



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

MEETING, DOCUMENT

Ministerial Advisory Group for Welsh Fisheries meeting: 24 April 2024

Minutes of the meeting held on 24 April 2024.

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Attendees

Jim Evans (JE)
Nicola Cusack (NH) (Marine Conservation Society)
Alexander Scorey (AS) (Natural Resources Wales)
Natalie Hold (NH)
Helen Duggan (HD) (Seafish)
John O'Connor (JOC)
Gareth Bevington (GB) (Welsh Government)
Tamsin Brown (TB) (Welsh Government)
Rob Floyd (RF) (Welsh Government)
Amanda Wilson (AW) (Welsh Government)
Julian Bray (JB) (Welsh Government)
Elen King (EK) (Welsh Government)
Mark Stafford (MS) (Welsh Government)
Alun Mortimer (AM) (Welsh Government)

Apologies

Carl Davies (CD)
Alan Winstone (AW)

1. Government business update

Since last meeting the Welsh Government has a new First Minister and new Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Huw Irranca-Davies MS. The new portfolio means the marine and fisheries divisions now have the same Cabinet Secretary but there are no plans to re-merge.

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A new digital permitting system for domestic fisheries, including: whelks, scallops and cockles is being developed and is due to go live in a few weeks. This moves permit applications, payments and catch returns online. The Fisheries Division issues approximately 1300 permits a year so we hope this will improve the user experience. Once final system checks are complete, communications will go out to stakeholders.

2. Review notes and actions

No issues were raised with the record of the meeting on 9 November 2023. If no issues are raised with secretariat by 1 May the meeting record will be published on the website.

Action 1: Raise any issues with 9 November meeting record by 1 May – all.

Given the previous Minister took the decision not to publish her statement on the strategic approach for Welsh fisheries until after the leadership election. Officials will brief the new Cabinet Secretary and see how he wants to proceed.

The following points were made in discussion:

- the strategic approach statement was important for clarity of direction and raising morale in the sector rather than just being about holding the government to account
- new Cabinet Secretary is keen to meet stakeholders and hear from them
- group would like ask the Cabinet Secretary to join a future meeting

Action 2: Arrange Cabinet Secretary attendance at future meeting – AM.

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3. Bluefin Tuna update

RF provided background and an update on the Welsh Government approach to Bluefin Tuna fishery management. Leaving the EU means the UK has to deal with regional fisheries management organisations, in this case, ICCAT directly. UK Parliament cleared plan to allocate quota based on CHART data for 16tn of tuna. DEFRA are aiming to define the fishery by mid-May.

In Wales we are proposing a small recreational fishery. This reflects our different experience of CHART to England. 1000 fish were tagged in the English zone, 18 were tagged in the Welsh zone between CHART and TUNNUS. We will establish a specific stakeholder group and we ask MAGWF to support this approach.

The following points were made in discussion:

- the difference in numbers tagged by England and Wales is partly down to scale of the fleet but also the weather. Comparing catch per unit effort (CPUE) does not reveal a big difference
- the commercial fishery being introduced in England is very small. Welsh Ministers have decided to take a more cautious approach by growing the evidence base and considering what infrastructure would be needed to progress a commercial fishery responsibly
- concern raised that with the UK Government moving first, it could give fishers in England an advantage if the fishery develops
- foreign vessels will not be allocated any of the UK's quota to target tuna in the Welsh zone. The EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA) includes an equal access principle so EU vessels can fish in UK waters as long as they comply with UK single issuing authority requirements. If an EU vessel had EU tuna quota and caught tuna as bycatch in UK/Welsh zone they could keep it
- UK have been lobbying ICCAT for a larger share of the quota in the long

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term

- unused annual quota can be rolled over to subsequent years under ICCAT rules but do need to demonstrate it is being used
- fishers are interested in this topic. Tuna stocks are migrating and have even been spotted in North Wales again
- concern raised that tuna could be caught as bycatch by commercial English vessels but not by Welsh vessels
- a commercial tuna fishery is a real opportunity for Wales' small and limited fleet. In England they are allocating quota by considering expressions of interest. This is something that could be worked towards in Wales too

GB recognised the potential and opportunities associated with a commercial tuna fishery but emphasised the need to gather the evidence and plan responsibly.

