

Fisheries Management Scotland Fish Farming Meeting Minutes



8 July 2020

In attendance:

Alan Wells (Fisheries Management Scotland) (Chair)	Alan Kettle-White (Argyll)
Lucy Ballantyne (Lochaber)	Shona Marshall (West Sutherland)
Polly Burns (Fisheries Management Scotland)	Bill Whyte (Wester Ross)
Roger Brook (Argyll)	Keith Williams (Kyle of Sutherland)
Gill Burn (Skye and Wester Ross)	Bob Younger (Fish Legal)
Chris Conroy (Ness)	Craig Sommerville (Castabroad Media – Item 6 only)
Jon Gibb (Lochaber)	
Paul Hopper (Outer Hebrides)	

Apologies:

Alasdair Laing (Findhorn)
Jason Laing (Western Isles)
Rob Whitson (North and West)

1. Welcome and Introductions

AW welcomed everyone to the meeting and noted the apologies. AW introduced PB to the meeting and provided a short update on the Aquaculture Interactions Manager role.

2. Update on local situation

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

- **West Sutherland** – There have been some applications for consolidation of existing sites; some do represent increases in biomass but there is an overall decrease within the sea loch. There have been no significant lice issues on local farms. In recent years there have been some gill health issues on the farms, but it is not yet clear whether this has been an issue this year. Wild sea trout have been assessed in recent years as part of the sweep netting programme, with no sign of any issues.
- **Kyle of Sutherland** – Monitoring effort through smolt trapping has been reduced due to Covid-19 – two traps deployed rather than four. As has been the case in all years that traps have been operated, farm escapes were identified, and scale samples were taken to confirm this. Discussions continue with the two operators on Loch Shin about contributing to the monitoring work. It was noted that the status of the EMP for the Migdale farm remains unclear.
ACTION: AW to contact Highland Council to get clarity on the current situation.
- **Western Isles** – SSC have indicated that they will be seeking a biomass increase in the bays of Harris. There are no longer many wild fish in this area, and therefore the trust is working to develop appropriate monitoring techniques.
- **Skye and Wester Ross** – Mainly activity has been through planning applications or appeals. Whilst no monitoring for EMPs has taken place due to Covid-19, a commitment in one EMP to support a smolt tracking project has led to in kind support for the West Coast tracking project. Mowi have applied to increase biomass in Loch Hourn – an EMP is being developed for this area.

- **Ness** – There has been an application to move the Loch Ness site by 250m – this is due to the pump storage hydro scheme application. 10 sites will be sampled across the Ness system as part of the third year of the genetic introgression study.
- **Lochaber** – There are proposals for consolidation of some sites, but most do not involve increases in production. There has been very little monitoring due to Covid-19, but sampling for genetic introgression will continue later in the year. Coastal fyke nets for all trusts have arrived and will be delivered in the coming months.
- **Argyll** – Freshwater monitoring for the Sound of Shuna EMP will begin later this year. Progress on the Carradale EMP has stalled due to illness. SSF have applied for CAR license variations at Lismore and Spelve to increase SLICE usage and shorten the fallow – Argyll DSFB objected to this. SSC have started screening and scoping for a new site at Ulva west Mull. There have also been some Marine Scotland license renewals in Loch Etive (Dawnfresh) which Argyll DSFB are objecting to on the basis of recent escapes and the fact that no EMP has been produced - a breach of their planning permission. In 2019 there were 33,000 escapes, of which 10,000 were removed from the River Awe by rod and line. The Dawnfresh loss adjustor has refused to compensate for nuisance caused, on the basis that no negligence was detected by Marine Scotland. It was therefore emphasised that 'good management' is no guarantee that fish will be kept in the farms – this should be emphasised to planners in all future applications. It was noted that a similar situation occurred previously in Loch Lochy.

ACTION: AW/PB to seek clarity from Marine Scotland about investigations following escapes

It was noted that there was a forthcoming proposal for a semi-enclosed site in Loch Long. Whilst the development of such technology was welcomed, it was felt that a loch with no current development was not an appropriate location for trialling this technology.

3. Salmon Interactions Working Group – local feedback and next steps

The Salmon Interactions Working Group published its final report on 1st May 2020. Fisheries Management Scotland [welcomed](#) the publication and urged the Scottish Government to support the delivery of the recommendations as soon as practically possible. In addition, in recognition that the current regulatory system for aquaculture is complex, additional explanatory information was [published](#).

Feedback was sought from the committee members on the views at a local level. Local feedback was broadly positive, but the concerns of other NGOs have also been raised. There is a widespread recognition, shared by the committee, that the way implementation of the recommendations occurs is crucial, and many will reserve judgement until that point. There was a general view that we need to do more to set out our position in a positive manner and it was recognised that there is scope for a greater presence on social media from Fisheries Management Scotland to highlight the importance of our collective work.

ACTION: PB to consider how best to take this forward.

It was emphasised that the SIWG process was one of a number of parallel processes which are currently being progressed by the Scottish Government. These include the spatial planning framework being taken forward by a technical working group of regulators (see below), the work of the farmed fish health framework (which is looking at publication of data and refining farm management areas) and announcements already made by the Scottish Government (which include the mandatory publication of sea lice data, the requirement for Environmental Management Plans at all new farms, or farms which increase production, and exploration of introducing third party independent checks on sea lice counts).

Due to COVID-19 the precise timetable for taking forward the recommendations of the SIWG, and the other processes highlighted above, is uncertain.

ACTION: AW /PB to continue to press for regulatory reform to be progressed as soon as is possible.

4. Technical Working Group – feedback from technical workshop

Seven members of the committee attended a technical workshop organised by SEPA and Marine Scotland Science to present and discuss progress on the spatial planning framework for aquaculture developments. AW provided a short overview of the framework as presented. Whilst there have been some changes to the process following feedback at earlier stages in the process, the outputs are broadly similar to earlier iterations. However, there were a number of areas that the group felt could be improved, particularly in relation to ensuring that the full extent of migration bottlenecks were correctly identified in the model, and specific areas that it was felt were not assigned at a high enough sensitivity. It was also felt that more could be done to explain what would happen where lice move between areas identified of being of different sensitivity to wild fish. Overall, it was felt that the framework was a major step forward which could also be improved in an adaptive manner as modelling techniques develop further. The importance of the West Coast Tracking project in providing vital information for this process was emphasised.

ACTION: PB to provide early feedback to the technical working group, with a view to influencing the process prior to further consultation.

5. Environmental Management Plans – local progress

There was a short discussion to identify the status of EMPs across each region. It was emphasised that supporting Fisheries Management Scotland members to protect wild fish through the planning process, including the development and agreement of EMPs, is a key part of PB's role and therefore it is vital that PB is kept in the loop as early in the process as possible. As discussed previously, it is important that EMPs are maintained at a consistently high standard across Scotland and between different companies, until such time as the reformed regulatory regime is in place.

ACTION: ALL to contact PB with information on all agreed, developing and potential future EMPs

6. IYS Aquaculture film

Craig Sommerville was welcomed to the meeting. PB introduced the concept of producing a film on aquaculture interactions, as part of an overall suite of short films being developed by CS on behalf of Fisheries Management Scotland. This project is part of the International Year of the Salmon and is aimed to be a way of engaging the public and influencing policy makers. Filming is to take place Spring 2021 after Covid-19 delayed from this year. Discussions were held around the three key messages to be presented in the film.

Action: PB to set up regular meeting with CS to ensure continued progress and have further discussions with Boards and Trusts around filming and interview opportunities.

7. AOB

Funding arrangements related to monitoring for impacts on wild fish were discussed in the light of Covid-19.