

Angling Consultative Council of Ireland (ACCI)

Minutes of Meeting – 23.03.2023

IFI, Citywest & Remotely via Zoom

Attendees:

Martin McEnroe (ACI, Co-Chair), Philip Nugent (DECC, Co-Chair), Fergal Bell (IFPAC), Warren Doyle (EFSA), Noel Carr (FISSTA), Paul Byrne (IPS), Denis Maher (DECC), Barry Fulham (DECC), Barry McCartin (DECC), Dr Cathal Gallagher (IFI), Francis O'Donnell (IFI), Barry Fox (IFI), Declan Cooke (IFI).

Apologies:

Bob Seward (SSTRAI), Jonathan Rice (Co-Secretary, ACI), Mary Breslin (Co-Secretary, DECC).

Agenda Item 1 – Minutes of previous meeting

Meeting opened with welcome to all.

The minutes of the previous meeting held on the 25 July 2022 were discussed. These minutes are to be agreed and adopted at a future meeting.

Agenda Item 2 – IFI Update

Co-Chair (DECC) gave an update on the issues that have affected IFI for several months. It has been a difficult period for IFI and DECC. Due to the position of the board of IFI, several critical functions could not be progressed. On the 14 February 2023, Minister Ryan exercised his powers under Section 18(5) of the Inland Fisheries Act 2010 to remove the board of IFI on a no-fault basis and appointed Mr Seamus Neely, former Chief Executive of Donegal County Council and Mr Tom Barry, former Chief Executive of Carlow County Council to carry out the functions of the board. The appointees have been asked to progress protected disclosures and complete a governance review of IFI within six months. The appointees will be in place for six months or until the Public Appointments Service and Joint Oireachtas Committee processes to fill the board vacancies have concluded.

IFI confirmed the Senior Management Team have met with the appointees on a number of occasions. Pressing and critical issues are being progressed promptly. IFI advised that it is seen as an opportunity, a fresh approach, and a good foundation for a new board.

FISSTA agreed that, although unfortunate, it can be considered a reset with a lot of positives for IFI. FISSTA hope IFI will now be better funded to achieve their plans.

EFSA believe that sea angling has been neglected by IFI. EFSA hope that, with the reset of IFI, sea angling will be given the same opportunities that other sectors have been afforded.

IPS raised the issue of IFI's inaction on habitat protection. IFI advised that there are resource challenges in delivering development works. IFI have advertised a senior position

to manage the Habitat Specialisation Unit within IFI. The unit will have three experts who will work with communities and groups to design fishery management plans and assist them in funding applications.

IFI advised that the strategy going forward is to ensure habitat interventions are more evidence based. IFI are now involved in barriers and hope to get a national role in the mitigation of barriers and catchments. It is a complex area which will require an upgrade of their skillsets to mitigate against the obstruction of the free passage of fish, restore hydromorphological integrity and future-proof against the impacts of environmental and climate challenges. IFI will work in partnership with other departments in the context of the Water Framework Directive and the Habitats Directive.

IFI confirmed they have received additional funding from DECC to fill seven to eight new critical positions.

Co-Chair (DECC) commended the commitment of IFI's senior team and staff in the continued operation of business during this difficult period. All in attendance agreed.

Agenda Item 3 – DECC Update – North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organisation (NASCO)

DECC gave an update on NASCO 2023. It will take place from 4-8 June 2023 in Moncton, Canada. FISSTA will attend, ACI to confirm. DECC advised the implementation plans due to be brought forward at NASCO are being reviewed. DAFM have provided aquaculture inputs. DECC inputs are well received but aquaculture inputs can be challenging. DECC is happy to meet with FISSTA, ACI and other NASCO accredited Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs) in advance of the NASCO meeting.

