

Aquaculture Leadership Group Meeting Minutes – 10 Feb 2021

In Attendance

James Fox Davies, Fowey Shellfish Co, ALG Chair (JFD)
Kim Cullen, SF2040 (KC)
Sara Catahan, Defra (SC)
Dr Stuart McLanaghan, Seafish (SMcL)
Martin Syvret, AquaSolutions (MS)
Dr Lewis Le Vay, Bangor University (LLV)
Benjamin Coppin, MMO (BC)
Michael Gubbins, CEFAS (MG)

Roger Covey, Natural England (RC)
Oliver Robinson, British Trout Association (OR)
Kelsey Thompson, Morecambe Bay Oysters (KT)
Abbey Coppin, MMO (AC)
John Holmyard, Offshore Shellfish (JH)
Ruth Allin, Defra (RA)
David Jarrad, Shellfish Association of GB (DJ)

Guests

Neil Auchterlonie, SF2040
Stacey Clarke, Defra

Robert Clarke, Association of IFCAs
Aoife Martin, Seafish

Apologies

Rebecca Redrup, Defra
Angela Mead, Biome

Dr Christopher Sweeting, MMO
Dr Stuart McLanaghan, Seafish

Meeting Minutes

Agenda #1

Welcome

Agenda #2

9 Dec 2020 Minutes

- Tabled and accepted

Agenda #3

Q&A on Seafish paper submitted earlier to ALG

- No comments or questions

Agenda #4

Update from Defra

RA provided an update on the EU export ban of live bivalve molluscs

- Plan A: work with the EU to resume trade of Class B water undepurated live bivalve molluscs as soon as possible
- Plan B: to meet with SAGB to agree on an appropriate way of working collaboratively with industry to formulate Plan B

Discussion

- It is the top priority of the Secretary of State to address this issue
- The shellfish industry is asking Defra 3 things:

- Release the letter from the EU Commission from 18 months ago¹
- Urgent review of water quality classification
- Short-term financial support²
- The Shellfish Stakeholder Working Group (SSWG), of which several ALG members sit on, are overseeing the Development of an Assurance Scheme for Shellfish and Human Health (DASSHH). This research seeks to develop an innovative risk-based approach to enable the production of high-quality shellfish that fully meets consumer safety and regulatory requirements, while recognising the variable water quality environment in which most UK aquaculture production occurs
 - Before the LBM issue, Seafish began a review of how the classification regulations are applied across the EU member states and 3rd countries to identify what flexibility is possible under those regulations and how 3rd countries operate and get their food into the EU. The draft report is underway and to be reviewed this winter / early spring

Agenda #5

Update from SF2040

KC provided the update

- SF2040 SILG meeting with Minister Victoria Prentis, MP in January
 - Priorities for the UK seafood industry:
 - Overcoming immediate administrative and logistical export / import difficulties
 - Getting the government funding schemes up and running
 - Tackling some difficult conversations around sustainability
 - Protecting MPAs
 - Persuading people to buy and eat more fish
- English Aquaculture Strategy
 - Meetings with organisations listed in Delivery Plan are ongoing
 - Complete: Cefas, EA, The Crown Estate, ARCH-UK and Seafish
 - In progress: Defra, MMO, research funders & academics e.g. Innovate UK
- Funding update
 - Current funding ends 28 Feb 2021
 - Defra & Seafish supportive of programme continuation
 - Seafish agreed to 25% of total one-year funding
 - Letters of support received from SILG and ALG industry members
 - Important for programme planning and certainty to investigate multiple sources of funding (private, UK Research Councils, etc.) within next tranche of funding

¹ 27 Sept 2019 letter has since been publicly released. Please see link:

<https://depositedpapers.parliament.uk/depositedpaper/2282974/files>

² Funding stream was expanded on 21 Feb 2021. Please see link: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/increased-support-for-fishing-and-shellfish-businesses>

Agenda #6

The role of the Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Association (IFCAs) in aquaculture *(the presentation was emailed to ALG; please refer to those slides for full detail)*

Rob Clark, Head of the Association of IFCAs

- IFCAs are the lead Authority for inshore fisheries in England; there are 10 IFCAs
 - Duties include the sustainable management of inshore fisheries and the conservation of marine protected areas
 - IFCAs are required to balance the needs of different users and achieve conservation objectives
- IFCA's duties are section 153 (2) of the Marine and Coastal Access Act (2009)
- IFCA byelaws regulate fisheries in inshore waters; these byelaws apply to all aspects of the exploitation of marine (biological) resources i.e. not just finfish and shellfish, including algae and worms
- Marine Planning: IFCAs are a consultee on marine consents
- The AIFCA recognises and values the importance of aquaculture / mariculture and its potential for development; a number of IFCAs are developing aquaculture plans
- AIFCA will work to support the implementation of the English Aquaculture Strategy
- IFCAs can assist in promoting regional development of sustainable mariculture within the IFCAs Districts, and can support the delivery of an effective balance between the social, economic and environmental considerations in the exploitation of wild or cultivated sea fisheries resources

