



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

MEETING, DOCUMENT

Ministerial Advisory Group for Welsh Fisheries meeting: 18 July 2024

Minutes of the meeting held on 18 July 2024.

First published: 18 July 2024

Last updated: 18 July 2024

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Attendees

Jim Evans (JE)

Colin Charman (CC)

Aoife Martin (AM)

John O'Connor (JOC)

Jon Parker (JP)

Huw Irranca-Davies MS, Cabinet Secretary for Climate Change and Rural Affairs

Gareth Bevington (GB) (Chair) (Welsh Government)

Julian Bray (JB) (Welsh Government)

Shelley Vince (SV) (Welsh Government)

Alun Mortimer (AMr) (secretariat) (Welsh Government)

Apologies

Natalie Hold

Alan Winstone

1. Welsh Government update

GB updated the group on recent divisional activity:

- the election of a new UK Government in Westminster. The Cabinet Secretary has already met with new UK counterpart
- in the last 48 hours the First Minister, Vaughan Gething MS, has started the Labour Party process to replace him. Not for Civil Service to comment and government work continues
- the fourth funding round of the Welsh Marine and Fisheries Scheme (WMFS) closed 24 May. 34 applications were received. 21 have passed first stage.

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Unsuccessful applicants have been informed. Expecting to issue contracts in August

- pre-consultation engagement for crab and lobster FMP has been done
- pre-consultation for recreational potting expected over the summer
- Bluefin Tuna (BFT) catch and release fishery application system is up and running. 8 applications were received and 5 met the criteria. Aim to open the fishery in early August
- scheme to allocate additional quota for Welsh administered vessels is being developed

The following points were raised in discussion:

- important to continue the momentum of the pre-consultation events for crab and lobster FMP development
- could planned legislative changes be augmented to future proof for unexpected events? GB advised that efficiencies will be considered but aim is adhering to the development timeframe for 2026 publication of the Crab and Lobster FMP within existing resources
- feedback regarding the WMFS: pleased with some of the success aquaculture industry Wales members have had at first stage. Would recommend a panel approach for technical assessments of applications. GB responded that the WMFS is evolving with each round. Funding from UK Government is key so we'll see what comes out of that in the next few months

Notes and actions

Two minor corrections were requested to the minutes of April's meeting.

Action 1: Corrections to 24 April 2024 minutes. Completed

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2. Meet Huw Irranca-Davies MS, Cabinet Secretary for Climate Change

GB introduced the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Climate Change, Huw Irranca-Davies MS.

The Cabinet Secretary greeted the group and explained the government's understanding of the issues facing the fishing and aquaculture sector and approach moving forward. The Cabinet Secretary made the following points:

- meetings have been held with several individuals present but this is the first opportunity to meeting the advisory group
- the government is listening and learning to stakeholders so important to hear the group's views. The Cabinet Secretary will then reflect with officials on how to move forward for the fisheries sector
- due to previous rural affairs role in UK Government, the Cabinet Secretary noted experience and understanding of Welsh fisheries
- Wales has fisheries with particular characteristics but there are some real opportunities in this sector
- there are resource challenges within the fisheries division and wider Welsh Government
- the government is aware that people are leaving the fishing sector
- there have been several notable achievements recently including:
 - a new digital permitting system to streamline applications
 - The Cockle Fishing Management and Permitting (Specified Area) (Wales) Order 2024 was signed off last week to improve sustainability of cockle fisheries
 - the Seabass and King scallop FMPs have been developed and are being delivered. Stakeholders key to delivering these important activities
 - work is underway on pre-consultation for the Crab and Lobster FMP
 - positive take-up of the latest round of the WMFS

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- looking ahead, FMPs are going to be integral to sustainable and adaptive fisheries management based on science and evidence. This group's advice and support will help deliver FMPs
- although FMPs are a substantial resource burden, the government will take opportunities for the industry to grow and underpin support with future rounds of the WMFS
- following advice from this group, the former Minister for Rural Affairs committed to making a statement on the strategic approach for Welsh fisheries and aquaculture priorities for the remainder of the Senedd term. Cabinet Secretary wants to hear from the group before making a statement, potentially in the autumn

The Cabinet Secretary encouraged advisory group members to introduce themselves and asked each for their views about their respective work areas. The following points were made:

- the impact of marine planning decisions and net zero targets are likely to have on Welsh fisheries is quite alarming. Our resources are impacted by fishing displacement from within and outside the Welsh zone. Other administration's decisions also influence displacement. This is why we need a strategy for fisheries
- it appears several draft FMPs are struggling to meet publication targets. With a new government in Westminster, are the timetables for FMPs likely to change?
- ask that progress and momentum the Welsh Government is currently committed to is at least maintained. Need to go further and faster. We need the Fisheries Act framework to deliver for Welsh fisheries
- Aquaculture Industry Wales (AIW) have over a hundred employees in member businesses
- aquaculture is not just food. There are businesses working on development of recirculating aquaculture systems, development of aquaculture farms, diversification
- can give perspective on how both aquaculture and agriculture sectors can

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integrate

- recreational anglers in Wales seeing dwindling stocks and want a return to the condition they were in when we grew up. Competitions are now for catch and release only
- sustainability is important but think the target should be fishing below MSY rather than at MSY. Would be short term pain for long term gain
- seafish are coordinating the roadmap for future development of sea fisheries and seafood sector in Wales. We normally stick to shellfish in Wales. A once significant industry to be reinvigorated
- carbon emissions in the sector and local development are other important areas to highlight

