

Action Points/Decisions from NIFF meeting with Minister Creed, T.D. 30th January 2019

1) Presentation of Inshore Strategy

NIFF chair welcomed all to the meeting and thanked Minister Creed for taking the time to meet with them. She opened proceedings by making a presentation on the Irish Inshore Fisheries Strategy to Minister Creed. After describing the background to the Inshore Strategy and how it was developed, she outlined the numbers that had responded to the Inshore Strategy consultation and explained the themes and actions that had been developed. The presentation concluded by outlining how the implementation of the strategy should be achieved. The Chair then asked the Minister if he would be willing to launch the Strategy and give it a national profile for the industry.

The Minister thanked the NIFF Chair for her presentation and said he would be delighted to launch the Strategy. He welcomed Vera O'Donovan, as the BIM lead in charge of the implementation of the strategy. He emphasised that this is a great opportunity to improve the visibility of the sector in the 6nm zone, up the profile of the sector and develop it's potential. He could envisage the NIFF developing as the "go to" organisation for items relevant to the inshore sector.

He spoke about the recently launched Capital Investment Programme for Fishery Harbour Centres and Local Authority Harbour development and hoped that the local authorities would engage with the inshore sector going forward to discuss with them which piers need work, what needs to be done etc. Implementing the Strategy will take time, as it hasn't been done before but he hoped that the Inshore Fisheries Forums (NIFF & RIFFs) would be the "go to" organisation for this. He hoped that the Inshore Fisheries Forums would become the voice of the inshore sector showing where the sector is going in the future. He congratulated everyone involved but warned it would not be without its challenges. He also stated that he would be happy to set a date sooner than later to launch the Inshore Fisheries Strategy.

2) Outcome of trawling inside 6nm

The NIFF chair thanked the Minister for the decision following the public consultation on trawling for vessels over 18m in length from inside 6nm. She told him that the inshore sector was pleased with the outcome of the consultation. She emphasised that it was the right move in the right direction for the sector. The Minister explained that the consultation brought a lot of issues to a head, but he feels his decision was the right one, and it is important to follow through working together collaboratively. We have already seen good progress on conservation issues and hopefully this decision will lead to local economic opportunities for the sector. The NIFF chair feels we may not see the benefits immediately but hopefully will in the long term. She asked, "what happens next"? The Minister stated that his decision is the law now and some in the fisheries sector are not happy with his decision. The inshore sector needs to take ownership and promote the NIFF to the same status as the Producer Organisations. The NIFF chair stated that this is already happening as we achieve more and gain more credibility and we now have a road map of where we are going through the strategy. It was noted that the inshore sector can get more value out of the catch and that same catch can support one large vessel or many small vessels and their families and coastal communities. The Minister emphasised the need to get the inshore

sectors' voice heard more strongly in the marine press and that the NIFF need to play a bigger role in making this happen.

3) Conservation Measure for Brown crab

The Minister announced that he has approved an increase to the minimum conservation reference size for brown crab. This new conservation measure, which was initiated by members of the SE RIFF, will increase the minimum size of brown crab that can be landed by Irish sea-fishing boats from ICES VI and VII to 140mm. Then Minister invited the members of the NIFF and the marine agencies to give their views on an appropriate lead-in period for the measures. NIFF members would like to see the measure in within a month. **Action Point:** BIM are to get a gauge with the new measurement produced and made available to the industry within weeks. It was decided that the start date of the Statutory Instrument should be the 1st March 2019 and that it should be flagged to industry now that it is coming into force from the 1st March.

4) Update on present Inshore Fisheries Forum proposals

a. New conservation measure on Crayfish (*Palinurus elephas*)

This proposal originated from the NW Kerry Shellfish Co-op and was brought to the NIFF by the SWRIFF. The MI representative gave a brief overview of this proposal to the Minister. They are looking for an SI to give legal protection to marked and tagged crayfish in a similar manner to the lobster v-notching programme. The RIFFs are unanimously in favour of this proposal. This proposal will have little economic impact on the fishermen and consideration will also be given to introducing a reward for reporting the capture of tagged and notched crayfish. DAFM brought up the issue of tangle nets and said it would be easier to bring this proposal forward if it was just for pot fishing. BIM noted that there is a ban on tangle net fishing in Tralee Bay and that there is hard eye pot fishing for spider crab in Tralee Bay but that these caught very few crayfish. The crayfish stock is low, so it is important to include crayfish caught by both tangle nets and pots. The NIFF are ready for this proposal to go to the Minister. DAFM stated that they need to give it due consideration before it is brought to the Minister due to the problem of tangle nets. Biodiversity issues with respect to certain species of sharks, skates and rays have been a particular problem in the Kerry area over the last number of years. The proposal might need to be balanced in some way or it might not be possible to do it on its own. **Action Point:** The DAFM to consider the proposal and come back to the NIFF.

