

## Wales Marine Fisheries Advisory Group (WMFAG)

Notes of meeting held on Thursday 25 June 2019, Trawscoed Room, WG office, Rhodfa Padarn – 10am to 4pm

### PRESENT

Nick O’Sullivan, Chair, Welsh Marine Fisheries Advisory Group  
Jim Evans Welsh Fishermans Association  
Sion Williams, Llyn Shellfishermans Association  
John O’Connor, Welsh Federation of Sea Anglers  
Holly Whiteley, Seafish Wales  
Sean Evans, Natural Resources Wales  
Kevin Denman, South West Wales Fishing Communities  
Dean Parry, Cardigan Bay Fishermans Association  
Brett Garner, Llyn Fishermans Association  
Mark Roberts, North Wales Fishermen’s Cooperative  
Professor Lewis Levay, The Menai Strait Fishery Order Management Association (MSFOMA)  
Gareth Bevington, Deputy Director, Marine and International Fisheries, Welsh Government  
Julian Bray, Chief Officer, Fisheries Operations, Welsh Government  
Colin Charman, Senior Fisheries Advisor, Welsh Government  
Michelle Billing, Fisheries Policy Manager, Welsh Government  
Mike Jones, Sea Fisheries Policy Manager, Welsh Government  
Elen King, Workstream Leader – Marine & Fisheries EU Transition, Welsh Government  
Jane Jones, Secretariat, Welsh Marine Fisheries Advisory Group, Welsh Government

#### 1 Welcome and Apologies:

Chair welcomed all to the meeting and introductions were made.

Apologies were received from:

Gill Bell, Wales Environment Link /RSPB, Trevor Jones, MSFOMA and Bethan Jones, Welsh Government

Sincere thanks were given to Margaret Rees for all her hard work while Secretariat to WMFAG and warm wishes were expressed on her retirement.

Action 1 – Letter to be written on behalf of WMFAG to Margaret expressing their thanks and good wishes.

#### 2 Introduction:

Julian Bray extended a warm welcome to those attending for the first time. Apologies were made for having to postpone the meeting in May. However, he stated that having that small amount of extra time meant that substantial progress had been made since the last meeting. Julian made reference to the previous meeting and explained that sufficient time had been allocated at the beginning of this meeting for everyone to give their views on the roles and purpose of WMFAG going forward and to highlight any priorities members feel should be addressed.

Gareth Bevington introduced himself and explained his role in the Welsh Government as Deputy Director of the Marine and Fisheries Division. He went on to announce recent staff changes, including the movement to 'pastures new' of Graham Rees and Alison Kitchener. As a result Gareth currently has sole responsibility for the Division but added that WG is looking to bring in another Deputy Director soon to help. He stated he was keen to move the work of the Division forward and gave a firm commitment to the members present that he would tackle any issues they have. His first priorities are to re-visit the structure within the Division and investigate and put in to action any priorities that need addressing including ensuring there will be a team dedicated to progressing necessary legislation. He is currently looking at how this can be resourced. Gareth recognises that a long term plan is required and is working towards delivering this. He expressed a wish to hear from members of the group about their experiences and views on priorities for the future.

The following suggestions and points were made by those present:

- Gareth was thanked for making the effort to attend the meeting and it was felt that his comments were positive and reflected a wish to work with the group on moving forward. It was felt that any trust which may have been lost between the group and Welsh Government can now be rebuilt.
- A mechanism to manage and develop all fisheries in Wales is needed. *Response:* The aim is to ensure that all long term legislation is put in place to ensure this can happen. This is a complex piece of work and there is no quick fix. However, the Division will be working on some single species legislation first to 'kick start' the process.
- It was noted that the longer this process is left the harder it will get for the fishing industry. Wales is not known for managing their fisheries or species and this is felt throughout all of the Welsh Fishing Fleet. This situation is becoming quite desperate in certain fisheries and legislation is needed soon before the fisheries become untenable.
- A long term plan is desperately needed to ensure effective management of our fisheries. We need to work with scientific data to ensure conservation of our fisheries for years to come.
- At present the fishing industry is working much harder for less money even though we have some of the best products. For example our cockles and whelks are of the best quality and there is great demand for these. However, we need to manage this and other fishing stock for the longer term and to ensure a future for those younger fishermen coming in to the industry.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We need an urgent management system in place to enhance what stocks there are now.</li> <li>• <i>Response:</i> We are striving towards this goal – collective will and endeavour ensures this is not insurmountable.</li> <li>• It was expressed that there is now much more positivity in everyone working together towards the same goals and that the trust between the industry and the Welsh Government could be improved.</li> <li>• It was observed that there was a lot of inactivity in Wales compared to IFCA's in the UK. There are issues with fish stocks e.g. there is now an abundance of undersized bass and the future is looking good. The same approach needs to be taken for other species before it is too late.</li> <li>• There seems to be a lack of cohesion between science, enforcement and policy. <i>Response:</i> The Division now has a larger science capacity and Gareth is working on improving resources to enhance the Policy capacity. The opportunity is also there to do things differently with the resource the Division already has.</li> <li>• Fishermen have lost confidence in helping to produce data as nothing has been done with it over the years. Welsh Government needs to start delivering to gain the industry's confidence once again. <i>Response:</i> WG is starting to deliver – the consultation on Brexit and Our Seas is out in the public domain, work on whelks is progressing and there is the potential for a Welsh Fish Bill. There are clearly opportunities to move forward and a clear vision is required in order to put in place a long term plan.</li> <li>• Work needs to be done on the perception that all fishermen are 'bad'. The majority of fishermen care for conservation and wish to plan long term re environmental issues. There are very few bad fishermen but it was acknowledged that these can do a lot in reputational damage. Some work needs to be done to restore the public's positive perception of the fishing industry.</li> <li>• Management of the fisheries should not just be directed towards one particular species. It must be borne in mind that by increasing one species you may also increase the number of their predators. Careful thought needs to be given when trying to conserve ecosystems.</li> </ul>
3	<p><b>I) Approval of notes of meeting held on 7 February</b>  Amendment: Page 5, Number 7, Assessing Welsh Fishers – <b>change to: Assessing Welsh Fisheries</b></p> <p><b>APPROVED</b></p> <p><b>II) Progress on Actions from previous meeting</b>  Actions 2 and 3 – Escape hatches for pots. Thanks to Holly and Sean for responses. WG have identified a potential way forward on this issue and hope to be able to discuss it in the next meeting.  Action 4 – Simplified costs scheme; Jim fed back that this was reviewed positively and the system was easy to navigate. Now on social media.  Action 5 – Reporting fisheries infringements and intelligence; Barrie is developing a new system as part of the Wales Fisheries Monitoring Centre.</p>