IFI advised that the special session at NASCO will focus on the impacts of climate change on salmonids. IFI have produced a paper on the issue from an Irish perspective. IFI chair the Implementation Plan (IP) review group. The group meet in Scotland at the end of April where all European and International plans (excluding Ireland) will be reviewed. Aquaculture issues seen in Ireland are also experienced by Norway, Canada, and Scotland. IFI confirmed Ireland will host NASCO in June 2024.

DECC advised that many of Ireland's team are on scientific groups and policy committees within NASCO which facilitates influencing NASCO discussions. In the past we have chaired one of the commissions and would hope to do so again. DECC's view is that the Loughs Agency should also be included as they were previously excluded from the UK delegation. Dr Sarah McLean from the Loughs Agency will join the delegation and a working group subject to the approval of other member states.

FISSTA agreed that aquaculture is the main issue for all NGOs. At NASCO 2022 it was clear that the EU were awaiting Ireland's strong proposals against aquaculture as, following Brexit, they no longer had to defend the UK. DECC noted FISSTA's comments.

IFI commended DECC's commitment to highlighting the impacts of aquaculture. FISSTA agreed that Minister Ryan's letter to Minister McConalogue on the impacts of aquaculture has put the issue under the spotlight.

Co-Chair (ACI) advised that (MARA) taking over the issue of licencing would be a major step forward. Co-Chair (DECC) confirmed that there is a commitment, at government level, that aquaculture will go to MARA when they are ready to take on this function.

IFI gave an update on the Compass Project due to be raised at NASCO. FISSTA updated on their attendance (via Zoom) at the Salmon Summit.

Agenda Item 4 – Western Lakes Management Plan (WLMP)

IFI gave an update on the WLMP. Public Consultation has concluded, and it has been sent to IFI's environmental consultants who are drafting the Natura Impact Statement (NIS). It has also been sent to Minogue & Associates for completion of a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) report. Both documents are due back to IFI in the coming weeks, amendments will be considered, and it will go back out to Public Consultation for a further six weeks. Upon conclusion of the Public Consultation, IFI will meet with DECC to discuss all issues raised. FISSTA queried why there was a need for another Public Consultation. IFI advised it is required as the NIS needs to be considered.

IFI raised the issue of the Conservation and Prohibition on Sale of Coarse Fish Bye-law No. 806, 2006 and Conservation of Pike Bye-law No. 809, 2006 and the perception that they offer a level of protection to non-salmonid species. IFI recommended a review of these bye-laws.

IFI advised that 2018 research identified several lakes in the west of Ireland with pristine populations of trout and char. There is an onus on IFI to protect these lakes. IFI to discuss the possibility of providing a dedicated staff member to liaise with DECC on legislation matters.

DECC confirmed that, in the ongoing update to inland fisheries legislation, a head, dealing with the movement of fish, has been drafted.

Co-Chair (ACI) discussed how the movement of boats on the Shannon is the single biggest threat to our waterways resulting in the spread of invasive species. A new expert steering group on invasive species has been formed. The group hopes to have legislation in place within the next two years to help stop the importation and spread of invasive species. IFI discussed their concern that the National Parks & Wildlife Service (NPWS) have only two staff members dedicated to working on invasive species. IFI are aware of their own need to assign more staff to deal with the issue.

IFPAC queried if legislation would be introduced in relation to the protection of individual water bodies. IFI advised that there may be a requirement for bespoke legislation, but it is only ever a deterrent. IPS advised they would support any legislation that aims to protect pristine waters. They referenced the slaughter of pike on the Western Lakes and how it also needs individual consideration as there is no deterrent or enforcement of fines.

DECC discussed the new inland fisheries legislation being drafted and how it aims to deal with issue of invasive species.

Co-Chair (ACI) discussed the ease at which a boat may be moved from Germany to Ireland. These boats should be prevented from importation unless properly certified and disinfected.

Co-Chair (DECC) advised there is a commitment in the draft policy paper 'Policy and Regulatory Context for Inland Fisheries' to review all bye-laws in force for more than 10 years. ACCI are in a privileged position to review the draft policy papers and have an opportunity to submit observations before they go to public consultation.

