

## SCOTTISH ENVIRONMENT PROTECTION AGENCY

**SEPA Finfish Aquaculture Advisory Panel****Minutes of Meeting: 8<sup>th</sup> December 2020**

10.00 – 12:30

**Microsoft Teams****Attendees:**

**Coastal communities** (Coast/Coastal Communities Network); **CoSLA** (The Highland Council); **Environmental NGO** (Salmon & Trout Conservation, Scottish Environment LINK - Marine Conservation Society, Scottish Wildlife Trust); **finfish buyer** (Sainsburys); **finfish producers** (British Trout Association, MOWI, Scottish Salmon Company, Scottish Salmon Producers Organisation); **Marine Scotland**; **NatureScot**; **Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA)**; **Wild fisheries** (Fisheries Management Scotland)

**Apologies: Crown Estate Scotland, Finfish buyer** (Aquascot); **Inshore Fisheries Group** (West Coast Regional Inshore Fisheries Group);

**Agenda**

<b>1. Welcome/Introduction</b>		
	The Chair welcomed new members to the group from Scottish Wildlife Trust and Scottish Salmon Producers Organisation (SSPO).	
<b>2. Actions from the last meeting</b>		
	A representative of the Coastal Communities Network requested that where a matter of fact is being discussed SEPA (or the relevant agency) state the facts to clarify matters for the group.	
<b>Action</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Update</b>
SEPA and SSPO to explore inclusion of impact of residue on shellfish in upcoming azamethiphos study	Open	Discussions have begun but are at preliminary stages.
Chair and SSPO to agree how to engage the Panel regarding the SSPO blueprint	Close	On today's agenda
SEPA to schedule the following at future meetings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. SSPO blueprint</li> <li>b. Fish escapes and regulation</li> <li>c. Medicine discharge; assessment, control, treatment and cumulative impacts</li> <li>d. Further innovations update</li> <li>e. Spatial planning</li> <li>f. How SEPA are applying new regulatory regime</li> </ul>	Open	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a - b. On today's agenda</li> <li>c – d. To be scheduled</li> <li>e - f. Agreed to cover at the next meeting</li> </ul>

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SEPA to explore communications with stakeholders regarding the use of SEPA position statements	Open	Targeted communications have been undertaken, however a further public communication is being considered
<b>3.</b>	<b>Fish Escapes and regulation</b>	
<p>A representative of finfish producers provided information about recent fish escapes from a finfish farm in Kilbrannan Sound.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 20 pens were affected.</li> <li>• Moorings broke and the structures rotated and moved during a storm.</li> <li>• 48,000 fish escaped, with 14,000 of those recovered.</li> <li>• The operator responded quickly to secure the pens using vessels and staff.</li> <li>• Use of gillnets to capture escaped fish was considered but Fisheries Management Scotland (FMS) advised against it under the circumstances.</li> </ul> <p>The representative outlined the operator's policy to use offshore waters due to socioeconomic and environmental benefits; these sites are away from sensitive areas and in an area that can accommodate the discharges. The operator told the Panel that escapes at other sites in 2019 and 2020 were due to equipment failure and escapes have been reduced by two-thirds since 2000 whilst the number of fish farmed has significantly increased over the same period.</p> <p>The representative of FMS confirmed that the operator had acted quickly and maintained appropriate communication throughout the incident.</p> <p>In response to the incident the operator:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Put in place a genetic study with FMS to assess the number of farmed fish in the rivers and breeding.</li> <li>• Strengthened policy to require infrastructure to be engineered to withstand a 1 in 250-year storm.</li> <li>• Reviewed all sites with offshore wave height and introduced new anchors and moorings.</li> <li>• Begun to specify moorings for sites before tendering.</li> </ul> <p>The fish were around 1-year at the time of escape so will spawn around October 2021 so full impact will not be known until then.</p> <p>A representative of the Coastal Communities Network expressed concern over what they felt could be a profound impact on wild salmon, telling the Panel that 170,000 farmed fish escaped over 3 incidents, and this represented 50 % of the wild salmon population. The representative expressed support for large fines used in Chile for fish escapes. The Chair noted fines are not within the remit of this group as they are a matter for Parliament.</p> <p>The representative of the Coastal Communities Network further expressed concern that SEPA policy is encouraging farms to locate in exposed areas where equipment is not sufficient to prevent escapes. A representative of SEPA confirmed that SEPA's regulatory decisions are based on assessment of the capacity of the environment to accommodate waste discharges. It is the operator's duty to ensure structures can contain the fish.</p>		

