

Angling Consultative Council Ireland (ACCI)

Minutes of Meeting – 24 August 2021 (Remotely)

Attendees:

Philip Nugent (DECC, Co-Chair), Martin McEnroe (ACI, Co-Chair), Bob Seward (SSTRAI), Paul Byrne (IPS), Warren Doyle (EFSA), Noel Carr (FISSTA), Denis Maher (DECC), Karen Egan (DECC), Barry McCartin (DECC), Mary Breslin (DECC, Co-Secretary), Francis O'Donnell (IFI), Suzanne Campion (IFI).

Apologies: Jonathan Rice, Donal Kennedy, Joe Birney, Pdraig O'Riordan.

Agenda Item 1 - Adoption of Minutes

Meeting opened with welcome to all. Minutes of 8 July 2021 meeting were circulated previously. Chair outlined the main points. Adoption of the minutes was proposed by Bob Seward and seconded by Warren Doyle. There were no matters arising.

Agenda Item 2 - Theme 1 (Conservation and Habitats) of the Work Programme

ACCI Chair opened the discussion on Work Programme Theme 1 "Conservation and Habitats" referring to the roadmap document "Towards a Policy Framework for Inland Fisheries in Ireland". The Chair reminded all members of the requirement for making a fundamental move from exploitation of the resource to conservation and the importance of the work around the Marine Protected Areas.

A. Inshore fishing

Conservation of the inshore marine environment needs to be prioritised. Serious damage has occurred to the inshore fishery and many stocks have been depleted. Seabed destruction has occurred in many areas due to bottom trawling activities.

B. Impacts of aquaculture

The impact of aquaculture particularly salmon aquaculture on wild stocks including the licencing regime must be addressed.

C. MPAs

A submission was made on behalf of ACCI to the consultation/observation process. DECC reported good engagement with the Department of Housing, Local Government & Heritage (DHLG&H) and the commitment to take inland fisheries views on board as the process is rolled out.

D. Weed control in canals

Recent issues with weed control measures adopted by Waterways Ireland (WI) are of serious concern to member federations, certain species use this for spawning. IFI to discuss with WI.

E. Western Lakes

IPS were of the view that the recent draft Designated Salmonid Waters (DSW) Bye-law had missed an opportunity to deal with major issue of pollution which has a much greater impact on fish stocks. This should now be considered in the new proposed lakes management policy documents. The Bye-law in particular was discussed later in the meeting.

F. Conservation measures

ACCI angling members to promote conservation catch and release policies.

(Items A & B to be discussed with the responsible agencies under DAFM's remit.)

Proposals

An inter-agency approach is required to deal with the many threats to our fisheries and aquatic habitat. Concerns were raised on the level of pollution from agriculture, aquaculture, and water treatment plants, damage to our ecosystems from afforestation and deforestation, water abstraction, barriers to migration, drainage works and aquatic invasive species. Consideration is to be given to the setting up of a working group from all agencies with responsibilities for fresh and inshore marine environments to agree policies on the protection of fish stocks and ecosystems in their area of operation.

Consideration is to be given to the setting up of a fish habitat protection programme. Priority areas are conservation of existing fish stocks and to implement a programme to restore and develop fish habitat.

Consideration for IFI to set up regional bases specifically for conservation, protection and development of fisheries and aquatic ecosystems. Regional bases to be supported by 3 key elements:

1. Scientific Research Personnel
2. Development Plan Teams
3. Conservation and Protection Work Teams

IFI advised they are currently working at the highest level with OPW to seek work practice improvements with the potential to set up joint workshops for training. IFI are also working with WI and will bring weed cutting and spawning concerns to their attention.

Action Points:

1. DECC to liaise with DAFM as regards activity within the 6-mile limit and protection of inshore stocks, the impact of aquaculture on wild fish stocks and the licencing system for aquaculture. Licencing systems must ensure effective wild stock protective measures are robust and

guarantee the protection of all wild stocks. Enforcement mechanisms should be detailed and robust.