The Cabinet Secretary made the following points in response to contributions made by the group:

- it is good to get a feel for the composition and level of experience on the group
Advice from the group is appreciated even when the topics are complex or challenging. Grappling with some of the complexity of having a thriving sector that we can grow as well as replenishing stocks. This is the right forum to wrestle with these issues
- beneficial that this portfolio includes biodiversity, climate change and marine planning. It helps to bring together how we think strategically about these things and balance interests
- how do we get the balance right between offshore electricity generation and existing [marine space] usage and how do we use development to create opportunities
- I have some familiarity with aquaculture but not in Wales. Some of the projects mentioned are interesting and are different to what we're seen elsewhere in the UK
- one thing with the new UK Government, brings a benign environment for inter-governmental discussion. All the aquaculture, planning and fisheries work we're talking about, optimistic that there is a greater scope for

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cooperation and better outcomes

- within 48 hours of the election I was speaking to Steve Reid MP, the new Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. Going to need to consider how we work with them to deliver all of the above topics. There are a number of things we want to speak to the Crown Estate about. I think we have a renewed opportunity to work through some of these things
- interested in point about sustainability of stocks. I know we need to improve stocks. Need to work together with international actors to improve shared stocks. Getting the balance right, whether MSY or something else, is important and needs to be discussed
- really good to see Seafish as part of this group. You're right in saying the roadmap is important. The trade landscape post-Brexit is ripe for discussion. Officially, Wales has no seat at the table in terms of international trade or border issues. However, that wasn't always the way. We haven't discussed it yet but one thing I want to raise is how to get the Welsh voice heard in trade discussions. Hopeful that with a benign UK Government these is real possibility of making progress
- I think this area is genuinely exciting area and I'm glad to be back working in this area
- there are conflicting interests but with good advice will help us take things forward

3. Permitting update

SV, head of digital and data, provided the following update on the new digital permitting system:

- permits are required for some of the byelaws we inherited from the former sea fisheries committees and new fisheries legislation for Whelk and Cockle. A new digital system went live at the end of May. Different fisheries open at different times so this has led to rolling implementation

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- one cockle permit required for all Welsh Government managed cockle beds from now on
- it is possible to register for a scallop permit for north and south Wales but the permit window isn't open yet because the fishery doesn't open until November
- where there are requirements to submit catch return data, can do this online now so we should get robust timely data in future. Reporting and monitoring should be a lot easier
- the bluefin tuna recreational fishery came in quite quickly so we didn't manage to get this on the system for this year but it will be future years
- a new feature of the system is that physical permits are not required anymore. Digital account will include a photo. MEOs can check who has a permit in the field.

SV opened discussion and the following points were made:

- stakeholders noted that there haven't been many queries about the new system and only feedback has been positive so far
- the permits reflect the current management and can be tweaked if management is changed
- with regard to different catch recording systems, such as CatchApp, this should provide additional data for analysis. Is there ambition to integrate reporting requirements? SV confirmed that CatchApp does not provide all the data required and changes require agreement across the UK. Hope to integrate everything at some point in the future

4. New cockle order

JB provided a summary and update on the introduction of The Cockle Fishing Management and Permitting (Specified Area) (Wales) Order 2024:

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- cockle gathering is of significant economic importance and has a long history in Wales. Welsh Government have been using disparate and unsatisfactory legislation to manage the fishery for some time
- consultations in 2013– noted need for new legislation but resource was not available to introduce. Since 2018, the three rivers cockle beds have been used to test for what measures we would need
- 2022 consultation on proposed measures was overwhelmingly positive. The new order was drafted based on that feedback and came into force last week
- there will now be one all-Wales cockle permit for designated cockle beds. There will be a fee for a cockle permit. New universal permit conditions and an option to add specific fishery local permit conditions. Permit conditions can also be used to vary adaptive management measures within the specified area
- adaptive management options include: the ability to vary the daily catch limit, ability to vary the times that people can gather and specify the methods for gathering and means of access. Conditions imposed will be based on evidence
- the specified area includes, the Three Rivers Estuary, Whitford, Traeth Lafan and Melynog. If no new regulating order is made for the Bury Inlet, when the existing order ends it will also be integrated into the scope of the order
- quite different to how legislation set out in the past but clear that catch returns are a key part of the system. Permits are allocated via the new digital system
- guidance is being produced for stakeholders and we will update it regularly. Hoping the industry will engage with us in doing that

JB opened the topic to discussion. The following points were made:

- the new order delivering adaptive management capability is a positive development
- industry intelligence is that there has been non-compliance when fishery is closed. Will the new order change the dynamic? JB – responded that this is

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an enforcement issue and this is a challenging fishery to control.

Enforcement do have some new gear for monitoring, drones etc. Encourage stakeholders to engage with responsible management of the fishery

- regarding Bury Inlet regulating order renewal, would the MSC certificate be retained or lost? JB advised that if there is no new regulating order, Welsh Government may not be able to manage the same way as NRW have so this is something we will look at

5. Any other business and close

No specific points were raised as AOB. A brief discussion followed about funding, specifically Wales receiving appropriate share of the UK Seafood Fund budget and ensuring the WMFS reflects strategic priorities. GB noted that the UK Seafood Fund budget point had been made forcefully but unsuccessfully to the previous UK Government.

Actions

Reference	Action (include deadline)	Owner	Status
1	Corrections to 24 April 2024 minutes.	AMr	Complete

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