	<p>Action 6 – Email outlining the main concerns of group; the group agreed these were a fair reflection of concerns. Points made during discussion at beginning of meeting.</p>
<p><b>4</b></p>	<p><b>Terms of Reference:</b></p> <p>The Chair noted that when the Terms of Reference and Standing Orders were drawn up, they were two completely separate documents. The group now has one Terms of Reference.</p> <p>Action 2 – The Chair will check the Terms of Reference against the standing orders to see if anything was missed out when they were amalgamated.</p> <p>The Chair asked if the members were happy with the way WMFAG is operating at present. All those present agreed they were happy with the current situation.</p> <p>Action 3 – Any comments other comments to be submitted to Nick within the next two weeks.</p> <p>It had been suggested the Chair and officials should give the Minister a joint briefing on progress. This is not possible. WMFAG as an advisory group can give advice to the Minister but civil servants may also have to provide additional advice to the Minister as part of their role. The advice may or may not support or agree with WMFAG advice.</p> <p>It was noted the Chair’s appointment came from the Minister. Therefore a distinction should be made between expert advice and that which comes from civil servants.</p> <p>Action 4 – Gareth to consider strengthening No.7 Decision Making paragraph.</p> <p>It was asked if the Aquaculture Advisory Group was still operating</p> <p>Action 5 – Find out the status of the Aquaculture Advisory Group.</p> <p>Action 6 – Consider whether the creation of an Intertidal Fisheries Advisory Group would be beneficial.</p> <p>Re membership – It was noted that Welsh Aquaculture Producers Association no longer exists.</p>
<p><b>5</b></p>	<p><b>Consultation – Brexit and Our Seas:</b></p> <p>Elen King announced the launch of the consultation on 1 May and talked through the document submitted for the meeting.</p> <p>The following points were made:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unfortunately the consultation meetings have been planned for the peak of the fishing season and unless the weather is particularly bad, many of the fishermen will be at sea. However, all those present agreed to brief their members to try to ensure attendance.</li> <li>• It was put forward that many fishermen were now ‘disengaged’ from any consultation process and may not know the consultation is live. One suggestion was to make posters and send to buyers for them to post in a prominent place.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It was mentioned that a large number of fishermen were not able to operate electronic systems and that thought was needed to reach those who would prefer to respond differently.</li> </ul>
6	<p><b>Fisheries Operations:</b></p> <p>Julian went through the Operations Branch report – points raised in discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enforcement weekly priority and tasking meetings are informed by intelligence reports.</li> <li>• Concerns expressed about lack of enforcement and that fishermen are not seeing the benefit of the large amount of money spent on the new WG boats. Tremendous amount of illegal fishing going on but no visible enforcement. Need visible regular patrols day and night. <i>Response:</i> New staff been appointed who are currently being trained. Acknowledgement that WG don't have the balance quite right at the moment and there is a need to get better at acting on intelligence. It was also acknowledged there may be a business case for more staff.</li> <li>• It was suggested that there needs to be more enforcement in harbours and checking of boats when coming in to the harbour as well as on the sea. This is particularly needed with regard to recreational fishers and anglers.</li> <li>• Illegal fishing really needs tackling with some urgency.</li> </ul>
7	<p><b>Summary of progress on key work streams:</b></p> <p>Julian presented – points made as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Priority 2 under 10m catch reporting – Some consideration needs to be made re change over from Buyers and Sellers. Too complicated regarding small scale selling of fish to local buyers. Could old and new systems be linked? <b>Action 7 – Julian to take suggestion back.</b></li> <li>• Priority 3 Inshore VMS – Concern was raised as to why fishermen should have to pay for this system. Also concerns were raised that the system was similar to being 'tagged'. However, on the positive side, it was noted that it would be a useful tool in future fisheries management.</li> <li>• <b>Whelks</b> – Michelle announced that the first measures re Whelk minimum conservation size increasing from 45mm to 55mm will be operational on 4 July. The SI had been laid and the Minister's Written Statement was imminent. A letter will be sent to all licensed fishermen. The members expressed their thanks to Colin and Michelle for all their hard work in getting this to this stage.</li> <li>• <b>Scallops</b> – Colin gave overview to developing these new measures. The flexible management mechanism work being undertaken is extremely complex but WG will give clarity to the industry as soon as they can. Gareth assured members that a lot of hard work had gone in to this priority and he would push to look for the quickest route to a solution. Members thanked Colin for his update and appreciated the work that has gone on.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Fixed administrative Penalties</b> – Michelle reported that the Sea Fishing (Penalty Notices)(Wales)(Order) 2019 and The Sea Fishing (Penalty Notices)(Wales)(Amendment) Order 2019 came into force on 22 March 2019. All members acknowledged the enormous team effort that had gone in to this and that this should be put forward as a ‘Good News Story’. Michelle also reported that they were currently finalising the guidance to go with the Orders.</li> <li>• <b>Assessing Welsh Fisheries</b> – Colin reported on this and stated there would be a consultation. He also mentioned a series of visits with mobile gear fishers, he asked that if members were not able to attend any of the meetings could they please email him with queries etc.</li> <li>• <b>Cockle Management Plan</b> – Julian reported that this work had been paused because the Project manager, Mark Tilling, was covering for Barrie John who was dealing with Brexit related work. He stressed this was an important piece of work and included an eligibility process which would also have a bearing on other fishery enforcement tools.</li> <li>• <b>European Maritime and Fisheries Fund</b> – It was acknowledged that there had been some improvement in this and some positive responses. However, it was also noted that there was no paper avenue for those in the industry still struggling with electronic technology.</li> </ul>
8	<p><b>International Policy</b></p> <p>Agreed this was a good summary of the position and another good news story. Work on exemptions – for next meeting.</p>
9	<p><b>Any Other Business:</b></p> <p><b>Climate Change etc</b> – The Chair noted the two pages relevant to fisheries were on pages 20 and 21. It was acknowledged by the group that the litter actually referred to the leisure fishing industry and that commercial fishermen would be more responsible re the loss of their equipment as this would entail them losing money. It was also noted that harbours needed to have skips for fishermen to be able to dispose of all the rubbish they were picking up and bringing to shore in an effort to keep the seas clean.</p> <p>Sean reported that NRW had recently appointed a staff member to look at Marine Litter.</p> <p>It was also reported the Welsh Federation of Sea Anglers had produced educational leaflets which had helped to reduce recreational angling litter around Skomer and Stackpole.</p> <p><b>Wales MCZ Approach</b> – Julian explained he had added this item to the agenda to highlight the work being done in Wales on MCZs and how it differed from Michael Gove’s review in England.</p> <p><b>Economic, social and environmental sustainability of UKs Marine Sectors</b> – Contact details were distributed to all members – could those interested please contact Richard Weaver. He is running this project on behalf of the UK and it would be good to be able to present a Welsh viewpoint.</p>
	<p><b>The Chair then drew the meeting to a close.</b></p>