Salmon 2019**

Discussion are on-going with Councils re Salmon trail with Causeway Coast and Glens. AFBI/DAERA portacabins were in place at Bushmills. Members were advised that Ken Whelan was in Omagh for an event next week, 25 September 2019. Mr Albert Keys felt that the depletion of salmon stocks in Lough Erne and the loss of revenue to NI should be highlighted. Mr Frankie Conlon advised that the Lough Neagh Festival was being held on 28/09/2019 at Toome and extended an invitation to all members.

10 **Litter in Rivers**

Mr Maurice Parkinson advised that the media had taken up this topic recently and he highlighted the long-term impact on health, which has yet to be determined. Mr Albert Keys advised that the Rivers Trust had published a report. Mr Michael Crilly noted the lack of ownership to remove litter/plastic. Discussion was held on litter reduction programmes. It was agreed that Maurice Parkinson and Edward Montgomery would provide a response to a forthcoming consultation document.

**Action Point: Maurice Parkinson and Edward Montgomery would provide a response to the forthcoming consultation document.**

11. **Inland Fisheries Technical Report Update.**

The Chairman offered to leave the meeting given that he had a potential conflict of interest. Members agreed that this action was not necessary. Mr Jim Haughey advised that the fish farm concerned had undertaken a lot of remedial work and precautionary work should be encouraged to ensure it was fit for purpose. Mr Robbie Marshall queried issues with the exemptions which Seamus Connor clarified, noting the importance of reasonable timeframes. Members agreed lessons have been learnt.

**12 Restriction on capture of Bream in DAERA PAE waters.**

Seamus Connor outlined the current commercial fishing position on Lough Erne which was that no Bream are allowed to be taken commercially. The proposal is that Bream cannot be taken recreationally on DAERA PAE waters. Continuing, Seamus Connor advised that currently the only way to stop the capture of Bream is by a condition in the DAERA permit. Mr Robbie Marshall queried the situation with competitions and Seamus Connor advised that it would be catch and release only. Mr Albert Keys suggested that there should be no restriction on the number of Perch captured as they are an invasive species. Seamus Connor clarified that the legislation could not be changed at present but that the DAERA Permit conditions could be amended. Continuing, Seamus Connor advised that Pike fishing was a bigger issue and needed a separate annual discussion and review. Mr Gary Houston raised his concerns about invasive species. Mr Frankie Conlon noted the recent AFBI surveys on Lough Neagh which had involved tagging Bream to provide data for the future. Mr Jack Tisdall referred to an AFBI presentation which provided information on tagged Bream and gave various locations and information on migration. Discussion was held on Bream stocks, fish movement and migration. Members were supportive and the Chairman stressed the importance of a public awareness campaign.

13 **Any other business**

Mr Jim Haughey advised that the exchange of letters was very useful and queried if they could be circulated among members. Seamus Connor confirmed this was in order.

**14 Date of next meeting**

The next DAERA Salmon and Inland Fisheries Forum meeting will be held on:

**Wednesday 15 January 2020 at 2pm in DAERA Bushmills Salmon Station.**

**Members agreed the following dates for further 2020 SIFF meetings:**

**Wednesday 18 March 2020 – Portadown**

**Wednesday 17 June 2020 - Portadown**

**Wednesday 16 September 2020 - Portadown**