

Fisheries Management Scotland Fish Farming Meeting Minutes



26 November 2018

In attendance:

Lucy Ballantyne (Lochaber)
Roger Brook (Argyll)
Chris Conroy (Ness)
Derek Dowsett (Skye)
Jon Gibb (Lochaber)
Paul Hopper (Western Isles)
Richard Davies (Western Isles)
Alan Kettle-White (Argyll)
Peter Jarosz (Skye and Wester Ross)
Shona Marshall (West Sutherland)
Bill Whyte (Wester Ross)
Keith Williams (Kyle of Sutherland)
Alan Wells (Fisheries Management Scotland)
Bob Younger (Fish Legal)

Mark Bilsby (AST) joined the meeting in the afternoon

Agenda

1. Welcome and Introductions

It was agreed that AW would chair the meeting now that AL has stepped down from the committee. AW welcomed LB and RD to the meeting.

2. Update on local situation

Each area provided a short update on issues arising locally. These included:

- Applications. There is a general trend of applications for increases in biomass, and potential consolidations occurring at the moment (both in freshwater and seawater). Engagement with fisheries managers from the industry has been variable depending on company and location.
- Environmental Management Plans. These are increasingly being included as a planning condition relating to a recently consented biomass (via the planning system). Such 'Environmental Management Plans' are an attempt by planning authorities to address the current failings of the aquaculture regulatory system. The EMPS which have already been agreed, and those currently in development are extremely variable in terms of ambition, depending on the fish farming company in question. Fisheries Management Scotland are working with Argyll to develop an EMP with Marine Harvest, which it is hoped will become the model approach in future.
- Overall, it was felt that the current situation was fairly bleak, with only limited opportunities to make progress in the face of an expanding industry. However, it was also noted that the

Parliamentary process, and the various workstreams which are now running present an opportunity to make very real progress. These workstreams are covered below.

3. Interactions working group

AW and RB gave a short update on the Interactions Working Group, noting the short update on the [Fisheries Management Scotland website](#). The Committee discussed and agreed a range of priorities: addressing the current *lacuna* within the regulatory system through which impacts on wild fish are not adequately considered or addressed; transparent and timeous reporting of information; a robust, enforceable regulatory regime with appropriate penalties and appropriate monitoring of wild fish, with a feedback to farm management.

4. REC Committee Report

Whilst there was not time to fully consider the REC Committee report, the associated press release and key recommendations were discussed. The initial reaction was that many of the priorities of committee members were included and there was now a real opportunity for meaningful change.

5. Financial support for fisheries management

This has not progressed substantially since the last meeting due to a focus on the Parliamentary Inquiries. Fisheries Management Scotland will continue to engage with SSPO to progress this.

6. Monitoring of wild fish

i. Crown Estate Project

LB provided a short update on work undertaken in 2018 to develop methods for monitoring sea lice impacts on wild fish. An important element of this project was to compare the established technique of beach seine netting for wild sea trout with the deploying of a bag net system, which has been trialled in Ireland and Norway, but not yet in Scotland. Such fixed nets have the potential to capture a more representative sample of the local population of fish and have the potential to allow the capture of juvenile salmon, as well as sea trout. The net design is similar to that of a commercial fixed engine salmon net. A 'leader' net extends perpendicular from the shore, and diverts fish into a v-shaped system of nets. Wild fish swim freely in the net until released, following sampling for sea lice by researchers.

It was noted that Marine Harvest played a crucial role in the project through daily provision of boat and staff time. This allowed Marine Harvest staff to observe wild fish and the sea lice burdens they carry first hand. This collaborate working has led directly to a more positive working relationship at a local farm level, but has also resulted in enhanced communication with Marine Harvest head office staff, leading to further collaboration and data sharing.

Once the net was successfully deployed the net caught 114 sea trout over 16 days, with a peak of 36 in one 24 hr period. It was observed that the fixed net was able to catch fish more consistently, without the restraints of weather and tide which affect the ability to seine net.

In 2019, the focus is on deploying the net over a two month period, including the smolt run, and investigating an additional site in Loch Linnhe with the potential to effectively monitor wild salmon smolts. The steering group for the project will meet in December.

ii. Environmental Management Plans

As noted above, there are a number of EMPs which are being developed across the aquaculture zone, primarily in relation to marine sites, but also for at least one freshwater site. The requirement for these to be consistent and meaningful was emphasised and AW noted that he is working with the local authorities to achieve consistent wording of EMP

conditions and ultimately a more consistent approach to agreeing these between local authority areas.

There followed a specific discussion about discussions in Argyll with Marine Harvest. We are working to achieve a meaningful wild fish monitoring plan, with a clear feedback to farm management. The key element of this will be to agree sea lice thresholds, and much of the discussion around this has focussed on field and laboratory studies in Norway and Ireland, and laboratory studies in Scotland.

The flaws in the current system of EMPs were also discussed: enforceability; only exist for new farms, or existing farms which have applied for planning consent to increase biomass; and related to the above, it does not make sense to have a condition relating to the performance of a single farm, in a management area including multiple farms, potentially from different companies.

iii. 2018 Sweep netting programme

AW noted that discussions had started with regard to funding for sweep netting in 2019. It was also noted that Marine Scotland Science are analysing sweep netting data collected between 2013 and 2017. It is hoped that the results of this work will be published soon.

There was a discussion about how the current dataset might be usefully deployed and displayed, perhaps in relation to established thresholds which demonstrate impacts on wild fish. It was agreed to progress this, with a view to displaying data through GIS. There is also the possibility of developing a GIS tool to display data already held on the Scotland's Aquaculture website – this would be a useful tool as part of responding to planning applications.

7. Aquaculture Stewardship Council – second consultation on trout standards

The second consultation on proposed changes to the trout standards was circulated prior to the meeting and discussed. Some concerning changes were highlighted, notable in relation to escapes, which is a major concern from a wild fish perspective. It was further noted that many of the other issues relating to competition, predation, and olfactory issues had not been addressed. The changes to the proposed standards appear to have been driven by the Danish trout farming industry. Fisheries Management Scotland, Atlantic Salmon Trust and Marine Harvest are due to meet with ASC in January 2019 – a consultation response will be submitted after that meeting.

8. Missing Salmon Project – Mark Bilsby

MB gave an overview of plans for tracking work in 2020. This was with a view to gauging interest in being involved and what strategic questions might be answered. This would be an opportunity to learn more about migration routes and gauge an understanding of where fish go missing. A major project between Ireland and Scotland is due to commence in 2020 – Sea Monitor – and there is an opportunity to add to the planned array.

Committee members were asked to feed thoughts to AW who will coordinate a response to AST.

9. AOB

SEPA Sector Plan: early views of the SEPA sector plan were discussed. Western Isles, Wester Ross and West Sutherland have attended specific meetings with SEPA and other meetings are scheduled.

Recent discussions and amendments to the Scottish Crown Estate Bill relating to kelp harvesting were discussed. It was agreed that the amendment to the Bill was helpful, but that it did not remove all concerns.