

**Ministerial Group on Sustainable Aquaculture Interactions Working Group
Meeting to be held at Victoria Quay, Edinburgh, on 1 October 2013 at 10am**

AGENDA

- (1) Welcome, introduction and apologies
- (2) Working Group Priorities (paper 1) – for decision
- (3) Outline workstreams (papers 2 – 5) - for discussion
- (4) Update on recent interactions related developments (verbal from SSPO) – for discussion
- (5) Reporting to the Minister on 4 November (verbal from Andrew Thin) - for decision
- (6) AOCB

Paper 1 – Working Group Priorities (for decision)

The Interactions WG was established by the Minister for the Environment against a background of some debate between interested parties as to the best way to address a number of interaction related issues. At the MGSA meeting on 7 May it was agreed simply that an initial focus of the WG should be on improving dialogue at a local level, and that an appropriate work programme for the WG might be best explored initially through bilateral discussions between the WG chair, WG members and Marine Scotland.

Over the summer a number of bilateral discussions have taken place, and a great deal of detailed work has been undertaken by the SSPO, ASFB and MS in particular. The outcome has been tentative agreement on four main areas where further attention from the WG is likely to be fruitful. Significant work remains to be done on the detail of each, but in outline they are as follows –

- (1) Aquaculture operates in rural and often relatively remote locations. As an employer and purchaser of services aquaculture can have significant positive socio-economic impacts, and it can also at times act as a provider of services that would otherwise be absent or hard to source. But there is also the potential for negative socio-economic impacts, for example if poorly designed and managed farms detract from the tourism product or farm management practice impacts negatively on wild fisheries. It is suggested that a priority for the WG is therefore to foster effective mechanisms for local collaboration between aquaculture and a range of wider interests such that these interactions and impacts are managed to optimal effect.
- (2) An important mechanism for providing assurance to stakeholders in relation to potential interactions is the Code of Good Practice for Finfish Aquaculture (CoGP) that underpins all types of finfish production in Scotland. Full details of the CoGP are publicly available, but in practice public awareness is low even among key elected representatives and other core stakeholder groups. There is also a perception, notably within the ASFB, that consultation between the CoGP Management Group and key stakeholders outside the aquaculture industry is not as effective as it could be. It is suggested that a priority for the WG is therefore to help broaden awareness of the CoGP, and to foster a greater sense of inclusivity as regards consultation about its management.
- (3) The possibility that sea lice from fish farms may be having a negative impact on migrating salmonids is probably the greatest single cause of public debate and disagreement in relation to the aquaculture industry. This is exacerbated by a lack of really robust and conclusive scientific evidence as to the facts of the situation. Resolving this weakness is a very high priority for both aquaculture and wild fisheries interests, and Marine Scotland (MS) has allocated significant resources for further research in this area. It is suggested that a priority for the WG is therefore to assist MS in this work, and in particular to facilitate access by MS scientists to detailed monitoring information on sea lice levels on both wild and farmed fish.
- (4) An atmosphere of conflict between aquaculture and wild fisheries in some parts of Scotland has clouded the potential that exists for fruitful cooperation. Wild salmon stocks have decline markedly throughout the whole Atlantic region since the 1970s, and implementing robust river based recovery programmes should be an integral part of wider efforts to reverse this decline. Each Fisheries Board now has in place a management plan for its area, but some of these have been devised without the involvement of local aquaculture interests and work remains to be done if these plans are to be fully effective. It is suggested that a priority for the WG is therefore to foster a more structured and collaborative approach to this work, balancing the impetus to be gained from national leadership with the importance of securing effective practical collaboration the ground.

Members of the IWG are asked to amend/agree these four areas as an initial focus of the work of the IWG.

Paper 2 – Fostering local collaboration between aquaculture and wider interests (for discussion)

Background

Aquaculture operates in rural and often relatively remote locations where there is usually a high degree of interaction and interdependence within the local socio-economic context. Those interactions are most likely to be optimally managed, and synergies maximised, where there is effective collaboration and information sharing at a local level.

Central to this is collaboration between organisations that provide public services, and Community Planning provides the statutory framework for integrated public service delivery at a local level. But equally important is collaboration across the wider economy, recognising that aquaculture can be a highly significant element in some local situations.

Purpose and Aims

The overarching purpose of this workstream is to create a climate of mutual understanding, respect and cooperation among those with an interest in aquaculture at a local level (stakeholders), and by doing so to optimise its contribution to socio-economic development in the local area. Specifically it will aim to –

- Enable relevant local interests to collectively explore and agree how best public agencies might facilitate effective integration of aquaculture into the wider socio-economic context, and through the relevant public officials advise the local Community Planning Partnership (CPP) accordingly.
- Facilitate dialogue between aquaculture and specific local interests with a view to increasing the local socio-economic contribution of aquaculture and minimising any negative impacts.

