

Action Points/Decisions from NIFF meeting with Minister Creed, T.D. 27th September 2017

1) Update on Inshore Strategy Development

NIFF Chair emphasised that the development of an inshore fisheries strategy was the most significant item done for the sector since the setting up of the forums and asked the Minister for his support in this endeavour. He outlined how the NIFF had come to the conclusion of the need to develop a strategy for the inshore sector to frame the work of the forums over the next number of years. The status of the strategy was briefly outlined. Consultants have been engaged and are developing a work plan and the next meeting of the steering group is set for the 9th October. Minister Creed stated how important it is to have engagement with the sector and that the development of a strategy was a very important logical next step. The other advantage of developing the inshore strategy at the present time is that EMFF funding is available which will increase the possibility of achieving the work plan set out in the strategy.

Action Point: NIFF Chair asked the Minister if he would launch the public consultation on the Inshore Strategy when the time comes possibly January-February 2018. He indicated that he would be happy to do so.

2) NIFA and NIFF Memorandum of Understanding

The NIFF Chair explained the background to the setting up of the NIFA to the Minister and their progress to date. The NIFA CLG is a company limited by guarantee and was set up as a legal entity to support the NIFF. There are only 8 members at present and they have applied for funding for a management consultant under the EMFF to help the NIFA grow. When they have a formal application ready they will open the NIFA up to new members. The NIFF chair informed the Minister that an MOU between NIFF and the NIFA was agreed at the NIFF pre-meeting that morning. He explained practical examples of how NIFA could utilise funding through the EMFF to get work done for the NIFF that the state agencies cannot help the NIFF with. The Minister feels it is a positive step and it is important to roll out the new organisation slow and steadily.

Action Point: NIFA hopes to have a formal application process seeking new members early in the New Year and will keep the NIFF and the Minister updated on its progress.

3) Update on v-notching review

There was a need expressed towards the end of last year that the V-notching programme which has been running for a number of years needed to be reviewed to establish if it was the best use of EMFF funding. It was hoped that this review would be complete before the end of 2017. NIFF chair explained to the Minister that it is unfortunately not completed as yet and the NIFF are looking for an extension to the existing statutory instrument provisions regarding landing lobsters over the maximum size for v-notching into 2018. Multiple NIFF members including the Chair expressed the view that any legislative change taking effect mid-season could potentially cause confusion within Industry potentially resulting in compliance issues. MI representative stated that the technical report will be ready in the week or so and that he hopes to present the technical report to the IMG and RIFFs for discussion between now and Christmas and come up with proposals/recommendations.

Action point: NIFF has asked the Minister for at least a three month extension of the existing statutory instrument provisions regarding landing lobsters over the maximum size for v-notching into 2018 in order to have a good debate and discussion on the review before anything is

changed. The Minister is disposed to the idea of the extension to enable this to happen and will revert to the NIFF in due course.

4) Proposal to introduce a MRCS or Velvet Crab

This measure originally developed by the West RIFF with advice from the Marine Institute was brought to the NIFF and to the Minister for consideration last year and a public consultation was held at the end of 2016. At the last NIFF meeting the NIFF requested that the full submissions to the public consultation be released as they wanted to check a number of anomalies in the summary of submissions. The full public consultation submissions were released online the day before this meeting. Having reviewed these submissions the NIFF felt that their position was as valid as ever and wish to have this measure brought in. The Minister noted that industry is taking hold of these conservation measures and was very happy to announce new regulations to introduce a Minimum Conservation Reference Size (MCRS) of 65mm for velvet crab that will apply to Irish sea-fishing boats for the 1st January 2018. He acknowledged that it is unusual for the industry to put restrictions on itself. The WRIFF representative stated that he is delighted to go back to his RIFF with this news and the NIFF very much welcome the new regulation. They also feel that the NGO's will welcome this measure.

Action Point: NIFF chair to issue press release on the new measure.

5) Proposal to increase MLS of Brown Crab from 130mm to 140mm nationally

This is a similar measure to the velvet crab proposal in that it will help future proof and safeguard the species going forward. All the RIFFs support this measure. The MI also supports from a biological perspective in that it will bring us closer to MSY. MI noted that recruitment is OK at the moment but in some areas fishing effort is high. Long term it is felt that this measure will help protect the stock.

Action point: The NIFF have requested that the Minister brings this measure to full public consultation within the next 4-6 weeks in order to have the consultation process complete by early in 2018. The Minister agreed with this approach.

6) Update on Brexit, Sea Fisheries Amendment Bill and proposed UK withdrawal from the London Fisheries Convention.

