

Minutes of Seafish Northern Ireland Advisory Committee

Held on Wednesday 5 October 2022 at the Slieve Donard Hotel, Newcastle

Attendees

- Members:** Harry Wick, Northern Ireland Fish Producers' Organisation (Chair)
Colin Taggart, R Seafood
Billy Hunter, Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute
Mathieu Lundy, Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute
Ewan Hunter, Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute
Simon Cummings, Kilkeel Seafoods
Rosemary Johnston, Kilkeel Seafoods
Ben Collier, Northern Ireland Gear Trials
Fiona Taylor, Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs
Ronnie McBride, Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs
Rod Cappell, Aquaculture Representative Group
Andrew Rooney, Rooney Fish
Colin Adamson, Young's Seafood
Ingrid Perry, Fishermen's Mission
Lesley Hammond, Fishermen's Mission
- Seafish:** Lynn Gilmore, Director of Communications and Engagement
Hannah Thompson, Head of International Trade & Regions (West)
Sally Chamberlain, Regional Manager – Northern Ireland
- Minutes:** Phillip Quirie, Project Co-ordinator and Administrator

1 Welcome and apologies

- 1.1 The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and conducted roundtable introductions.
- 1.2 Apologies were shared on behalf of Bob McCoubrey (Mourne Seafood), Paul Leeman (Northern Ireland Scallop Fishermen's Association), Alex McMullan (North Coast Lobster Fishermen's Association), Ian Kelly (Northern Ireland Fish Producers' Organisation), Carrie McMinn (Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute), Adam Holland (Northern Ireland Fishermen's Federation), Daniel Whittle (Kilkeel Seafoods), and Owen Lyttle (Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs).

2 Minutes of the previous meeting, held on 24 March 2022

- 2.1 The Chair invited feedback on the draft minutes. The minutes were approved as an accurate record of the meeting.

ACTION 01: Phillip will upload the approved minutes of the March 2022 meeting to the Seafish website.

3 **Actions from previous meeting**

- 3.1 Sally confirmed all actions had been completed with the exception of action four, and reported that Seafish Fishing Gear Innovation Manager, David Warwick, will be invited to a future meeting as part of a wider visit to fishing ports in Northern Ireland.

ACTION 02: Sally will invite David Warwick to a future meeting as part of a wider visit to fishing ports in Northern Ireland.

4 **Roundtable updates and horizons**

- 4.1 The Chair explained this was a chance to provide meaningful updates which may lead to opportunities and encourage interaction between members for mutual benefit.
- 4.2 The catching sector is experiencing difficulties with crewing due to changes in the Immigration and Borders Act – those workers using transit visas are no longer permitted to fish within 12 nautical miles, which is challenging in the Irish Sea due to proximity to Scotland, Isle of Man, and England. Government has delayed enforcement of this action for a few months and engagement with Westminster is ongoing.

ACTION 03: Sally will share Seafish impact assessments with SNIAC members when available.

- 4.3 Most processors are finding it difficult to recruit and retain processing operatives, which combined with a lack of fishing due to crewing challenges, is part of a wider labour problem in the industry. Dialogue has opened with the catching sector to explore linking the two and having “fishing families”, with the partners of potential fishers being employed in processing. There is a lack of local labour and the paperwork involved in recruiting foreign workers is challenging – added to difficulty engaging with the Home Office.
- 4.4 Processors are also experiencing a delay of product arriving from Scotland due to Brexit complications and the increase of energy and fuel prices.
- 4.5 Kilkeel Seafoods are participating in the Scottish *Nephrops* project, which looks to ensure quality standards across the supply chain. During recent audits of suppliers in Scotland and England, it was found that there’s a lack of resource in their technical and quality departments, and Kilkeel Seafoods are providing input to the creation of best practice and quality assurance guidelines.
- 4.6 Fishermen’s Mission reported that many of the migrant workers are expressing concerns over their job security.
- 4.7 DAERA reported that the Government are reviewing some of the future funding schemes. They shared that the [UK Seafood Fund](#), a £100m pan-UK fund to support the long-term future and sustainability of the UK fisheries and seafood sectors has four pillars of funding:
1. Science and innovation (£24m)
 2. Infrastructure (£65m)
 3. Skills and training (£10m)
 4. Exports support (£1m)

Ronnie asked anyone with a potential project for funding to contact him for further discussion and advice.

