

# **Angling Consultative Council Ireland (ACCI)**

## **Minutes of Meeting – 01.06.2023**

### **IFI Headquarters, Citywest, Dublin 24 & Remotely via Zoom**

#### **Attendees:**

Philip Nugent (DECC, Chair), Martin McEnroe (ACI), Bob Seward (SSTRAI), Fergal Bell (IFPAC), Warren Doyle (EFSA), Noel Carr (FISSTA), Denis Maher (DECC), Barry Fulham (DECC), Dr Cathal Gallagher (IFI), Barry Fox (IFI), Suzanne Campion (DHLGH).

#### **Apologies:**

Francis O'Donnell (IFI), Eithne Brown (Co-Secretary, DECC), Paul Byrne (IPS)

#### **Agenda Item 1 - Minutes of previous meeting**

The minutes of the previous meeting held 9 May 2023 were agreed and adopted.

#### **Agenda Item 2 – NASCO**

DECC confirmed their attendance at a meeting with NASCO Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and Salmon Watch Ireland on Monday 29 May 2023.

The group explored the position they will adopt within the EU delegation at NASCO. This position is to encourage the progression and acknowledge the efforts made by Greenland where there is two-year deal in place, subject to review. The reporting and monitoring this year by Greenlandic authorities is good. There have been no issues with quota numbers as had been in previous years. Salmon Watch Ireland discussed the important point that the Greenland Fishery is essentially a subsistence fishery. The NGOs confirmed they would agree on an arrangement with the Greenlandic authorities.

Ireland's Implementation Plan and Annual Progress Reports were discussed. DECC confirmed the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) have been invited to attend the Special Session at NASCO, remotely, to answer questions relating to aquaculture. DECC advised that it was important that the NGOs in attendance at NASCO asked the right questions. DECC may update on the development of the Maritime Area Regulatory Authority (MARA) and the ongoing Judicial Review of a licence for a fish farm in Bantry Bay.

DECC advised the issue of pink salmon will be raised at NASCO. Small quantities have been discovered in Ireland, UK, Germany, France and other more southerly European countries. The largest concentration is in Nordic regions where it was introduced by Russia in the 1960s and 1970s as a commercial opportunity. Pink salmon have a two-year cycle of migration. In 2019 Finnish scientific surveys estimated approximately 5000 pink salmon in the Tana River. The next two-year cycle, in 2021, estimated 50,000 pink salmon. The quantity of pink salmon in Irish waters will likely increase over the next number of years. IFI will lead discussions on a European wide pink salmon eDNA project to investigate their abundance.

IFI advised the issue of pink salmon was raised at NASCO by Norway where they are being found in all catchment areas. To enable the extraction of pink salmon, Norway has begun introducing barriers to all migrating salmon and have developed Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology to automate fish traps. IFI confirmed that the EU support funding of an eDNA project which will be used to detect the presence of pink salmon in catchments. IFI is leading the European-wide Monitoring Network which uses water sampling for detection of pink salmon. At a recent meeting, arrangements were finalised for the monitoring programme. If samples of pink salmon are detected, they will be removed from catchments to avoid establishment. The impacts of pink salmon on Atlantic salmon are not yet fully understood. IFI will lead a monitoring programme within the EU with anticipated funding from the European Commission (EC).

DECC advised that some groups, within the NASCO community, see the potential of pink salmon as a commercial alternative to Atlantic salmon. DECC confirmed that Ireland's position within the EU delegation at NASCO is that pink salmon are an invasive species and not a substitute for commercial fishing. DECC confirmed that in new legislation being drafted, salmon will be defined as all species of salmon. It is proposed that if an angler catches a pink salmon, it should be tagged and reported to IFI which will give an indication of their abundance in Irish waters. This tag will be replaced.

FISSTA wanted it acknowledged that private buyouts, facilitated by the Atlantic Salmon Federation and the North Atlantic Salmon Fund to protect feeding grounds, are one of the reasons salmon continue to return to Ireland. FISSTA believes their success is due to private agreements being completed in a business-like manner. Government and NASCO parties must ensure fishermen get proper compensation. FISSTA intends to comment on the issue of pink salmon following NASCO.

DECC confirmed FISSTA were referencing the Faroes where the majority of Europe's stock complex migrate. There are also an increasing number migrating to Greenland. There has been no commercial fishing at the Faroes for some years and this agreement is still in place. DECC advised it is an important issue, and the NGOs will raise it at NASCO. FISSTA asserted that there is a denial that the private agreements are having any effect and this thinking needs to change.

ACI referenced the new legislation being drafted by DECC and queried when they would see the draft bill. DECC confirmed that there are approximately 150+ draft Heads. Approximately 110 Heads have been completed. DECC intend to have the draft bill completed by the mid-2024. Once the legislative process has been adhered to, there will be a public consultation. ACI advised it will be important for ACCI to have input into any amendments or additions. Chair confirmed that the legislative process provides for a public consultation.

SSTRAI queried DECC's view on the 46 recommendations in the Third NASCO Performance Review. DECC believes the direction of NASCO needs to change and introgression is the biggest problem globally. NASCO needs to focus its attention on the loss of genetic integrity from escapes. IFI advised there will be a stronger focus on climate change at NASCO 2023. IFI advised that, while there is no appetite to change the original agreement, there needs to be recognition of the good work being done at NASCO. IFI advised that some of the 46 recommendations relate to the roles of individual jurisdictions rather than the role of NASCO. IFI advised NGOs to consider their inputs for the Forth NASCO Performance Review.