The Minister updated the NIFF on the impact of Brexit on the fishing sector and the United Kingdom's stated intention to withdraw from the London Fisheries Convention, which governs access to waters inside the 12 mile limit. The Minister outlined how, although the implications of Brexit are far from clear, his department have been forging alliances with other impacted EU member states and the EU's negotiation team to ensure that fisheries are not isolated in the overall negotiations. He noted that progress is slow and that the negotiations are still deeply involved with other issues even though it was hoped to start trade talks in October but that this is unlikely to happen. They hope that enough progress will be made by December to start on trade issues. Ireland also has the North/South Border issue to contend with and we have to ensure that the Good Friday agreement is adhered to. The onus is now on the UK to come up with a solution. The best solution for us in Ireland would be if the UK stays in the Customs Union. The Minister explained to the NIFF that he has a dedicated Brexit and international trade unit within his department.

He also briefed the NIFF about the UK seeking to withdraw from the London Fisheries Convention, which governs access to waters inside the 12 mile limit and which predates the EU CFP. This is also complicated by last years' Supreme Court ruling regarding voisinage (the

arrangement allowing reciprocal access to Irish and Northern Ireland waters from the 1960s that now has to be legislated for). Published legislation on voisinage has been introduced in the Seanad where there has been considerable resistance to it. The UK are insisting that when they leave the EU they would take back their 6-12 mile zone in Area VIa waters in particular. Because the UK has stated that a transitional period would be desirable they would not be able to do so till this period was completed. NIFF briefed the Minister on their concerns including: The ripple effect - larger vessels displaced into inshore waters if the UK take back their 6-12 mile zone which would have knock on effect on smaller inshore vessels and diversification of larger vessels into non quota species. NIFF also expressed their concerns regarding the route to market as many lorries of shellfish transit through the UK to gain access to the European markets. The Minister noted that Voisinage arrangement situation may be further complicated by the lack of an executive in Northern Ireland. The UK have stated that would like to keep the Voisinage arrangement but without London Fisheries Convention they legally may not be able to so. Voisinage is provided for in the CFP through reciprocal arrangements between neighbouring states.

Action Point: The issue of Brexit, London Fisheries Convention and Voisinage arrangements to stay on the NIFF agenda for updates from the Minister.

7) Saltee Islands and Hook head Natura Measures

Minister Creed informed the NIFF that he had signed the Hook Head and Saltee Island Fisheries Natura Declaration, which will restrict fishing using dredge and trawling gear for scallops fishing to protect certain sensitive habitats in Natura 2000 conservation sites of the southeast coast of Wexford from the 30th November 2017. The declaration also sets down monitoring and notification requirements for boats using dredge and trawling gear within these habitats. These gears and monitoring measures were developed through industry members working with the MI and BIM to address risk in sensitive habitats in the Hook Head and Saltee Islands SAC. Industry representatives included individual scallop fishermen, members of the Southeast RIFF and representatives of the ISEFPO who met with the MI and BIM throughout 2015 and 2016 to develop risk mitigation proposals for the fishery. A public consultation on the resulting mitigation response plan was carried out in 2016. This shows a good relationship between industry, science and the DAFM working together in Natura 2000 sites. MI noted that calculating risk in some areas is difficult because you don't know what levels of activities are taking place.

8) Proposal to increase MLS for Razor Clams from 100mm to 125mm in the North Irish Sea

This proposal from the NE RIFF is another technical conservation proposal brought to the NIFF. There is a clear mandate from industry in the area supporting this proposal with support from the RIFFs also. The MI have completed a stock survey in 2017 and note that this additional measures will remove about 20% of the stock from the legal catch. Discarding is expected to increase. The measure on its own is insufficient to protect the economic viability of the razor clam fishery in the NE and possibly the sustainability of the current landings. The NE RIFF chair gave the Minister a brief history as to why they were bringing this proposal forward. He explained the price differential between razor clams at 100mm (5c each) and with those around 125mm which would be worth more than twice as much per piece. A fully grown razor >200mm could be worth in excess of a €1 per piece but given their slow growth and number of vessels involved in the fishery large razors are becoming harder to catch. The smaller razors are going

to Spain and the bigger ones go to China and Hong Kong where there is more traceability. It was also noted that the Northeast Razor Fishermen's Association suggested in the original proposal that some vessels were deliberately targeting small razors in areas of high density in order to catch their 600 kg quota in a shorter time. Concerns were raised that these vessels could damage stocks but it was also mentioned that the vast majority of vessels do not fish in areas with small razors and discard mortality is probably quite low given the quick return of razors in shallow waters. Economic data, particularly catch value by size range, would make a good addition to this proposal as it would demonstrate that this proposal would effectively raise the economic value of the fishery (the value per recruit). These measures could eliminate the taking of juvenile razors and targeting of areas where juveniles are abundant. It was noted that there were additional pressure on the NE Stock due to the closure of the Rosslare bed and displacing razor vessels to the North Irish Sea.

Action Point: NE RIFF/NIFF wish to have the proposal brought forward for public consultation. DAFM are to examine pending advice from Marine Institute and come back to the NIFF. The Minister will consult with the MI and IMG to see where we will take this proposal.

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