



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

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Ministerial Advisory Group for Welsh Fisheries meeting: 6 July 2023

Minutes of the meeting held on 6 July 2023.

First published: 27 June 2024

Last updated: 27 June 2024

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Attendees

Group: Colin Macdonald (CM), Alexander Scorey (AS), Natalie Hold (NH),

Alan Winstone (AW), Carl Davies (CD), John O'Connor (JOC), Gareth Cunningham (GC), Nerys Edwards (NE), Noemi Donigiewicz (ND)

Welsh Government: Gareth Bevington (GB) (Chair), Mark Stafford (MS), Gary Douch (GD), Amanda Wilson (AmW), Julian Bray (JB), Tamsin Brown (TB), Alun Mortimer (AM),

Apologies: Jim Evans (JE), Mark Gray (MG)

Agenda

1. Welcome and Welsh Government update - 10:00 - 10:10
2. Bluefin Tuna update - 10:10 - 10:20
3. Funding policy update - 10:20 - 10:40
4. Ministerial statement on strategic approach for fisheries and aquaculture, group discussion - 10:40 - 11:40
5. AOB -11:40 - 12:00

1 - Welcome and Welsh Government update

GB opened the meeting and delivered the Welsh Government update. Key points are:

- Welcome to AS who is attending today as Natural Resources Wales (NRW) representative.

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- Want to allow as much time for discussion on strategic approach as possible.
- CD wasn't sure he could attend and sent a contribution in advance. We will respond to this in writing if we run out of time.
- It has been a big piece of work to get the first Fisheries Management Plans (FMPs) for bass and scallop this far. Advice is with UK and Wales Ministers on both plans. We hope to be consulting on both plans in coming weeks.
- Vessel Monitoring System (iVMS) issues. Found some not to be working and had to remove 2 devices from vessels in Welsh waters because they were not compliant.
- Had request from the Senedd to publish minutes. Minister wanted to confirm the group do not have an issue with this. We'll ask members to confirm via email so can raise any issues by a date to be determined and if we don't hear from you by that date we'll assume everyone is content.

Action 1: Members to raise any issues or concerns regarding publishing MAGWF meeting notes by a date to be determined (18 August) AM to email group.

Questions:

- AW raised that the action for Pacific Oyster policy development is vague. Would appreciate a more specific action otherwise feels like it is being brushed off.
- GB confirmed this topic is not being dismissed. The approach to developing this policy is ongoing at present but happy to consider alternative wording. It may be a topic the Minister will need to consider as part of strategic approach so that is the initial timeframe.

Action 2: Consider clarifying or updating ongoing PO policy development action.

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2 - Bluefin tuna update

MS presented the paper and lead the discussion for the Welsh Government's position on Bluefin Tuna for 2023. Key points:

- Upon leaving the EU, the UK became an independent party to ICCAT. As a result, UK receives a small quota of BFT annually which is unapportioned and managed centrally.
- Last year, the fishery was not opened commercially or recreationally. Quota has gone up to 65 tons (UK) for 2023. Defra have shared proposals on managing an element of UK quota for a trial commercial fishery in English and Scottish waters.
- The Welsh Government position is that the quota is small. Traditionally UK waters had Tuna and it is possible that there is more here than we are aware of but we don't feel 65 tons, or the Welsh share of this, is adequate to open a commercial or recreational fishery. Therefore the aim should be gathering scientific evidence of stocks. Northern Ireland have taken a similar view and will also not proceed with a commercial fishery.
- Have been doing catch and release CHART programmes at Wales and UK level until now. Intend to keep this going in Wales for the foreseeable future.
- DEFRA, (lead on international matters) and have decided to open a limited commercial fishery.
- As there is no catch history expect the principle of zonal attachment to apply so should mean Wales gets higher quota share than for other quota stocks.
- The fish are valuable, particularly in Japan. WG want to make sure we extract the maximum value within sustainable environmental limits when it comes to a commercial fishery.
- The approach to a recreational fishery is the same. Recreational vessels still need to be licenced for catch and release and regulations do not allow for this at present so there may be merit in developing the ability to do this in Wales. Would be for bycatch not a targeted fishery.