Discussion

- Balance between industry, conservation, fisheries etc in a marine space is important but can be difficult to achieve and there is a sense in the aquaculture industry that conflict isn't always equally resolved
 - In the Marine Planning process it is advisable to speak to the local IFCA early on to ensure the actual implications of any potential development are articulated fully in the application. It does not suffice in obtaining balance to say other users can go elsewhere; need to articulate the impact on the other users in that space. Also, Marine Plans are more mature which will have a positive effect on the process
- All IFCAs are members of the AIFCA
- There have been problems between certain IFCAs and established aquaculture farms resulting in difficult engagement
 - The potential is large for IFCAs to support aquaculture which was not realised by a dedicated investment when that potential was added to the duties of the IFCAs. Unfortunately IFCAs are underfunded and under resourced. It is recognised that the marine regulation framework is complex and strict therefore navigation, time, compromise and difficult conversations are required. Better communication is necessary and AIFCA can broker any discussions between industry and their local IFCA when conflicts emerge
- SAGB and AIFCA welcome ongoing dialog between industry and the IFCA network

Agenda #7

Aquaculture in Marine Planning: Policies & evidence *(the presentation was emailed to ALG; please refer to the slides for full detail)*

Ben Coppin, MMO Marine Planning and SF2040 ALG member

- In an increasingly busy marine environment, marine planning balances all competing uses of the marine areas in a sustainable way, while protecting the environment
- How Marine Plans and policies work
 - The policies cover a wide range of topics including:
 - activities and uses
 - economic, social and environmental considerations
 - cross-cutting issues such as the join up between decision-making on land and at sea, or between national and local
- Within a proposed application area – need to consider the plan as a whole when making decisions; consider all policies of relevance to that area
 - Policies often apply within specific areas, implemented by spatial evidence. Some other policies apply across the whole marine area
 - Each policy can be thought of as a ‘test’ that the application needs to pass to gain consent
- Aquaculture policy AQ-1 aims to protect space for aquaculture in defined strategic areas; improved spatial delineation means stronger protection
 - The map and the written policy should be used together
 - The marine plans and their supporting evidence are only one part of the consenting process
 - Their primary use is currently for gaining a marine license, and they complement more discreet site-selection considerations
- Series of changes made to policies and maps based on consultation feedback, we are still working on these now and the refreshed maps will be available on EMP as soon as possible after plan adoption. Note that those included in the plan documents are samples and EMP should always be used for the most up to date data
- Future of marine planning and aquaculture evidence may change based on evolving planning process, and future requests – this is stakeholder driven and is partly reliant on the state of the industry

Discussion

- Any licensing application has to be in line with all policies in the area of interest, including Marine Plans
 - Marine Plans are consulted as part of the MMO application process (Marine Planning Policy Assessment tool)
 - Applicants must demonstrate their business activities are compatible with other users in line with specific policy wording (e.g. aquaculture/AQ1) in the area in which they wish to operate. Any justification impacts on the success of their application
- Strategic areas of sustainable aquaculture are future areas for development. There is currently mixed correlation between these existing sites and areas of strategic sustainable aquaculture development
 - The policy wording does refer to both existing and future aquaculture so both are covered by the policy

- Locations of existing sites can be located in various ways, such as consulting with MMO Marine Licensing, viewing existing consents on EMP (note this may not include many shellfish farms as these are subject to a marine licensing exemption), the APB Register etc.
- What's fed into the models to develop the plans won't always line up directly, as the models are based on environmental and physical factors. The MMO has been transparent about this. It may be that historic farms don't line up but they are still protected

Agenda #8

Review SF2040 Recommendations 13 & 14

Discussion

- The revised recommendation was provided in a paper submitted to ALG prior to the meeting. It merges the original recommendations of 13 and 14, includes the English Aquaculture Strategy and clarifies the role of the SF2040 programme
- Two members requested more time to review. As a result, ALG agreed to provide final comments COB Thursday 11 Feb 2021. SF2040 Secretariat will then review and make changes before forwarding the recommendation on to the Seafood Industry Leadership Group (SILG) for approval

Agenda #9

Any Other Business

1. The next ALG meeting will be in May 2021
2. The SF2040 ALG Secretariat proposed:
 - a. *The development of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)* - to track the impact and progress of the English Aquaculture Strategy. The SF2040 Secretariat will develop some for ALG feedback; and
 - b. *A running update for ALG on English aquaculture investment* - it will be useful to show what is happening in the industry (projects in the pipeline, expansion, production growth, etc.). CEFAS collects some data and ALG industry members are aware of potential investment. This can be compiled for ALG and provided at meetings to track growth and capture information for the KPIs where relevant. It will also inform government ALG members of what is happening within aquaculture industry on the ground
3. Update on Defra Pacific oyster review
 - a. CEFAS is on track to deliver their report end of March
 - b. Natural England will then have an opportunity to review the results to inform their advice to Defra
 - c. There will be an internal joint meeting with the aforementioned organisations
 - d. A meeting with industry will be held before a final decision on Pacific oysters is made