Angling Consultative Council Ireland (ACCI)

Draft Minutes of Meeting – 06.08.2024

IFI Headquarters, Citywest, Dublin 24 & Remotely via Zoom

Attendees:

Philip Nugent (DECC, Chair), Frank Gallagher (DECC), Barry Fulham (DECC), Martin McEnroe (ACI), Bob Seward (SSTRAI), Paul Byrne (IPS), Dr Cathal Gallagher (IFI), Noel Carr (FISSTA) Warren Doyle (EFSA), Fergal Bell (IFPAC), Coilm McArdle (DECC)

Agenda Item 1 – Adoption of minutes of previous meeting 25 September 2023

The minutes of the previous minutes held on 25 September 2023 were agreed and adopted

Action Point: Chair requested that all stakeholders provide input to the agenda of future meetings and reminded members that the group was not intended as a one way channel of communication.

Agenda Item 2 – Proposed new name and remit

Chairman proposed that Group be re-named as the Angling Advisory Group (AAG) and as this would more strongly reflect the Group's advisory role on inland fisheries policy matters while helping to avoid confusion in terms of the relationship between this group and the Angling Council of Ireland (ACI). Members agreed to the new title for the group and the Chair indicated that a revised terms of reference, taking account of the new title, would be circulated.

FISSTA expressed dissatisfaction with short notice of meeting and issuing of agenda. DECC indicated that a week and a half notice period had been given for the meeting in terms of a placeholder date and that required attendees had not all been in a position to confirm attendance to DECC until shortly before meeting was formally confirmed. It was agreed that in future, DECC would endeavour to circulated all meeting documentation at a minimum during the week prior to meetings of the group.

IPS put on record their dissatisfaction with progress made by the Group regarding the level of feedback to their body regarding certain matters they have raised.

EFSA proposed that the AAG should be lobbying Government Departments to promote the case of charter boats as it has been a challenging year for that cohort. EFSA also noted that angling received funding from Sport Ireland this year but a significant proportion of this funding was used to pay high insurance costs.

The Chair expressed disappointment from DECC's perspective also. Despite invitations to all group members to propose agenda items, very few suggestions had been received. For the group to be effective, members need to step forward and provide input to DECC / IFI on policy development and the future strategic direction of angling in Ireland. Too often, discussions at the group had focused on issues that did not come within these categories. The ACCI / AAG provides a unique level of access for group members to senior policy makers and the Chair asked the group to seize the opportunity on offer.

ACI gave a commitment to develop paper for discussion on empowering a greater degree of regional input in respect of inland fisheries policy.

The Chairman suggested that the Group should meet at a minimum of 4 times a year which was agreed by all.

Action Point: ACI to submit a paper for discussion at next AAG Meeting on ACI's proposed mechanisms for stakeholder input into IFI's regional operations.

Agenda Item 3 - Update on appointment of New IFI Board

Chairman informed the meeting that the new Board of IFI was appointed on 16th January 2024 consisting of Professor Tom Collins (Chair), Maria Graham, Jackie Maguire, Raymond O'Dwyer, Aebhin Cawley, Jonathan Derham, Karin Dubsky, Paul Leo Connolly & Lorraine O'Donnell (Staff Rep).

SSTRAI shared their concern about the lack of an angling representative on the Board stating that this Board would be developing and implementing policy and angling representation was important. IFI responded by saying that the Board wishes to engage with all stakeholders with regards to developing and implementing inland fisheries policy.

FISSTA expressed dissatisfaction that there was no fisheries management experience on the Board but acknowledge they may have a wide range of other important skills and experience.

The Chairman advised that the Board was appointed through an independent process and campaign managed by the Public Appointments Service with a separate campaign managed by the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Environment & Climate Action. This resulted in the appointment of a full Board with a wide range of skills, experience and competencies which will leave IFI in a very strong position to deliver on its statutory remit and put the governance issues of recent years behind it.

Agenda Item 4 – Update on IFI Governance Review

IFI stated that 11 recommendations arising from the publication of the Review at the end of 2023 were being implemented and progressed by the IFI Board and Executive on an ongoing basis and in accordance with a dedicated Action Plan.

Agenda item 5 – Update on Western lakes management Plan

An update was given on the Western Lakes Management Plan-

IFI is currently finalising its recommendations to the Minister in relation to this Plan and the related relevant byelaws – 806 and 809. This advice will be based on an analysis of the submissions received during the public consultations on the Western Lakes Management Plan, as they pertain to the conservation of fish species and the designated waterbodies. The draft Plan will be ready for Ministerial review once considered and approved by the IFI Board. IFI stated that the next board meeting would be in early Autumn.

Agenda Item 6 – Update on investigations into recent fish kills in Sligo and Wicklow

Sligo

IFI stated that there were over 1,000 salmon mortalities in Ballysadare, Co Sligo. Immediate action was taken with environmental sampling and multiple agency involvement and investigation including the Marine Institute, Uisce Eireann and the EPA. Findings were that there was an Algae Bloom and there was evidence of fish gills been damaged. Fish were stressed but there was no evidence of transmission of disease. An emergency bye Law was introduced "*The Conservation of Salmon and Sea Trout Ballysadare (Closed Rivers) Bye Law No 336, 2024*" which closed the river.

FISSTA asked whether there was pollution found in the area to which IFI responded that there was no evidence of this.

Wicklow

IFI confirmed that they had attended a fish kill of 2500 on the Aughrim River but that it was currently subject to an active investigation and no further comment could be made at this time.

Agenda Item 7 – Grant Agreement with ACI

ACCI were asked to approve and agree the grant payment of €11,095.84 to the ACI for use in accordance with the 2023 Funding Agreement between DECC and ACI.

SSTRAI proposed that the criteria for eligible qualifying expenditure should be expanded for the purposes of any 2024 Agreement. DECC advised that any Grant Agreement is subject to public financial rules and guidance but would be open to examining if the criteria may be revisited for a future agreement.

FISSTA placed on record its objection to the Group's approval of the grant payment until it was discussed by FISSTA members.

Chair and Group approved and authorised the grant payment notwithstanding the FISSTA reservation.

Action Point: FISSTA to seek further information from DECC on the Grant Agreement.

Agenda Item 8 – AOB & Date of next meeting.

EFSA raised a query about the designation process for SACs. The Chair advised that after a formal public consultation process, the Minister for Housing makes the decision as the NPWS manage Ireland's nature conservation responsibilities and are under the aegis of that Department.

FISSTA said it was a major achievement for IFI to win a judicial review regarding an aquaculture licence case in cork. IFI thanked FISSTA and said they were currently taking advice on the comprehensive and detailed report arising from the review.

The Chairman set a provisional date of 08th October 2024 for the next meeting of the Group with meeting papers to be circulated minimum one week in advance. .