4. Welsh Marine and Fisheries Scheme (WMFS): Funding Round 4 Update

AW briefed the group on the fourth funding round of the WMFS which is open for applications for a range of topics until 10 May. Applications may be for capital or revenue funding or a mix of the two. Would like to ask stakeholders to encourage their networks to consider making an application for funding.

The following points were made in discussion:

- fixed hourly rates does not work for universities as it is not adequate to cover other overheads like pension contributions
- understand reasons for delay in opening the funding round but there was not much warning for when the application window would open
- WFA have managed to employ amateurs from Seafarers UK to help fishers prepare applications. A few projects are pending submission

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- Fisheries Management Plan's evidence plans and strategies can help identify the projects to target funding
- feels like it is more tailored towards revenue than capital
- application process and categories are too rigid. Flexibility would help. For example, one would think that remote electronic monitoring (REM) would be fundable under the heading of 'innovation' but it does not appear to be
- this is the last year of the current spending review period so budget will need to be re-negotiated after this funding round. Need to target this resource and make sure benefits are maximised
- suggestion to extend the closing date to maximise the applications. Where applications are mostly capital the reduced project delivery timeframe should be manageable
- understand the need to account for public money but seems unfair to have the same process for applications worth £500 or £100,000. Understand need to account for public money. Needs to be a more flexible approach. Intention was to reduce bureaucracy
- value for money isn't just about committing the minimum possible and it isn't just a Welsh Government problem. Funding needs to be more sustainable to avoid stop-start which wastes time and money.

GB acknowledged the points made and confirmed several will need to be lessons learned for future funding rounds. Annual budging is very challenging to manage. It was very difficult to commit the funds we have.

5. Fisheries Management Plans (FMPs) update

JB recapped the key points on FMPs and provided an update.

Sea Bass and King Scallop FMPs were jointly produced with DEFRA. Welsh Government will continue to work with the other fisheries policy authorities and

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will now implement the plans in relation to Wales. Stakeholder advisory groups have been established for both published FMPs. Terms of reference and priorities have been agreed. Engagement has been very positive. Early focus has been evidence. Very grateful to NH and Ian McCarthy from Bangor University (BU) as well as other experts for their input.

Future meetings will focus on more evidence for the sea bass group and regulations for king scallop. Anticipate producing implementation plans for the Cabinet Secretary to consider later in the year.

Work is underway to develop the Crab and Lobster FMP which is to be published in 2026. Commissioned Seafish and WFA to conduct stakeholder engagement meetings to identify issues and areas for improvement. Please promote up-coming meeting dates as shared to your networks.

The following points were made in discussion:

- NH raised that BU have a project to assess netting impact on birds for which data from catch app and iVMS has been useful. The focus when introducing iVMS was on enforcement but the data has been very useful for science
- feedback that the advisory group meetings have been productive and positive
- 10 people attended the Crab and Lobster event in Milford Haven last night which is good. Early engagement is to be commended. Feel individuals are happy to contribute when they understand the FMP is not a one-way dialog
- there is no delivery plan for consulting on a draft Crab and Lobster FMP yet. Stakeholders would appreciate having notice of a timeline
- 6-year timescale to introduce the sea bass and king scallop FMP actions. JFS published in 2022 and is due to be reviewed in 2028

MS provided an update on the other FMPs being jointly produced with other administrations. Northern Ireland is leading on demersal and pelagic FMPs in the Irish Sea. Have shared responsibility with DEFRA leading on demersal and

pelagic FMP for the Celtic Sea. The Scottish Government is leading on a further 21 FMPs, only 3 of these include the Welsh zone but as we have a common licensing approach to quota stocks we need to be involved.