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- Sea temperatures rising so likely to have more Tuna in UK waters in future.
- There is a lot to consider to avoid poor outcomes and we will observe how the UK Government approach for England works.
- Commercial fishers will not be able to fish for Tuna in Welsh waters. Welsh vessels can travel to other areas but aware specialist gear required and there is a cost to this.

Questions and discussion:

- It was noted that this is a responsible approach to managing this stock. It has the potential to be a really good fishery and that could be threatened by allowing targeted fishing too soon.
- Concerns were raised over IUU fishing GB advised that enforcing the Welsh Government position is part of standard enforcement activity. Welsh Government encourage information on illegal fishing activities to be notified to our enforcement email address and will act on the intelligence.

3 - Funding policy update

GD presented an update on funding policy and led the discussion.

Welsh Marine and Fisheries Scheme (WMFS) recap and update:

- We have established a dedicated funding policy stakeholder advisory group which includes several MAGWF members. The time and input from stakeholders are much appreciated.
- The WMFS was created by Regulations in December last year. There have been two funding rounds so far, *marketing measures* and *energy efficiency*

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and mitigation of climate change.

- Those windows have now closed. six projects completed expression of interest (EOI) totalling £276,000 for marketing measures all going forward to full application. Nine expressions of interest were received for energy efficiency and mitigation of climate change with seven projects totalling £574,000 proceeding to full application.
- The next two funding rounds are being developed with the intention to open in August/September. Following feedback, capital funding will now be included (UK Government only provided revenue budget).
- Funding round 3 will be a one application 'standard cost' round rather than a two-stage application process. Applicants can get funding for a set list of items with a total cost between £200 and £10,000 to promote health, safety and wellbeing. £600,000 is the initial budget allocation for the round.
- Anticipated plans for a funding round 4 will be a two-stage application process but most of the activities that can be supported by the scheme will be in scope. We are calling it a "general support" funding round.
- The scope is broader for funding round 4 because fewer applications we received for funding rounds 1 and 2 than anticipated. There will be a mix of capital and revenue budget available. This gives applicants scope to define their own projects.

Coastal Capacity Building Fund update:

- To complement the WMFS, the coastal capacity building fund has been developed. The aim is to support sustainable growth and nature recovery by providing investment to coastal communities.
- This initiative builds on research by colleagues from Cardiff University for WG and a trial *challenge fund* delivered via the WCVA and Local Nature Partnerships (LPN).
- Despite the very short application window and delivery timeframe for the trial challenge fund, 16 applications were received with 14 approved, totalling just

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under £500,000. The trial provided valuable feedback which we have taken on board for a longer-term support mechanism which has been procured for the next two years costing £500,000 per annum.

- The Welsh Government ran a procurement exercise and WCVA submitted the successful bid using the LNP to deliver the contract. A new window for applications is expected to open in August. It is hoped that capacity building projects will be larger in scale and more strategic given the improved timeframe but it depends on the applications submitted.
- As well as specific capacity building projects, the funding should also improve capacity by supporting marine, fisheries and aquaculture organisations to apply for funds from other sources such as the UK Seafood Fund and the Welsh Government's Food Business Accelerator Scheme as well. LNP have offices located around Wales and are able to provide support with applications.
- Grants will be awarded on a competitive basis and need to be delivered by end of 2024-25 financial year.
- A range of organisations are expected to apply including private sector, third sector and possibly public sector organisations. Collaborative projects should do well.
- It seems to be a very efficient way to deliver funding to coastal communities, so stakeholders are encouraged to apply.
- A press notice is anticipated to go out later this month from the Minister and officials would appreciate your support in getting the word out to stakeholders via your networks.

Questions and discussion:

- AW – Regarding coastal capacity building, if an organisation wanted to put in a bid covering all Wales, how do they decide which LNP to use? LNPs are usually focused on their patch so a national project might be a less smooth process.