2. IFI to make WI aware of weed cutting concerns particularly during spawning season.

3. Develop a draft chapter document on Conservation and Habitats based on discussion with distribution of draft to ACCI for next meeting if possible. ACCI to discuss this draft at next meeting if it is available.

4. DECC working on draft policy papers on Aquaculture within the roadmap process and will bring forward work on policy paper on in-shore issues. These will be presented to ACCI when available.

Agenda Item 3 - Discussion on adoption of ACCI Work Programme

The draft Work Programme was discussed and the timing and order of monthly scheduled themed topics was again put forward. There was majority agreement as per draft. One member was not in agreement stating insufficient time for federation consultation and proposed two months for each item. Request to bring the theme of Inland Fisheries Management Regimes forward in the timetable will be considered. It was agreed to proceed with the Protection theme for September meeting.

Protection	September
Access and Coaching	October
Species Specific Policy & Stock Management	November
Governance & Funding	December
Inland Fisheries Management Regimes	Jan 2022

Action Point: ACCI members to prepare for each scheduled Work Programme agenda item in advance of meetings.

Agenda Item 4 - Updates

- **Draft Designated Salmonid Waters Bye-law (DSW)**

DECC advised that a draft DSW Bye-law has been withdrawn. It is considered that a comprehensive long term policy approach, based on robust scientific analysis and studies, rather than a legislative approach is the optimal way forward.

A discussion took place on the feedback received from the public consultation - DECC advised 181 submissions were received - 25 in support and 156 not in support (for a range of different reasons).

FISSTA questioned the process with the view that it calls into question the way DECC brought forward the draft DSW Bye-law. Chair asked FISSTA to clarify its views and advised that standard legislative (Bye-law) processes had been followed. Discussion also included

consideration on the inclusion of Article 7 in the draft bye-law. DECC advised that Article 7 was legally required.

IFI will set out a comprehensive science-based lake management policy. An ecology-based approach providing best scientific advice will be used going forward.

IFI have recruited a staff member specifically to pursue funding from the EU for conservation and habitats projects.

IPS asked when the report of the Pike Review Group would be published IFI advised that further research will be undertaken on trophic conditions and stock biomass to ensure all relevant data is considered. It was agreed that this would be discussed bilaterally.

- **NIFF**

Discussions on a potential Chair between DECC and IFI are ongoing. It is expected the formation of NIFF will be later in the year or early next year given the need to consult with a broad range of stakeholder groups.

- **Marine Protected Areas**

Maritime Area Regulatory Authority (MARA): It will have the technical expertise and will be the competent authority in this area. It will oversee licencing and regulation for offshore and renewable energy and will have a planning role. The potential opportunity for MARA to seek additional policing powers for the protection of MPAs should be explored.

New planning procedures proposed for marine environments including aquaculture, energy projects etc, sustainable angling and fishing must be included in MPAs. An opportunity may arise for creating good fish habitat around windfarm structures which should also be explored.

Agenda Item 5 – AOB

- **Donegal County Council:** The Council's Fishery Committee is seeking to open a discussion on a limited mixed stock salmon fishery off the Donegal Coast. DECC and IFI have a long standing policy to oppose such fisheries and are prepared to jointly present to the Committee on the issue. DECC and IFI will not support such fishery given the Government decision on the management of salmon.
- **Poaching:** A discussion took place on recent success in apprehension of poachers at sea and changes in detection methods are now proving successful.
- **MARA - MPAs** on the east coast from Wicklow to Wexford include many proposals for windfarms. These sites will be up to 10Km from the coast and may provide opportunities for habitat development and with additional structures would provide cover for fish stocks.

Action Points:

- DECC and IFI will jointly set out government policy and North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organisation (NASCO) standards on mixed stock fisheries to the Donegal County Council Fisheries Committee.
- IFI are requested to engage with MARA and discuss potential opportunities for marine habitat development at project design stage.

Date of next ACCI meeting (Remotely) Tuesday 28 September 2021 - 16:30

All those in attendance were thanked by Co-Chairs.