FMP development is resource intensive. The Irish Sea Pelagic FMP has missed its deadline. Scottish Government led FMPs are likely to be close. Anticipate consultation and supporting documents later this year. MAGWF members have been invited to engage with the FMP development groups.

Action 3: MS to send notice to MAGWF membership raising awareness of FMP Meetings.

Stakeholders noted that even though Wales only has an interest in some of the other joint FMPs being developed, it is important Welsh Government continue to observe and engage in case things change.

6. Effectiveness of the Welsh National Marine Plan (WNMP)

EK explained that the WNMP is undergoing its 3-year review with the next iteration to be published in 2025. The Welsh Government is keen to hear stakeholder views on effect of the WNMP on the sector.

The following points were made in discussion:

- this is a long term and iterative policy but government policy changes more frequently. The nature emergency has had more prominence since the plan was introduced. Spatial squeeze is a bigger topic now
- the following concerns were raised about the scale and nature of offshore wind proposals:
 - offshore wind project areas are exclusive by design and no opportunity to co-use the marine space

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- a precautionary approach is not being taken so we do not know the likely impact on protected features, species and environment
- appreciate the need for clean energy but must consider energy security. Much of the new electricity generated is exported and the UK/Wales doesn't own any of the turbines
- where electricity cables make landfall there is a potential conflict with inshore fisheries which fishers do not feel is adequately considered. Lack of (iVMS) locational data for all fishers means their activity is not always considered in marine planning decisions. Opportunity to improve this with recent iVMS changes, work on electronic reporting by CEFAS and Geofish development. Should look at catch in ICES subdivisions and assess the economic benefits from fishing
- Net Zero policy misalignment between Wales and UK Governments will have impacts. The Crown Estate Net Zero plans are concerning because there will not be an area of sea that is not impacted. Could destroy generations of heritage and a food source in a dash for exporting clean energy
- recommend a fisheries technical statement for marine planning
- it is hard to obtain data from CEFAS re Geofish to map fishing activity. BU are independently linking landings to iVMS data for crab, lobster, whelk and scallop. Not always clear where in the Irish Sea particular catch is caught. Might not be able to share maps because of the data protection issues

7. Quota allocations including Additional Quota

MS delivered a briefing on additional quota since leaving the EU. The Welsh Ministers have been clear, additional quota should be retained for Wales rather than being added to the quota trading system which is opaque and lacks controls. In Wales additional quota available on ad hoc basis but we would like to formalise this. All fishing vessels will be contacted to explain the opportunities.

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MS advised that there will be a future conversation with the group on the detail for new quota allocation arrangements as the Fisheries Act imposes some requirements to be considered. Important the industry is aware of this and represented.

The following points were made in discussion:

- stakeholders welcomed early conversations on additional quota allocations and complications with an EOI approach are appreciated
- it was noted that there is a zero Total Allowable Catch (TAC) advice for pollock this year. There is concern that if the commercial fishery is closed, recreational removals will not be stopped leading to feelings of unfairness. Appreciate there is an EU/TCA dimension to closing the pollock fishery but stakeholders do not have confidence in the specialised committee process. Question whether beam trawl is appropriate catch method for surveying pollock when not traditionally a mixed fishery. Might be skewing the results. Opportunity to expand use of catch app to get improved data

8. Any other business and close

- JE asked whether a change to the programme for government is possible to revisit ambition and resource for fisheries. GB confirmed it is a political call. There could be changes of emphasis within the existing programme for government but not expecting fisheries commitments to change
- aim to hold next meeting in July

Meeting closed.

Actions

Reference	Action (include deadline)	Owner	Status
1	Raise any issues with 9 November meeting record by 1 May	All	Complete
2	Arrange Cabinet Secretary attendance at future meeting	AM	Complete
3	MS to send notice to MAGWF membership raising awareness of FMP meetings	MS	Complete

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