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- GD – Applicants can approach any LNP but suggest start with the closest to the applicant. WCVA will have a central point to coordinate pan-Wales applications.
- NE – We were awarded an EMFF grant last year, but council are not responding to our emails. The grant is good but difficult to deliver as agreed when LAs are struggling to deal with planning queries. Might have to return the funding if we cannot get planning permission.
- GB – It is difficult to comment on an individual local authority's approach but we'd be happy to take a look if you send us the details.
- ND advised that Seafish is always happy to work with collaborators on funding applications for pan-Wales projects.

4 - Ministerial statement on strategic approach for fisheries and aquaculture, group discussion

GB introduced this agenda item:

- The Minister has been clear that she is not minded to divert resources to develop and implement a new strategy but has listened to the concerns raised by the group in previous meetings. We have agreed to develop a statement outlining a strategic approach to fisheries and aquaculture policy with input from stakeholders to be announced in the Autumn.
- There was a recent all party Senedd meeting where this topic was discussed. Resource constraints must be made clear: fisheries is a small division with a number of statutory duties and they have to take priority. Fisheries Management Plans (FMP) are a new requirement and are a substantial resource commitment. The discussion here is how we want to focus our resources for the rest of this Senedd term.

Everyone has had a copy of the paper in advance. TB presented the draft strategic approach paper, highlighted some general points and led the

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discussion structured around six main questions for stakeholders set out in the paper:

- The Minister agreed a fisheries priorities paper in July 2022 and that is the starting point for developing the new strategic approach. There was consensus regarding the topics included but following feedback we have reordered them slightly to emphasise that scientific evidence must run through everything we do and include aquaculture.
- There were other activities raised by members that were not in the paper such as having a clearer link to the Joint Fisheries Statement (JFS) and decarbonisation and climate change and more direct and regular updates from the Government to fishers. The draft paper links priorities to the JFS throughout.
- FMPs will be a significant part of delivering the JFS which sets out the commitment to deliver a number of FMPs, including the Wales only FMPs for Crab and Lobster, Whelk and Cockles.

Members were encouraged to voice any general comments or observations and the following points were made:

- Consensus that discussing a strategic approach is positive
- It would be good to see how the Welsh Government's strategic approach to fisheries and aquaculture fits with other policy areas such as marine planning and marine licencing
- Important that aquaculture is included
- It would be good to see how international dimension will be addressed. It tends to be foreign vessels catching majority of demersal and pelagic stocks
- It would be great to aim for and promote Welsh seafood as best in class for sustainability. Issues around having the product before selling it but setting the aim can lead activity. Funding scheme can support this now. All the mechanisms there to deliver now just need to bring it together
- The social aspect of policy is not well represented in the paper. Should link to Well-being of Future Generations Act (WBFGA). Understanding how you

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measure social metrics and which ones to measure. The Fisheries Act objectives do include these

- Using science to understand whether our fisheries are sustainable and the tension between this and social and economic impacts of reducing catch limits should be discussed. Whelk catch limits are an example
- Policy on displacement of fishing activity due to conservation could be developed. In agriculture, farmers get compensated for not being able to use land due to conservation. Nothing for fishers at present
- Economic, social and ecological pillars – might be able to maximise all three but likely always going to be a compromise in the short term
- Should consider what the strategy should be to make sure Wales has the fleet it needs in 10-15 years' time
- Approach to diversification should be considered. Coastal fishers have said they need this to maintain income. With the vessels left, it will be important to be able to target different stocks to survive
- Recommend cross-referencing environmental considerations such as water quality and plastic pollution in a strategic approach.