- 4.8 They told members that the summer ICES advice was released in June and the autumn advice is currently being drafted and is likely to affect *Nephrops*. AFBI also reported that the groundfish survey is underway for demersal species and the herring survey is complete – advice for which is being produced and will be

available in due course. The mixed fishery advice is being drafted and will be due for inclusion in the autumn ICES advice – this mixed fishery will be the first in the Irish Sea.

- 4.9 The Aquaculture Representative Group had its first meeting last month with Rod Cappell as new Chair and members identified water quality as the primary issue affecting the shellfish sector. The group is also engaging with DAERA to form new strategies (including marine planning, blue carbon, and Marine Protected Area strategies), and to establish clarity over licencing requirements. Rod also reported that an EMFF carbon footprint assessment of the NI aquaculture industry is underway. This forms part of the wider NI Aquaculture Support project facilitated by Seafish.
- 4.10 The Northern Ireland fishing gear trials continued with selectivity work between March and May. A future area of focus is likely to be on net zero blue carbon activity and end of life fishing gear.
- 4.11 AFBI told members that they are involved in blue carbon work supporting the DAERA carbon action plan. They are also involved in oceanographic monitoring and water quality assessment in the Irish Sea and are looking for any anecdotal information about changes in fishing due to the effect of the summer heat wave on sea temperatures.

5 Sourcing the seafood workforce

- 5.1 Harry gave a presentation outlining how seafood employers can obtain skilled worker visas for foreign workers. A skilled worker visa is essentially a UK work permit for foreign workers to reside and work in the UK with their spouse and any children under the age of 18. Harry outlined the costs involved for employers and explained the process and requirements of obtaining a sponsor licence via the Home Office and subsequently sponsoring an employee. The visa covers a wide range of roles in catching and processing, but a key challenge is demonstrating Level B1 English proficiency of prospective foreign employees not from predominantly English-speaking countries. Further to that, it's become apparent that finding suitable and local accommodation for foreign workers and their families is an issue in Northern Ireland and the wider UK.
- 5.2 Costs involved: A crew member salary must be £25,600 if aged 26 or older, or £20,480 if under 26. A licence application will cost a small company £536. Each certificate of sponsorship issued is £199, and small sponsors must pay an 'immigration skills charge' of £363 per year of sponsorship per applicant. The applicant will pay circa £610 per person for a visa up to 3 years in duration and £1,220 for more than 3 years. An immigration health charge which is £624 per year per applicant is also payable. A skilled worker must also have funds of at least £1,270 when they apply or alternatively the sponsor can certify on the Certificate of Sponsorship that, if necessary, they will maintain and accommodate the applicant up to the end of the first month of employment to an amount of at least £1,270. Once the certificate is awarded, the worker can move between sponsored businesses.
- 5.3 During a recent visit to Belize there was notable willingness and availability of workers in catching and processing roles to come to the UK to work in the seafood industry. The process to get these workers into post is now underway.
- 5.4 Harry emphasised the importance of getting the application right the first time, as poorly framed submissions can cause delay – anyone interested in discussing in further detail can contact Harry individually. Harry also said he has asked Seafish to facilitate the processing sector to collectively put together their case to the Migration Advisory Committee at the Home Office to have seafood processors listed as a skilled occupation. This will reduce the minimum required salary required to circa £20,500 from £26,000. Any processors interesting in assisting Seafish and participating in the process can contact Sally.

ACTION 04: SNIAC members will contact Sally if they are interested in Seafish looking at the potential to pull together a case to have seafood processing operatives listed as skilled occupations.