SSTRAI queried if NASCO is fit for purpose as the original goals are outdated and need to be modernised. DECC advised that when the original convention was written some of the impacts seen today were not in contemplation. SSTRAI advised that there are a lot of issues that could be resolved easily, including aquaculture, tagging and the sterilisation of farmed salmon but there does not seem to be any willingness to resolve them. IFI advised that, while the Williamsburg Resolution hasn't changed, the guidelines and goals have been updated. Sea lice goals and resolutions have been updated and it is now agreed that aquaculture should have no impact on wild salmonids and there should be 100% containment.

DECC agreed that NASCO is resolution based and aspirational, but parties are unlikely to agree that there will be enforcement via NASCO. SSTRAI advised that the work done at

NASCO in identifying issues is good but there is no implementation of the recommendations. DECC advised these issues should be raised by individual jurisdictions at the special session.

Chair wished the best to all attending NASCO.

### **Agenda Item 3 – Draft Policy Paper – Sea Angling**

DECC advised the draft policy paper describes what DECC and IFI consider deficits in the regulation and management of sea angling, particularly around the reporting of recreational catches. Apart from tuna the only species of fish regulated in the marine area is sea bass. The EU intend to introduce a licencing and recording regime for catches within the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP). The EU intends to licence all recreational angling. DECC believe sea angling should have the same focus and attention as other forms of angling and discussed some of the proposals in the draft policy paper.

SSTRAI welcomed the inclusion in the paper that charter skippers need funding as they put huge investment into bringing boats up to standard. SSTRAI queried if IFI would get funding for data gathering and research. DECC confirmed they have bid for a share of the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF) and are hopefully of securing funding of €500,000, a portion of which would be for IFI data reporting. IFI committed to data collection for the National Plan, this has been accepted by the EU but there are areas of data reporting devoid of funding e.g., eel. DECC confirmed the bid was submitted via DAFM as the overall authority of the EMFAF.

EFSA commented on some issues it believes should be included in the draft policy paper. Due to the use of angling charter vessels for the Tuna CHART programme there are less such vessels available and they are not a viable option for anglers and clubs due to high costs. From July to November there are practically no charter boats available on the west coast. EFSA asserted that socio-economic profiles of anglers should be included in the draft policy paper.

EFSA discussed the lack of access to beaches and the documentation required for angling competitions. EFSA advised beach protection programmes are also blocking access to beaches for anglers. EFSA believe that two thirds of beaches will soon be inaccessible to anglers unless local authorities are required to make access for angling. DECC confirmed the draft policy paper includes liaison with Local Authorities, possibly through the CCMA, to

discuss access for angling. SSTRAI agreed that the issue of access needs to be dealt with further in the draft policy paper. SSTRAI advised they have completed several of the documents required by local authorities for holding events and suggested working with EFSA to create templates.

EFSA believe that, due to their dwindling numbers, the conger eel should be included in the conservation of eel regulation. DECC advised the conger eel cannot be included in the EU *Anguilla anguilla* regulation as it applies only to that species. DECC can discuss the exploitation of conger eels on a commercial basis with DAFM. IFI advised any discussion with DAFM should be evidence-based. If there are specific areas where conger eels are in decline, they could be protected from an Marine Protected Area (MPA) prospective. IFPAC queried who was exploiting the conger eel. EFSA advised they are being longlined for the French market.

EFSA advised that there is an assertion in the paper that big game fishing means fish are being killed, but EFSA confirmed it can be undertaken on a catch and release basis. DECC and IFI advised catch and release is what is envisaged by Sport Angling. DECC advised their concern is that if DAFM secure a quota for BFT, DECC would be excluded from any share of same and DECC require a small share as a contingency in case of a mortality.

SSTRAI welcomed the draft policy paper and the inclusion of comments and observations of ACCI. SSTRAI is concerned that any new regulations will negatively impact anglers. SSTRAI believe most anglers and organisations are conservation minded and promote catch and release.

**Action Point:** Chair to consider inviting representative of CCMA to attend at a future ACCI meeting.

EFSA briefly discussed deep dredge trawling and the practices used in the Faroes and Iceland. DECC advised these are policies that could be discussed in consultation with DAFM. DECC welcomed any information on deep dredge trawling policies.

DECC advised they would appreciate feedback on the draft policy paper.

**Action Point:** Chair requested any comments to be returned by c.o.b 16 June 2023

## Agenda Item 4 – AOB

FISSTA queried the progress of the Western Lakes Management Plan. IFI provided an update, confirming that it will go back out to Public Consultation in August. The next step is the environmental statutory consultation which should be completed in the Autumn. The previous consultation has been published online.

EFSA queried if Minister Ryan would attend a meeting of ACCI. Chair advised that as Minister Ryan has two busy portfolios, it would be unlikely that he would attend a meeting of ACCI.

**Action Point:** Chair confirmed DECC will ask Paul Kenny, Minister Ryan's advisor to attend an ACCI meeting.

## Agenda Item 5 – Date of next meeting

4 July 2023 – IFI, Citywest