GB accepted the points made were valid and made the following observations:

- There is a challenge regarding certainty of key decisions by UK Government relating to quota. We have negotiated some certainty until 2026 but we'll have to work hard to keep this going as there will be other competing demands. The Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA) is due for renegotiation in 2026. UK Government lead and we hope to have more input this time around
- Good reminder for us as officials to raise our heads to link to wider policy goals such as marine planning, Strategic Resource Areas (SRA), WBFGA, water quality
- International dimension is that overwhelming activity from EU and other UK vessels. Through the new FMPs we hope to address this which is a significant piece of work
- The social component is a really interesting point. As we move to more

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sustainable Welsh fisheries via FMPs and measures such as Whelk order this should be addressed. Quota regime considers this at moment for shared stocks but less so for non-quota stocks. Not sure how much detail can be included in the strategic approach

- Promoting Welsh seafood as sustainable is challenging to get sequencing right for this to be successfully implemented. Need more advice on this because balance between announcing intention, delivery and promoting sustainability will be tricky.

TB asked for specific feedback on individual questions in the draft paper. The following points were made regarding science and evidence solutions to fisheries management problems considering JFS commitments (question 1):

- One of the biggest challenges in delivering high quality evidence is continuity of funding. It takes time train a team by which time the funding ends, the team disburse and the cycle repeats. Welsh Government need to consider that there is a scarcity of fisheries specialists. Without continuity of funding it isn't possible to retain talent in Wales. When funding is made available the application timeframes are short notice and short term
- Stop start research, isn't great for fishers either. The more FMPs that come out, more species that need to be sustainable, you're going to be relying on the fishermen. Would help us a lot if there were some continuity with surveys so that we can plan to contribute and maintain relationship with scientific community.
- Notice of FMP papers to be published for stakeholders to make informed decisions on prioritising funding
- Coast and Seas Partnership (CaSP) are developing blended public / private funding which if successful could be useful
- Science and evidence covers a lot: monitoring of existing activities, problem investigation, Welsh Government statutory duties, universities evidence, innovative approaches and horizon scanning. It is not clear how each of these fit together at the moment. A document or diagram that explains this could be useful.

The group made the following observations regarding stakeholder engagement in policy development (question 2):

- The group strongly made the point that to gather fishers' opinions, it will be necessary to do it on the ground, face-to-face. with this.

JB advised that FMPs will be main vehicles by which we engage on policy. Speaking to people in person individually does give good results but it takes a lot of time and resource. We do individual meetings on MS Teams which can save time. But to reassure you we are speaking to individuals. We would consider any options for engagement. It might be possible to record a message but it would have to be a specific point. Engagement on the Whelk order has worked well so far which might be something to replicate.

It was felt that questions 3, 4 and 5, in the paper had been discussed already and members were encouraged to provide any thoughts to officials in writing.

The group raised the following specific points regarding aquaculture to consider for future draft (question 6):

- More leadership from the Welsh Government on aquaculture is necessary
- Inclusion of aquaculture feels like an “add-on” but should be integrated into the document
- It would be useful to map how Welsh fisheries and aquaculture sectors link with other industries like fish-farms and animal feed. A framework to deliver the kind of sector the Welsh Government wants to see would be beneficial to avoid situation in Scotland where salmon farms vary in quality
- MAGWF has discussed Pacific Oysters policy previously, this is a specific topic that could be prioritised
- If Seaweed and Bivalves are priorities for Welsh aquaculture, recommend focusing on them.
- Water quality is an issue that affects Welsh aquaculture
- Since leaving the EU, UK Trade policy has become an issue for Welsh

aquaculture

- Important to promote diversification and resilience in the sector.

Action: Members are encouraged to consider the paper and the questions and provide any comments over the summer so that we can discuss at the next meeting.

5 – AOB

AOB raised in advance by CD and AW:

- Pacific Oysters action addressed above.
- It was agreed that the points raised by CD would be responded to in writing.

GB advised that to allow time to receive input and develop strategic approach and fit in another meeting before an autumn statement, next meeting likely to be end September, early October. Details will be sent in the usual way.

Meeting closed at 12:04.

Actions

1. Members to raise any issues or concerns regarding publishing MAGWF meeting notes by a date to be determined (18 August) AM to email group (All) -complete.
2. Consider Welsh Government policy and approach on Pacific Oysters – align with strategic approach paper development timeframe initially (WG/All) - ongoing
3. Members are encouraged to consider the paper and the questions and provide any comments to MAGWF secretariat by end of summer (All)

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- complete.

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