6 DAERA update on policy and funding

6.1 Fiona gave a brief update of recent activity in the fisheries policy team:

- DAERA have engaged with DEFRA and Border Force and continue their efforts to engage with the Home Office on the issues of crew being faced by NI industry– the Minister has written to the Home Office Secretary of State to open discussions about transit visas.
- ICES released advice indicating spurdog stocks are available in the North-East Atlantic and a total allowable catch of 17,000 tonnes will be made available. DAERA will discuss with industry and AFBI to determine how best to manage it.
- The Joint Fisheries Statement is due to be published on 21 November 2022.
- The Minister will receive a paper summarising the responses to the recent Inshore Vessel Monitoring System for the under 12 metre fleet. The intention is to implement the IVMS in 2023.
- The Minister recently approved the response to the recent consultation on soft shell crab, and new regulations are planned for implementation in early November.
- A paper on fishing restrictions in Marine Protected Areas and scallop enhancement sites is with the Minister, with the intention for restrictions to come into law this month.
- DAERA are committed to the inshore Fisheries Management Plan and encourage all relevant stakeholders to involve themselves in its development.

6.2 Ronnie gave an update from the fisheries funding team:

- 2022-23 MFF funding is still available for improvement projects – these need to be completed by the end of March 2023 and Ronnie encouraged anyone with project ideas to get in touch.
- A new five-year strategy for the future funding of marine and fisheries has been drafted, with the aim of obtaining Ministerial approval to launch a consultation on the proposal. The new strategy is far-reaching in a number of ways:
 - There is no set EU regulation advising what type of proposals can or cannot be supported.
 - It attempts to combine all funding within one strategy, with a wider range of marine/maritime interests and stakeholders included.
 - It offers a new approach – a move towards an outcomes-based programme of support as opposed to an output-based funding arrangement.
 - It will look to address modernisation of the fleet including ageing vessels and automation onboard vessels, as well as crewing and employment, processing capacity, facilities, career development, and operational costs.
 - There are opportunities for the fishing industry through the potential of “green growth” funding and contributing to the net zero ambition.
- Presently, there are six pillars under which funding will be offered in the new strategy:
 1. Industry viability and investment
 2. Green growth and climate action
 3. Economic, environmental, and stock sustainability
 4. Innovative and time-bound opportunities
 5. Maritime community initiatives
 6. Data collection framework, fisheries, and programme management
- A consultation process and stakeholder events will take place over the coming months – Ronnie added that all input to the consultation will be useful.
- Applications for the UK Seafood Fund open next year and Ronnie encouraged any businesses to contact him individually before submitting applications and he'll support the application and ensure requirements are met, reducing the risk of an insufficient application.

7 AFBI update on blue carbon work

- 7.1 Billy provided an update on the work AFBI have been doing focusing on blue carbon in the marine environment (Attachment: *01 AFBI Blue Carbon Work*). The seabed analysis carried out in the Irish Sea to date is inadequate for identifying stored carbon, so the main work activity initially involves mapping the marine substrata and analysing the seabed in the Irish Sea to establish what carbon exists. The primary food source for marine bottom feeders is phytodetritus – an organic particulate matter resulting from phytoplankton and other organic material, and it's considered to be a key carbon store. The work AFBI are undertaking is looking to assess the quantity and quality of the stored carbon and examine the impact of bottom trawling on stored carbon - initial results from two sample sites in the Irish Sea are encouraging.

8 Seafish Executive and Northern Ireland work update

- 8.1 Lynn presented an overview of pan-UK Seafish work that is of relevance to the Northern Ireland industry and the committee (Attachment: *02 Seafish Exec Update October 2022*), outlining all Annual Plan 2022-23 work delivered to date, an update on Seafish strategic review, and how the strategic review fed directly into the Seafish Corporate Plan for 2023-28. Further information on the strategic review can be found here: <https://www.seafish.org/about-us/governance-and-performance/strategic-review-of-seafish-in-2021/>. The Corporate Plan will focus on seven priority areas identified during the strategic review:

- A safe and skilled workforce
- Reputation
- Supply chain issues
- Climate change
- International trade
- Insight and innovation
- Fisheries management

Once the Board has approved the final Corporate Plan, the Chair will then seek approval from each of the four Ministers with the aim of formally launching the 2023-28 plan by April.