Main Activities

It is proposed that this workstream is implemented initially on a pilot basis in Lochaber and the W Isles. It will operate primarily through the convening of local discussion forums, meeting annually or more frequently as required. Forum meetings may spawn small groups to take forward particular initiatives.

Attendance will be by invitation, and may include local aquaculture, wild fisheries, business and community interests as well as representatives of relevant public organisations. Meetings will be chaired by a local elected representative nominated by the relevant local authority. A brief note of each meeting may be prepared and circulated if deemed appropriate by the chair.

In addition to advice to the local CPP on relevant public policy issues, examples of other potential outcomes from the workstream might include direct cooperation between aquaculture and –

- tourism interests to provide visitor information, farm visits, sales of locally farmed fish.
- marine transport interests to share lifting equipment, fuel storage, repair facilities.
- wild fisheries interests to share data and collaborate on river development projects.
- schools and colleges to offer educational visits, work experience, research projects, apprenticeships.

Workstream Participants

It is suggested that this workstream is led by Marine Scotland working through the relevant local authorities. SSPO, BTA, ASSG, ASB and RAFTS are asked to encourage their members to participate fully and constructively.

Paper 3 – Fostering greater awareness and perceived inclusivity of the CoGP (for discussion)

Background

Well designed and promoted industry production standards can help to reassure stakeholders about a range of potential interactions. In Scotland the Code of Good Practice for Finfish Aquaculture (CoGP) underpins the operation of all types of finfish production, and provides the template for the farm inspection system adopted by the Fish Health Inspectorate. It includes provisions relating to food safety, fish health, biosecurity, environmental protection and fish welfare. It is managed by the CoGP Management Group whose role and functions are recognised in the Aquaculture and Fisheries (Scotland) Act 2013. Compliance is independently verified by Food Certification International Ltd (part of the Acoura Group).

Purpose and Aims

Full details of the CoGP are publicly available, but in practice few people outside the aquaculture industry have a good understanding of its provisions or *modus operandi*. If the CoGP is to provide effective reassurance to a broader range of stakeholders, then this narrow focus of awareness will need to be extended, in particular to policy makers and elected representatives in both local and national government. The core purpose of this workstream is therefore to broaden stakeholder awareness of the CoGP and the details of its operation, and as a result of this to engage a wider range of stakeholders in contributing to periodic reviews of the code conducted by the CoGP Management Group.

Concerns have been specifically raised by the ASFB about a lack of inclusivity in the management of the CoGP that leads to low levels of confidence in its operation among some wild fisheries interests. While it must be clear that no industry can have imposed on it any form of regulation other than by elected authorities, a greater level of confidence in the CoGP among wild fisheries interests would be very much in the interests of the aquaculture industry. An important associated purpose of this workstream is therefore to foster closer consultation with wild fisheries interests regarding the operation of the CoGP, and in particular to build a greater sense of confidence in the CoGP within the ASFB leadership.

Main Activities

Three interrelated strands are proposed for this workstream -

- The SSPO in collaboration with the CoGP Management Committee will produce a short stakeholder guide to the CoGP, with additional reference to other standards being operated or developed by the finfish industries. This will be circulated to all key stakeholders, including elected representatives in both central and local government. This publication will be updated periodically to reflect any major changes to the CoGP and/or to other standards that apply in the industry.
- The SSPO will provide an annual report to the MGSA on the operation of the CoGP, and will invite comment and feedback from MGSA members as may be appropriate.
- The IWG chair, jointly with the SSPO and CoGP Management Committee, will establish a structured series of discussion meetings with the ASFB leadership to explore how best to improve consultation and perceived inclusivity as referred to above.

Workstream Participants

It is suggested that this workstream be led by the SSPO and IWG chair, working with the BTA through the CoGP Management Committee, and in consultation with the ASFB and members of the MGSA as above.

Paper 4 – Facilitating access by MS scientists to detailed information on sea lice levels (for discussion)

Background

There is a continuing need to better understand the possible impacts of sea lice on migrating salmonids, both at a research level and in the context of on-going management of salmon farming and wild fisheries. This may also serve to better inform policy in the future, especially marine spatial planning policy. The interactions involved are complex, but a pressing need is for good data sets at an appropriate level of geographical resolution for both farmed and wild fish. Access to these data for scientific research is currently hampered by concerns about their possible misuse for partisan lobbying purposes.

