



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

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Ministerial Advisory Group for Welsh Fisheries meeting: 9 November 2023

Minutes of the meeting held on 9 November 2023.

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Attendees

Group: Nerys Edwards (NE), Jim Evans (JE), Lynn Gilmore (LG), Colin Macdonald (CM), John O'Connor (JOC), Alan Winstone (AW),

Welsh Government: Gareth Bevington (GB) (Chair), Julian Bray (JB), Tamsin Brown (TB), Alun Mortimer (AM),

Apologies: Natalie Hold (NH), Carl Davies (CD), Gareth Cunningham (GC)

Agenda

1. Welcome -13:00 - 13:10
2. Minutes and actions - 13:10 - 13:15
3. Welsh Government update - 13:15 - 13:25
4. Fisheries Management Plans (FMP) update -13:25 - 13:55
5. Strategic approach for fisheries and aquaculture - 13:55 - 15:00.

1 and 2 – Welcome, Minutes and Actions

GB explained there had been a few last-minute apologies but would proceed given the numbers who had managed to attend. The previous meeting notes and actions were briefly considered. No issues were raised.

ACTION 1: Group to raise any points on April meeting notes by 23 November.

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3 – Welsh Government update

GB highlighted the First Minister's recent announcements regarding inflationary pressures, the actions taken by the Cabinet and the revised budget for this financial year. Next financial year will also be affected. Budgeting for next financial year is ongoing. The draft budget is usually published in December.

This has been a challenge for the whole government and fisheries is not immune. Please note that the impact to this financial year's fisheries budget has been relatively limited. By carefully reading the budget you'll see we surrendered some revenue budget for capital budget to run the Health and Safety funding round of the Welsh Marine and Fisheries Scheme (WMFS) but this was pre-planned, acting on feedback from the group.

The group raised concerns regarding the effect reduced fisheries budget would have on the sector, particularly any reduction in the WMFS budget.

GB advised that the WMFS could potentially be impacted but the resource constraints extend to staff as well as financial resource. It is still the aim to open funding round 4 of the WMFS and have offer letters out in April 2024.

The group discussed how to best represent the interests of the sector to the Minister, noting that because the fisheries division is small, any cuts to staff would have a proportionately greater impact.

It was agreed that this would be minuted and the Minister informed but also that secretariat would draft a statement of the group's position to be sent to the Minister. Secretariat will aim to share a draft for comments with the group in the next week. It was noted that Seafish, as a public body, could not be a signatory of the statement.

ACTION 2: Secretariat to share draft statement to Minister for comment by 16

November, and on to Minister as soon as possible thereafter.

The group also asked that stakeholders be given as much notice as possible on timing and content of funding round 4 of the WMFS so they can comply with the tight application window timeframes.

GB provided an update on the ongoing EU-UK Total Allowable Catch and quota negotiations. The Welsh Government is represented in all discussions as part of the UK delegation and is bound by the confidentiality of the negotiation remit on specifics. Difficult scientific advice for 7a, f and g this year particularly around Celtic Sea stocks. Mixed fishery advice will be published next week and that is when negotiations will get difficult, but progress is being made and officials are hopeful that negotiations will be resolved soon.

LG highlighted work being done by Seafish on scampi (nephrops) fishing. There is a lot of public discussion about damage to sea floor and discards and Seafish will be publishing a response to this next week.

4 – Fisheries Management Plans (FMP) update

JB provided an update on the Seabass FMP and King Scallop FMP development as well as Cockles and Whelks as key fisheries for Wales.

The Sea Bass FMP and Kings Scallop FMPs are being developed jointly with DEFRA for English and Welsh waters. Thanks to all those who took part in the recent public consultation. In general input has been positive and thoughtful. Eagerness from stakeholders for government to be more ambitious and progress at pace comes across. The aim is to publish the joint DEFRA-Welsh Government response before Christmas.

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King Scallop FMP

33 responses were received for the draft King Scallop FMP which included good quality responses regarding Wales. There are at least 12 pieces of legislation regulating Scallop fishing in Wales. Consequently, one of the themes was to review existing management measures and consider more coherent legislation. Other themes include: improving the scientific evidence base; environmental impacts, such as seabed integrity; and a desire for greater engagement moving towards co-management.

Seabass FMP

Of the approximately 30 responses regarding Seabass most were from recreational fishers. A wide range of stakeholders want to get involved with the group, including spear fishers. The FMP requires us to review sizing and closed seasons as well as inshore and offshore netting. Gathering further scientific evidence will again be important.

Publishing the FMPs will be the start of the process, not the end. It will be important for the Welsh Government to prioritise the actions in the FMPs which are most important for Wales. Our next steps will include setting up stakeholder groups for Scallop and Bass management. If anyone wants to be involved with these groups, please let us know.

A question was asked concerning the timeframe for establishing other stakeholder group for subsequent FMP development, particularly the Crab and Lobster FMP.

JB advised that administering the advisory groups is labour intensive. Resources go further when stakeholders engage positively. The Whelk group already exists and works well providing constructive challenge and insight. Crab and Lobster

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FMP engagement will be difficult because they are important fisheries to many people. It is hoped that pre-consultation engagement will be able to start soon so that we have a well-developed proposal to consult on publicly.