b. Limits on number of scallop dredges per vessel inside 6 nm

NE RIFF Chair brief the Minister on the history of this proposal which was first developed in 2017, recently amended by the MI to include amendments from the RIFFs and again presented and recirculated to the RIFFs for consideration. He informed the Minister that there was unanimous support for this proposal amongst the RIFFs. It was noted that it is not viable to have inshore scallop fishing with large vessels coming inside the 6nm zone and that this proposal compliments the Minister's decision in regard to trawling inside 6nm. The proposal includes monitoring measures using GPS trackers to help monitor the fishing. There was a lot

of work done to see the economic effects of one measure over another and the proposal outlines which vessels and how they may be affected by the proposal. It is also consistent with the Natura Declaration for the Saltees SAC. At the present time 95-97% of the fishing grounds for scallop that the larger vessels exploit are in UK waters. However, Brexit could change everything and until Brexit is resolved we will have to hold this proposal for the moment. This led onto a discussion on a European proposal that all fishing vessels, including those <12m, will have to have VMS. There is a strong push at European level and we will have to look and see how this proposal develops. One of the NIFF members asked how long VMS data would be retained. Under GDPR personal data can be retained for 7 years. If the personal data was extracted from the VMS data, it could be held for longer. We are still a bit away from these regulations however a lot of genuine fishermen would like to see VMS coming in. **Action Point:** The proposal is on hold until Brexit is resolved.

c. [Derogation from Prohibition on landing of lobsters over 127mm in Donegal waters east of 8 degrees west.](#)

This proposal was discussed at the NIFF pre-meeting in the morning, however as not all RIFFs had the opportunity to consider it the proposal was just being brought to the Minister attention for his information. **Action Point:** As the proposal overlaps with Ireland/Northern Ireland boundary it was decided to halt the proposal until after Brexit.

5) [Blacksod Bay fisheries and Natura 2000 management](#)

The Minister informed the meeting that there has been significant damage to sensitive habitats in the Blacksod Bay Natura 2000 site which is very damaging to the reputation of the inshore sector. The sensitive habitats concerned, primarily biogenic serpulid worm reefs, have been effectively destroyed. The DAFM explained that the NPWS contracted an environmental consultancy to dive the site and to carry out the 6 year Article 17 assessment of the site. The consultants provided photographic evidence of significant damage to the site. As the onus is on the Minister to protect these areas, protection was put in place under the Natura Declaration, however it is clear that these protections were not sufficient. The Minister explained that he may need to put additional measures in place. The NW RIFF chair explained that as soon as the damage to the site was brought to the attention of the NW RIFF they arranged to meet with the local oyster co-op and other vessels fishing dredges in the site. The co-op controls one of the areas in the site and there is a wild fishery in the another. The vessels fishing in these area under co-op control have no trackers but are willing to use them. The NW RIFF have also spoken to other fishermen in the area and explained that they may all require trackers now. Those involved in the Scallop fishery have iVMS where they have stated that they are fishing for scallops. The NW RIFF arranged to meet with the IFI who are responsible for the management of the oyster fisheries and had a positive meeting. This significant damage to a Natura site opens up the issue of compliance and further classification. The Minister noted that the NIFF must state that this damage is unacceptable and that some of the damage may never be recoverable. DAFM stated that there are other sites with similar designations and sensitive habitats. Detractors may say that there should be no fishing at all in these areas. The Minister reiterated that he would have to act even if he thought it was unpalatable. If you engage in illegal activity you will continue to do so. The EU

already have a low opinion of Ireland as far as in protecting these designated sites from damage. The Castlemaine site is a good example of co-operation between industry and DAFM. DAFM don't just have to look at the damage to Blacksod but all the Natura 2000 sites with special designation. **Action Point:** NWRIFF to see if they can address the issue and come up with a solution and see if vessels fishing in the area can make a commitment that will provide protection in the future. They have asked DAFM if they can be given some time to come back to them with a solution. The Minister said that at European Commission level that there is not a great deal of time to come up with a solution.

6) Wind turbines on the Irish Sea.

SE RIFF member brought up the issue of wind farms along the Irish Sea Coast from Dublin to Rosslare. He explained that he was recently told by his local harbour master that there were more wind farm turbines being erected on the Arklow bank. He explained that at the present time there are 6 wind turbines, but that he had seen on a map in the MSP Baseline report that the area around the Arklow bank is in production (more wind turbines) and he is very worried about losing fishing grounds. This is further compounded by the fact that the wind farm company said they legally could remove any fishing gear left on site. The Harbour Master informed him that there has been a lot of exploration in the past year. The fishermen feel that their only option is legal recourse.

The DAFM explained that the company had gone through the statutory planning process back in 2002 and they ended up with a 99-year lease for the area around the Arklow Bank which covers an area 20km in length and 5km wide. Only 6 turbines were built back when they first received their planning permission then but there is more going ahead now. As a condition of their planning the developers of the wind turbines were to appoint a fisheries liaison officer. He suggested that the fishermen need to approach the company and ask to speak with their fisheries liaison officer and try to work with them to resolve the issue. He explained that this is not a function of the DAFM to engage in the planning process. BIM noted that at one of the recent MSP workshop in Dublin on the MSP Baseline report that it was suggested by a speaker in relation to wind farms that as environmental compliance wasn't as stringent in 2002 as it is now and that they may have to revisit the planning status of these turbines.

Action Point: The SE and NE RIFFs to engage with the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government and the company involved in the wind turbines and seek engagement.

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