Action Point:

IFI to discuss the possibility of providing a dedicated staff member to liaise with DECC on legislation matters.

Agenda Item 5 – Finance Sub-group

In the absence of SSTRAI (who chair the Finance Sub-group) it was decided to carry this item over to the next ACCI meeting.

Agenda Item 6 – AOB

Maritime Area Regulatory Authority (MARA)

Co-Chair (DECC) confirmed that the board of MARA will have 12 members comprising of three government departments – Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications, the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage and the Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform. The chair of MARA is the former chief of staff of the Defence Forces – Mr Mark Mellett. Establishment day has not yet been confirmed. The CEO recruitment process has concluded, and an announcement will be made shortly.

EFSA queried why no angling organisation was asked to make a submission on the Marine Protected Areas (MPA) Bill 2023. Co-Chair (DECC) advised that the onus is with each organisation to make a submission. EFSA advised that the bill needs serious consideration by ACCI as there is a huge emphasis on Highly Protected Marine Areas (HPMAs). Co-Chair (DECC) advised that the MPA bill is a separate issue to MARA. EFSA was of the understanding that MARA would be responsible for these areas. Co-Chair (DECC) confirmed that NPWS are responsible for MPAs.

IFI briefly discussed MPAs. IFI provide datasets to assist with protecting and preserving angling areas. IFI are aware of the need to put more resources into marine angling. Co-Chair (DECC) advised that there will be further opportunity for EFSA to get involved in the MPA legislative and designation processes. EFSA advised of an issue when trying to submit a catch report online. EFSA to provide IFI with details of the website error.

Action point:

EFSA to provide IFI with details of website error and IFI to follow up.

Tuna CHART

Tuna CHART to begin 1 July 2023. Training and updates will be provided in advance. Up to 25 professional angling charter vessels will be licenced by DECC. A discussion took place on the importance of the Tuna CHART program to the sea angling industry. IFI confirmed that additional funding will be required via the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF) to cover the costs of coastal protection.

EFSA have expressed interest in running a European game championship in 2025/2026. IFI advised they will need to be notified if the competition is taking place as the control aspect for catch and release would require a lot of planning. IFI confirmed the catch per unit effort in Ireland is remarkable. DECC advised that the competition could be run on a catch and release basis but even a low-level mortality rate would be detrimental to adherence of the rules of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) and puts catch and release fisheries at risk.

ACCI Positions

Co-Chair (DECC) discussed the ACCI Terms of Reference. Co-Chair (ACI) and Vice Chair (IFSA) have been in place for 2 years. Co-Chair (DECC) discussed the possibility of amending the Terms of Reference to allow Co-Chair (DECC) to remain as the sole chair of ACCI, removing the requirement for rotating Chairs and Vice-Chairs. Co-Chair (DECC) believes this would leave it easier for each angling body to represent their own interests. IFI, ACI and FISSTA agreed with the proposal. IPS consider it a good idea and will discuss it with their members. Co-Chair (DECC) thanked Co-Chair (ACI) for their contribution.

2023 Work Plan

Written update to be provided.

Further AOB

IPS discussed the document 'Issues Relating to the WLMP and Stock (Pike) Management'. They confirmed that they also attended a meeting with IFI in advance of ACCI.

EFSA advised that coastal protection works are hindering access to beaches. EFSA also have issues accessing harbours and piers. There are many restrictions in place that are affecting sea angling competitions.

DECC thanked departing Co-Secretary, Mary Breslin. A replacement will start shortly.

EFSA confirmed the Cork small boats competition has been cancelled this year due to a lack of accommodation.

Action Point:

DECC to arrange for a representative from the Local Government sector to attend a future meeting to discuss access and other issues.

Agenda Item 7 – Date of next meeting

9 May 2023, 2pm – IFI, Citywest