The Welsh Government is also working with colleagues in UK and DAERA in NI on FMPs for other stocks. Scottish Government are leading on 21 FMPs for shared stocks also. FMPs do consume a lot of resource at the moment. Linking back to resources discussion earlier – financing the scientific evidence is going to be key because that sets the scene for all other actions.

Cockles

Officials have been developing an adaptive management order for cockles for the whole of Wales. Resourcing this work again is difficult. Three rivers due to close shortly but had a good year.

Whelk

This permit year, fishers have taken over 3000tn of Whelk, worth approximately £8m and corresponding to 81% of the annual limit. Do not feel there is a need to change the Monthly Catch Limit yet. Work done by Bangor University has been very helpful. The monitoring results look positive. A 10% buffer is built in to the catch limits. The same catch limits next year would appear appropriate. There is going to be an informal consultation on the Whelk permit fee starting next week.

5 – Strategic approach for fisheries and aquaculture

GB explained that although the Minister has various reasons for not

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commissioning a full strategy for fisheries and aquaculture, following advice from this group she has agreed to have a position on a strategic approach to give forward view on priorities and direction of Welsh Government activity.

The group have received a draft paper which presents the situation in the context of our resources and what we can deliver to aid discussion. We will take your views to the Minister and work up the result into a formal position, probably a written statement.

As a direct consequence of leaving the EU, the Welsh Government has had a significant increase in statutory duties, without the corresponding resource. Producing and delivering FMPs requires significant resource but is an opportunity to deliver on the measures within the FMPs of biggest impact for Wales. It has been very difficult to prioritise the actions for the remainder of this Senedd term.

TB explained that the document is not a draft statement but the skeleton of what we propose to cover in a statement. The paper sets out the priority areas: FMPs, recreational approach to Tuna, maintain representation across intergovernmental for a whilst also getting the most from Vessel Monitoring System data and making sure stakeholders can contribute and engage through MAGWF and species-specific groups.

On Pacific Oysters, the Minister has asked officials to keep reviewing evidence to come back to in the future.

The following points were made in discussion:

Paper is useful in clarifying aspects of the strategic approach.

AW noted that it does clarify the Welsh Government approach to Pacific Oysters and that they will be considered on a site-specific basis. Think this is sensible position and would support this going forward.

Any applicants with outstanding applications to farm Pacific Oysters may wish to progress these on the back of this which would have resource implications for the Welsh Government. It would be unfortunate if resource constraints were a reason not to progress these applications. Monitoring conditions to an authorisation would be useful. We would probably learn a lot from progressing one application and subsequent applications would likely be much easier.

GB explained that the position on Pacific Oysters is difficult. DEFRA have adopted a position for England that has become challenging so it is possible that the Welsh Government position regardless of resource might be to continue to observe, gather evidence and consider. Applications would need to consider the situation for themselves considering the statement when published. If anyone chooses to progress a live application, it would become an administrative issue rather than a policy issue. We genuinely haven't looked at this and I do not want it to appear as though there is prejudice in any potential outcome.

JE opined that the paper raises more questions but will send detailed points separately.

Some of the choice of language is not ideal. "Prioritise limiting fishing" is counter-productive for a fisheries division. Would be best if the Joint Fisheries Statement (JFS) section were tailored to Wales. Saying "environmentally responsible fishing industry" could irritate some people because overall sector in Wales is low impact. Be clearer about what the priorities are. Also need clarity on section on new arrangement for additional quota management to avoid wrong impression.

An opportunity for cost recovery with Whelk and iVMS. Preferred method might be cost per tonne – could be done with minimal administration.

This group (MAGWF) and the species-specific groups are in effect the co-management fora. Consider whether you spell that out in the statement.

GB confirmed that the language will be sharpened for the statement. All other points will be considered in drafting.

If there are other comments on this paper, please send to secretariat within a week. We will progress drafting after that.

ACTION 3: Group to provide any thoughts on strategic approach paper by 16 November

ACTION 4: Update Minister and draft statement to share strategic approach

Any other business

JE noted that the Minister has lent her support to medical certificates for small scale Welsh fishers. Please thank the Minister for her interventions in this case. The deadline for medical certificates is looming and causing anxiety with stakeholders because for many it is not achievable. Would the Minister raise this with the Secretary of State to progress the review of the regulations and to confirm when they intend to publish?

GB confirmed that as of yesterday, the Welsh Government had not received a response from the UK Minister. Probably approaching a stage where it would be acceptable for the Minister to chase this so will raise it with her.

GB noted that the group has been copied into a list of questions from CD to which we have responded. No further questions were raised about this.

GB also noted that secretariat received another email today from CD regarding iVMS data for spatial understanding of windfarm developers. Some members of the group were copied in. CD suggests developers have been in touch with the Welsh Government to request the data. We aren't aware of any requests. There was an informal request several years ago but that was before iVMS was

introduced. We don't regard that as being a live query.

Actions

1. Group to raise any points on April meeting notes by 23 November (All)
- Completed
2. Secretariat to share draft statement to Minister for comment by 16 November, and on to Minister as soon as possible thereafter (AM) - Completed 28-11-23
3. Group to provide any thoughts on strategic approach paper by 16 November (All) - Completed
4. Update Minister and draft statement to share strategic approach (TB) - Pending

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