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	<p>A representative of SEPA confirmed that SEPA have asked to join the technical standards board, which is reviewing the technical standard on fish containment and will be considering requirements suited to exposed locations.</p> <p>The representative of the Coastal Communities Network advocated for a better understanding of the environments capacity to assimilate the waste; taking into account cumulative impacts of organic waste and pesticides.</p> <p>A representative of the finfish producers noted that offshore sites can have lower medicines usage and the deposition model, NewDepomod, indicates that there is not an issue regarding accumulation of organic materials around the pens.</p> <p>A representative of FMS noted that biomass increases began to be authorised before the new regulatory regime was fully implemented and expressed a desire to see completion of implementation before further increases are authorised.</p> <p>A representative of Salmon and Trout Conservation expressed concern that not all fish escapes are reported.</p> <p><b>ACTION:</b> Marine Scotland and Salmon and Trout Conservation representatives to discuss out-with the meeting.</p> <p><b>ACTION:</b> SSPO to explore wither industry standards for equipment will change in line with strengthened policies introduced by the operator of the Kilbrannan Sound farm.</p> <p><b>ACTION:</b> SEPA and Marine Scotland to look at data published on Scotland's Aquaculture Website to ensure users can see the licence holder and operator of site (currently can only see the former).</p> <p>A representative of FMS confirmed that a wider lessons-learned exercise to put in place escape response plans is on the FMS agenda.</p>
<b>4.</b>	<b>SSPO Blueprint for the sector</b>
	<p>A representative of the SSPO highlighted the main aims of the SSPO blueprint for the sector, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A focus on people; recognising that local communities are important to the sector, which will build on this relationship</li> <li>• Continue to produce healthy and nutritious food for domestic use and export</li> <li>• Innovation – The sector will learn from what is happening internationally, developing the ability to innovate, test and export.</li> <li>• Recognising and tacking environmental footprint of the sector</li> <li>• The sector wants to see the regulatory world reformed and streamlined.</li> </ul> <p>The blueprint outlines aspirations and the next steps are to work out the detail of how it will be delivered. SSPO team and member companies will run workshops to produce a plan as well as baseline measures which will be reported on annually.</p> <p>A representative of the finfish producers pointed to work which has already started; to develop a new framework for managing wildfish and sealice interactions, involving SEPA and other stakeholders.</p>

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	<p>A representative of the Coastal Communities Network agreed local communities should be considered and highlighted the desire of local fishermen to know that the fish and crustaceans they catch/gather will not be impacted by finfish farms. He also expressed a desire to see larger scale assessment of impacts of fish farms and spatial planning before further expansion of the sector is undertaken.</p> <p>A representative of finfish producers pointed to significant assessments already undertaken before any expansion is undertaken involving permissions from multiple agencies.</p> <p>Salmon and Trout Conservation expressed a desire to see evidence of progress as the blueprint is implemented.</p> <p>The group expressed an interest in hearing more about progress on new technologies such as semi-closed systems e.g. site location, use of captured waste.</p> <p>A representative of finfish buyers noted an expectation for an increase in demand for farmed fish as an affordable, sustainable product. He expressed a desire to see more innovation and support for companies to take this forward, adopting a science and data-based approach.</p> <p>Marine Scotland pointed to the Sustainable Aquaculture Innovation Centre set up in Stirling to deliver on fish health and other key themes. The Centre has already delivered millions of pounds of innovation.</p> <p><b>ACTION:</b> Marine Scotland will provide an update on investment by the centre at a future meeting.</p>
<b>5.</b>	<b>Updates</b>
	<p><b>CAR Permit transfers</b> From June 2019; any application or variation granted has been brought into the new framework. Preparations are well progressed for bringing all existing licences into the new framework. We are hoping to start issuing draft permits at the start of 2021.</p> <p><b>Charging scheme consultation</b> 13 responses were received; 9 from the sector and 4 from other stakeholders. SEPA are finalising the proposal to preparing to go to Scottish Ministers for approval.</p>
<b>6.</b>	<b>AOB</b>
	<p><b>Monitoring</b> SEPA are assessing how both SEPA and operators undertaken seabed monitoring.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is hoped that environmental DNA monitoring will be in use from 2021.</li> <li>• SEPA are also looking at data required to assess compliance at sites and will work with the sector over next few months.</li> </ul>