The SSPO has recently developed a 30 area sea lice reporting mechanism for Scotland that provides data at a level of geographical aggregation that the SSPO believes will facilitate the scientific monitoring of potential impacts on wild stocks. The SSPO feels that the system is weak, however, in enabling possible linkages to be explored with equivalent data for wild fish. The Scottish Government have committed to reviewing the effectiveness or otherwise of the system through the MGSA within the current session of Parliament.

Purpose and Aims

The overarching purpose of this workstream is to improve scientific understanding of sea lice impacts on migrating wild salmonids by providing scientific access to robust data sets relevant to this work. This in turn will better inform policy and reduce tensions that have arisen around this issue. Specifically it will aim to –

- Ensure regular reporting of sea lice levels on farmed fish for each of the 30 areas referred to above, or a more detailed level of resolution as may be required by MS.
- Ensure regular reporting of sea lice levels on wild fish at comparable levels of geographical aggregation.
- Encourage data sharing at a local level between individual fish farm operators and fisheries boards.
- Monitor and review what these two data sets when taken together may be telling us, and advise on any conclusions arising from this for fish farm/wild fisheries management and policy development.
- Contribute to the Ministerial/MGSA review referred to above.

Main Activities

Part of this workstream has already been commenced through the work of the SSPO to develop a 30 area sea lice reporting mechanism. The following actions are proposed in order to build on this –

- Work with the AFSB and MS to ensure parallel sea lice reporting for wild fish.
- Establish a research programme to better understand sea lice impacts on wild out-migrating salmon juveniles and coastal sea trout.
- Establish a formal mechanism whereby requests may be made through the SSPO and AFSB for access to data at a sub area level on a confidential basis for SG led scientific purposes.
- Establishment of a scientific advisory mechanism, probably via the MGSA Science Working Group, to periodically review the data and recommend accordingly.

Workstream Participants

It is suggested that this workstream be led by Marine Scotland Science, in close collaboration with the SSPO, AFSB, RAFTS and the MGSA Science WG.

Paper 5 – Fostering a more collaborative approach to wild fisheries development (for discussion)

Background

Wild salmon stocks have declined throughout the whole Atlantic region since peak numbers were recorded in the early 1970s. This has led to active attempts to conserve stocks by managing wild fisheries and reducing the impact of recreational angling by adopting catch and release fishing. Additionally some fisheries have introduced habitat management initiatives to improve river quality, and/or have implemented a variety of stock enhancement measures to promote salmon numbers.

A small number of initiatives exist where these approaches have been used to good effect, some of which have involved active collaboration between river managers and local salmon farmers. The barriers to extending this sort of cooperation more widely are considerable however, and are both technical and cultural. Without a more effective framework on which to build this kind of initiative it is likely that potential synergies of this nature between farmed and wild fisheries will continue to be missed.

Purpose and Aims

The overarching purpose of this workstream is to systematically establish collaborative wild fisheries restoration and development programmes on a small number of rivers where the local socio-economic benefits of so doing are likely to be substantial. Specifically it will aim to –

- Identify rivers where the potential is likely to be good.
- Promote collaboration between wild fisheries managers, local communities and aquaculture companies to devise and implement realistic restoration and development plans consistent with local Fisheries Management Plans.
- Optimise the local socio-economic benefits arising from each initiative.
- Build into the planning process measures designed to better understand salmonid migration routes, timings and survival rates relevant to the river in question.
- Support this work with wider research and demonstration activity in order to promote best practice.

Main Activities

This workstream will be implemented on an incremental and (initially) on a pilot basis. Two rivers will be identified where the potential for restoration and development is believed to be significant, where there is an enthusiastic fisheries manager or fisheries trust, where the SSPO can identify supportive aquaculture companies, and where there is demonstrable community support for the initiative.

For each river an appropriate restoration and development plan will be developed, with clearly defined objectives, milestones and management arrangements, based on the existing Fisheries Management Plan. A project board will be established comprising wild fisheries, aquaculture, community and other appropriate interests to agree project specifications, assemble the resources required, and oversee implementation.

A central driver for activities in this workstream will be the need to better understand the effectiveness or otherwise of a range of potential restoration and development measures. This will in turn underpin wider research and best practice sharing activities within the workstream.

Workstream Participants

It is suggested that this workstream be led by the Marine Scotland Freshwater Fisheries Laboratory in close collaboration with AFSB, RAFTS, SSPO and BTA.