

Note of England Aquaculture Consultation Group (EACG) meeting held at The Wesley Hotel, Tuesday 29 July 2014

There is an EACG web page:

<http://www.seafish.org/industry-support/aquaculture/aquaculture-groups/england-aquaculture-consultation-group>

1. Welcome, introductions and apologies

Tom Pickerell welcomed everyone to the meeting. There was a discussion about the EACG at the Aquaculture Common Issues Group (ACIG) meeting in April and it was agreed that Seafish would re-convene the group. This meeting today is the outcome. Tom emphasised that Seafish is committed to this and hoped the group could build on what has happened before and move forward.

Attendees

David Bassett	BTA
Helen Duggan	Seafish
James Turner	Defra
John Holmyard	Offshore Shellfish
Karen Green	Seafish
Neil Auchterlonie	Cefas
Piers Hart	WWF
Sarah Horsfall	SAGB
Stacey Clarke	MMO
Tom Pickerell	Seafish

Apologies

David Jarrad	SAGB
Keith Jeffery	Cefas

2. Review of previous work

The group was originally formed to develop an aquaculture strategy for England and to act as some sort of a hub. The last real activity was a workshop at Fishmongers' Hall in September 2012, following the Defra-facilitated consultation. This was a very positive meeting (45 attendees) but very little has been taken forward. Possibly too much onus was placed on Defra and for various reasons agreed actions have not moved on and the responses were not published on the Defra website.

The identified priorities (November 2012) were:

- Establish ownership – who is leading on this? Think it has to be Defra.
- Establish contact with everyone who contributed to the consultation – maintain a database of interested parties.
- Establish an industry advisory stakeholder group. This will be the delivery group. Linked to Multi Annual Plans. Need to identify people to take part.
- Provide a forum for representative organisations to come together.

- Identify priorities, potential funding streams, timelines and who is going to lead on each area.
- Need for a central information base/portal - including research projects, institutions, people, papers, industry data. Poss EFF funding. Consider following SARF structure.
- Mirror strategic goals of the Commission (guidance/multi-annual plans)

Regulation

- Mapping exercise on regulatory burden – Cefas report to be made available by the end of Dec 2012.
- Consider benchmarking guidelines. Poss EFF funding. By end of March 2013.
- Generic Defra (or other) web portal re aquaculture regulations. By end of March 2013.
- Facility to share best practice. By end of March 2013.

Science

- Science portal for access to research.
- Better understanding of existing research (availability to industry).
- Key issues: water quality, How to identify sites, Identification, monitoring and mitigation of impacts, development of wind farms, sustainable feeds, species selection, selective breeding,
- Technology transfer – dovetail with current knowledge transfer programmes.
- Project identification – how the chain works, how to tap into post-graduate research.

Markets

- Industry to develop a relationship with processors/retailers (what do they need from industry). Could use Aquaculture Common Issues Group.
- There is no need to differentiate farmed and wild caught seafood we should consider how to market English seafood (including farmed) rather than English farmed seafood.

Discussion

- This is a disparate group due to the nature of the aquaculture industry – different parts of the industry have different concerns.
- English aquaculture is not really recognised as a viable sector.
- There was no one clear first step - crux was that an industry advisory group was not formed
- Now we have a Multi-Annual National Plan (MANP) it is possible to see how the draft plan for England could fit with that.
- It would be very useful to have this group recognised.

3. Seafish Aquaculture Review

The Seafish aquaculture review is due to be published shortly. The draft version notes that Seafish should focus on the development of the domestic sector through supporting national strategies. Imported farmed seafood is served by the regulation team. Seafish has a vacancy for an aquaculture manager and will shortly be advertising for a Domestic Aquaculture Strategy Manager.

4. Regulatory burden

The Cefas regulatory burden report was discussed. Cefas has been commissioned to look at this again and prepare a more digestible version. This is likely to be available in early 2015. Defra is also looking into information for regulators and new starters.

5. Scottish Aquaculture Research Fund (SARF)

The SARF model was discussed with a view to establishing a similar model in England. Questions were raised about how much contribution Government was likely to put in and how the potential funding pot in England would compare with Scotland. It was also mentioned that there was no reason that English projects couldn't go through SARF as long as Scotland would benefit.

6. Producer Organisations (POs) and Inter Branch Organisations (IBOs)

The new CFP makes provision for the development of Producer Organisations (POs) and Inter Branch Organisations (IBOs) and a funding stream under EMFF to support this. EMFF comes on stream in January 2015 (but there could be interim funding available from the current EFF). There was some discussion on how the EACG could develop in line with this.

Discussion

- The group would need to look at the legal parameters for setting up a PO. An aquaculture PO would operate in a different way to a PO for the wild caught sector.
- There are specific requirements on a PO. It would not be possible to have a PO for English aquaculture, but BTA and SAGB both have the potential to become POs, but it would be quite a challenge, especially for SAGB. This would create POs for trout and shellfish. Subsequent POs could be created for salmon and algae. The BTA and the SAGB would need a 60% commitment from members in order to be able to proceed.
- The POs would feed into a new English Aquaculture IBO with the EACG potentially becoming the IBO with funding and a paid secretariat with the remit: to be an information hub; to offer marketing support; to be an advisor to Defra; to be a lobbying group.
- The relationship of this group with Defra would need to be clearly defined. The aim was for this group to help Defra achieve its management objectives in line with the MANP.
- The new Seafish aquaculture post-holder (once in post/likely to be the end of the year) could lead on developing the strategy. This would include:
 - Aligning the draft English Aquaculture Plan (EAP) with the MANP.
 - Revising the draft EAP in line with the responses received in the consultation exercise.
 - Looking at the current composition of the EACG.
 - Looking at how to establish a PO, and an IBO.
 - Supporting BTA and SAGB on the progression to becoming POs.
 - Determining the most effective way of establishing an IBO lead.
 - Stakeholder mapping/gap analysis.
 - Linking with relevant NGOs and other interested parties including IFCAs, Natural England, Environment Agency, Crown Estate, and academia).

7. The way forward

It was agreed:

- 7.1 Seafish to circulate draft notes on this meeting, a copy of the final draft plan, the Defra consultation, the responses to the consultation and the Multi-Annual National Plan for aquaculture.
- 7.2 Seafish would continue funding any further meetings of the EACG and the group need to maintain correspondence.

- 7.3 Seafish to write to the Minister requesting formal recognition of the EACG. The group to take advice from Defra on the most appropriate way to do this.
- 7.4 Defra to update its table showing its 'virtual aquaculture team'. An old version was provided.
- 7.3 The BTA and the SAGB have both committed to investigate progression to a PO.
- 7.4 Seafish has committed to recruiting a new aquaculture person and developing a strategy based on the above.
- 7.5 A short agenda item will be included at the ACIG meeting on 23 September and EACG members to have an informal get together on the day.

There were thanks to Seafish for taking this forward. All participants thought this was a positive outcome.