- 8.2 Sally provided an update on the Seafish work programme in Northern Ireland (Attachment: *03 SNIAC Update October 2022*). A summary of progress was given on the following projects:

- NI aquaculture support – Rod Cappell appointed as Chair, and an aquaculture carbon footprint assessment underway and an aquaculture seminar being scoped.
- Ongoing engagement with numerous fisheries groups and committees.
- Marketing Seafood Through Education (MaSTE) – MaSTErclasses underway for college students between October and December.
- Man overboard awareness training will be held in Cork in January and February 2023 and the Northern Ireland Fishermen's Safety Forum will meet tomorrow in-person for the first time in three years (meetings were held virtually in the interim).
- NI Seafood Trails – 15,000 maps were circulated, and the launch included a press release. The trails feature on the Food NI and Discover NI websites. Phase 2 involves an MFF application to fund the creation of new trails.

9 Northern Ireland gear trials update

- 9.1 Ben gave an update on recent fishing gear selectivity trials since the last meeting. The overall aim of the project was to reduce unwanted bycatch in *Nephrops* trawls. In total, 25 individual gear trials have taken place, testing a variety of devices suggested by fishers, including coverless trawls. Since 2020; results have shown an 11% reduction in whiting bycatch. The mesh size modifications implemented for the trials held in May yielded inconsistent results, and scientists advised that subsequent trials should be longer-term and involve more vessels in order to further assess consistency. Ben explained that bycatch reduction is no

longer the only aim of the trials and the work is widening to assess the impact on fuel emissions and the impacts on blue carbon habitats.

- 9.2 Ben also reported that there are project plans with Ulster University to trial contact sensors on trawl footrope alongside multibeam scanning to assess trawling impact on blue carbon habitat, with the aim of using one vessel from each producer organisation.

10 **International trade support**

- 10.1 Hannah delivered a brief presentation outlining the support available to UK companies to facilitate seafood exports (Attachment: *04 Seafish International Trade Support*). The Seafish Regulation team help to identify trade opportunities and challenges and understand the mechanics of seafood trade. The International Trade team works alongside the Regulation team and looks to support UK industry to access trade opportunities and help to promote UK seafood internationally.
- 10.2 Partnered with DEFRA and Department for International Trade, Seafish host a UK pavilion at Seafood Expo Global in Barcelona (2022), featuring a dedicated exhibitor zone, and chef demonstration kitchen, and a communal meeting lounge and reception area. Seafish will also host a communal meeting lounge at Seafood North America, Boston in March 2023. Companies wishing to use the facility in Boston or exhibit on the pavilion in Barcelona in April 2023 can contact Phillip Quirie (phillip.quirie@seafish.co.uk).
- 10.3 In collaboration with DEFRA and DIT, Seafish helped create an International Marketing Toolkit, containing materials overseas colleagues need to effectively market UK seafood in their respective areas. The kit contains a sales flyer, a short film, sales presentations and speaker notes, and translations into Chinese and Japanese. The toolkit is available for Northern Irish seafood exporters to use and further information can be found here: <https://www.seafish.org/promoting-seafood/promoting-uk-seafood-internationally/#international-marketing-toolkit>

11 **Any other business**

- 11.1 No other business was noted.

12 **Date of the next meeting, and agenda item suggestions**

- 12.1 The Chair reminded members that this committee and these meetings exist to benefit them and the wider seafood industry in Northern Ireland and asked that any suggestions for future agenda items be conveyed to Sally for consideration.
- 12.2 The Chair thanked everyone for their attendance and participation and asked Seafish to arrange the next meeting in March 2023.

ACTION 05: Phillip will arrange the next meeting in March 2023.

No.	Action List	Timeline (Status)	Owner
1.	Phillip will upload the approved minutes of the March 2022 meeting to the Seafish website.	November	Phillip
2.	Sally will invite David Warwick to a future SNIAC meeting to discuss the Seafish gear technology work as part of a wider visit to fishing ports in Northern Ireland.	When available	Sally
3.	Sally will share the foreign crew economic impact assessment with SNIAC members when the report is available.	When available	Sally
4.	SNIAC members will contact Sally if they are interested in Seafish looking at the potential to pull together a case to have seafood processing operatives listed as skilled occupations.	November	All
5.	Phillip will arrange the next meeting in March 2023	March	Phillip