

DARD/AFBI Inshore Fisheries Strategy Project Steering Group

AFBI HQ, Newforge Lane 7th November 2012

Present: - **Dr Matt Service** **AFBI (Chair)**
Dr Carrie McMinn **AFBI**
Dr Lynn Gilmore **Seafish**
Dick James **NIFPO**
Marguerite Tarzia **Marine Task Force**
Peter Archdale **JNCC**
Ian Humes **DARD**
Ronnie McBride **DARD**
Chris Weir **DARD**

Apologies:- Jade Berman

Welcome

Matt welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Matters Arising from Minutes of Last Meeting;

- Sea Angling – the Survey was now live.
- Cockle Report – A new cockle report was available that indicated a similar pattern to the 2011 survey in terms of the tonnage of cockles still decreasing.
- Pot fishing – previous concerns on funding for lobster v-notching had been resolved as funding had been secured for a further 2 years by NELCO.

Project Progress Report

Carrie's presentation included a powerpoint presentation. The following points were made in conjunction with the presentation;

- Pot fishing – Around 200 lobsters had been tagged to date.
- Scallops – 32 tows carried out in April 2012 cruise, across historical and north coast sites. All but 3 sites had scallops present.
- Belfast Lough Cockle Fishery – survey carried out in May-July 2012 found further decrease in cockles, with very few juveniles or recruitment. Decline most severe in shallower areas of water. Possible explanations – more rainfall in shallower beds result in more freshwater; predation from birds; bait digging; harsh winter weather; or parasites/disease. Matt advised that recruitment is unpredictable.
- Sea Angling – 100 or so responses have been received so far.. Feedback had been quite enthusiastic, with many offering to help in publicising the survey. It was noted that many sea anglers felt the survey was overdue and welcomed the chance to express their opinion.

Comments arising.

- Peter noted that there were no responses from sea anglers in the Lough Foyle area. Carrie advised there was one respondent from the area but did not indicate a preference for fishing in their local area.
- Early respondents suggested that those who aren't affiliated with an angling club get 'left out'.
- Dick asked how the survey was being advertised. Carrie indicated it was being publicised through posters, weblinks, tackle shops, offices and word of mouth. Peter reported that anglers felt ignored as a sector and that the survey was positive step in rectifying this. This view had been endorsed by a number of respondents who previously felt excluded as stakeholders as they were not affiliated to an angling organisation.
- Marguerite Tarzia suggested that a follow-up survey may be beneficial. Carrie indicated that around 15-20 respondents had provided contact details. Ian Humes suggested it may be worth gaining more contact details as this may be a useful resource.
- Marguerite asked if the survey had been advertised in the South of Ireland. Carrie responded that it could be advertised by Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI) and that she would investigate this. After Ronnie expressed concern about southern responses perhaps skewing results, Carrie re-assured by stating that respondents had to indicate how much time they had spent angling in NI in the past 12 months.
- Matt suggested it may be worthwhile staging an event to present the results of the survey to stakeholders.
- Ian suggested that either licensing or a voluntary register could be considered, together with an 'app' for anglers to provide details of their activities. This information could be stored centrally to provide regular data on sea angling
- Peter suggested that the survey report may provide support and evidence to assist angling organisations secure developmental funding for sea angling projects, as it would appear the survey will identify some development needs.
- Ian suggested that sea angling could provide alternative income opportunities for fishing dependent communities, through diversification, if part of an overall strategy for these areas.
- Carrie agreed to consider revising the current request for contact details in the survey.

Draft Strategy

Ian recorded his appreciation of the draft document, specifically the work done on individual fisheries and recognised that it was a good step in working towards securing stakeholder support. However, the need for a shorter, more strategically-focused document was emphasised. It was suggested that this could be produced to allow for consultation by the end of February.

Ian also suggested that, while the document mentioned the different management regimes across the UK, the report should mention whether these regimes are working and which would be the 'best fit' for Northern Ireland. There was also a need to advise on where the various stakeholder organisations fit into the structure. Ian also stressed the need of measurement before management – a number of data gaps existed with regard to effort, stocks and landings and the report should have a

clear emphasis on plugging these data gaps. It was also important to emphasise the need to involve stakeholders as 'co-managers'.

Comments arising;

Dick suggested that the data gaps were not as wide as before. Recent work had yielded surprising information about the value of the inshore sector and suggested that fishermen were accepting that fisheries needed management and regulation in parts. Lynn suggested that the industry was open to the possibility of having different, smaller inshore management groups with one over-arching management body.

Peter stressed the need to recognise government's pledge to develop local provenance and sustainable management. After some debate industry representatives remained of the opinion that the fleet was, generally, maximising much of the value of their catch through exporting, but the strategy should consider the points made by Peter.

Matt Service suggested that most product caught here will always be exported. This was supported by Ian who indicated that the top 3 species consumed in NI were normally imported, though Lynn believed this practice was changing, with restaurants making more efforts to use the local catch. Dick advised that consumers like convenience and would generally buy imported coldwater prawns at markets as they were generally less expensive than, for example, locally-caught *palaemon*, which tend to be exported to Spain. It was suggested, though not agreed, that market would look after itself.

Lynn indicated that the industry was upset that inshore fishing was being promoted whilst at the same time, the industry was losing a considerable area of Strangford Lough for fishing opportunities. The industry had concerns that we may be marketing something we don't necessarily have in terms of quantities and continuation of supply. Dick suggested it would be good to have a thumbnail in the report of how the market and its processes work. Matt suggested that this could possibly be done by a research assistant / MSc student

In concluding discussions, Matt proposed that information in the report on individual fisheries could be available as stand-alone documents, whilst also retaining the larger document as presented (for detail) plus a shorter strategic version for consultation. Peter recorded that the report needed to reflect clearly the government strategy overall and that the consultation should acknowledge the direction set out by government.

Ian stressed that fishermen have an important role to play. Dick commented that the industry is looking forward to meaningful partnership with government, as fishermen cannot deliver a sustainable strategy in isolation. The panel agreed that industry needed something tangible in the short term, as Lynn believed that, at present, there was a 'us and them' attitude. If fishermen were given some control they would be more encouraged to self-regulate. Ian identified some issues with this in terms of effort control, minimum landing sizes, pot/boat limits.

An emphasis was placed on the need for some 'early winners' from the strategy. Dick suggested proper tagging and marking of pots or the rolling out of technological reporting and mapping systems as examples.

In terms of enforcement Ian advised that DARD cannot be omnipresent. While DARD appreciates that the landings of white or berried crabs is a problem but would, in the main, be unenforceable. Carrie disputed this, saying that greater DARD presence could act as an effective visual deterrent. Dick suggested that enforcement may be most effective at the quayside.

Way forward

A shorter, draft document should be produced and circulated by Friday 7th December, with committee responses provided by the 14th December. The aim was to have a final, agreed document by early February. The panel agree that the strict deadlines will help maintain stakeholder interest and engagement.

AOB

Peter Archdale recommended that the SALSEA report is looked at in the context of fisheries management, describing it as an important piece of research and one which may be worth factoring into the inshore strategy. Peter also suggested that the information in the strategy may in future be useful for councils with the RPA.

Lynn recorded her agreement with the concept of having a set of standalone documents for each fishery being very useful.

The group unanimously wished to record its satisfaction with the enthusiastic response to the sea angling survey to date.

Date of next meeting

Tuesday 15th January 2013.