

SCOTTISH ENVIRONMENT PROTECTION AGENCY
SEPA Finfish Aquaculture Advisory Panel

Minutes of Meeting: 27th April 2022

14:00-15:15

Microsoft Teams

Attendees:

Coastal communities (Coast/Coastal Communities Network); **CoSLA** (The Highland Council); **Crown Estate Scotland, Environmental NGO** (Scottish Environment LINK - Fidra); **finfish buyer** (Aquascot); **finfish producers** (British Trout Association, MOWI, Salmon Scotland); **Fisheries Groups** (Fisheries Management Scotland); **Marine Scotland**; **NatureScot**; **Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA)**; **Scottish Government**

Apologies: **Environmental NGO** (Scottish Wildlife Trust); **finfish buyer** (Sainsburys); **finfish producers** (Scottish Salmon Company); **Fisheries Groups** (Salmon & Trout Conservation; West Coast Regional Inshore Fisheries Group);

1.	Welcome/Introduction
	The chair welcomed panel members
2.	Finfish Advisory Panel and future work
	<p>The chair outlined the purpose of the Finfish Advisory Panel (FFAP); as a way to engage with a wide range of sector stakeholders regarding the work SEPA plans to undertake in relation to regulation of the sector.</p> <p>The chair welcomed feedback from members on how the panel is currently working and what changes members would recommend. This will inform a SEPA decision on whether the panel will continue, and any necessary changes to the way it is set up and run.</p> <p>A representative of SEPA provided an overview of the key areas of implementation and development work which SEPA is considering in 2022/23 and outlined the ongoing importance of seeking diverse feedback on proposed work.</p> <p>The panel provided a range of feedback including:</p> <p>Support for the panel</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A representative of the Coastal Communities Network (CCN) noted that the FFAP is the only forum where regulators are able to hear diverse opinions on the sector, thus it is very valuable to community groups which share the use of marine assets with industry. The representative described a perceived culture of secrecy between regulators and the industry around decision making which the panel helps to address. • A representative of CoSLA noted the panel's value in obtaining a wide range of views for SEPA to work with; particularly in development work. The representative suggested the meetings are best used to share ideas. Discussing the detail and driving work forward is done in another forum.

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- A representative of finfish producers welcomed the FFAP as a forum to discuss whether the aquaculture sector is acceptable in terms of environmental and social impacts.

Issues with the way the panel works:

- A representative of finfish producers expressed a preference for regulators and operators to work directly with each other and suggested that including other stakeholders such as NGOs causes distraction due to the number of differing views. The representative believed that the time of fish farm Managing Directors is too valuable to spend it defending their position at these meetings.
- A representative of finfish producers questioned the value of the current membership which results in SEPA asking lots of people who dislike aquaculture what should be done about aquaculture.
- A representative of finfish producers noted there is no representation from community groups which support aquaculture, and suggested we invite chambers of commerce to represent communities which rely on aquaculture for employment.

Ways the panel could work better:

- It was noted by a number of panel members that the panel, on occasion, results in 'intellectual tussles'. A representative of the finfish produced was content to have these discussions, provided they remained within the scope of available scientific evidence.
- A representative of CNN felt that when there is disagreement in what science says, SEPA should step in.
- A representative of the Sustainable Aquaculture Innovation Centre (SAIC) noted that SEPA should be clear on the purpose of the meeting and what the role of each participant is (i.e. what their contribution is). SEPA should also be clear on what they want to get out of the meeting and the purpose of consulting the panel (e.g. are the panel being asked what should be done, how it should be done or to consent to a proposal). Each member should have relevant expert knowledge, competence and capability.
- A representative of CCN noted the need for smaller targeted meetings in addition to the strategic meetings. It was noted that these already take place but may be too short or piecemeal.

ACTION: Members to provide any other feedback to SEPA over the next 2 weeks and SEPA will collate and take a decision as to how the panel will be taken forward.

Other feedback:

- A representative of finfish producers noted that SEPA need to be clear on their role as regulator and not encroach on the Scottish Government role of setting the regulations.
- A representative of finfish producers felt that the proposed 2022/23 work should be put on hold until the Minister announces how the recommendations of the Griggs review will be taken forward. The representative also expressed a wish for the work on the compliance assessment scheme to be accelerated.
- There is not a one size fits all approach between operators; trout farms and salmon farms have different requirements for licencing and sea lice etc.
- A representative of CoSLA noted that the presentation outlined a lot of work for the coming year and it would need to be broken down into packages to successfully move forward.

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3.	Introduction to SAIC work on sustainable aquaculture	
	<p>The representative from the Sustainable Aquaculture Innovation Centre (SAIC) provided an overview of the organisation's role, aims and examples of projects delivered.</p> <p>The presentation is available on the SEPA Website.</p>	
4.	Actions from the last meeting	
	Action	Status Update
	SEPA to schedule the following at future meetings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Update on investment by SAIC b. Further innovations update c. Detailed timeline of 2022/23 development work 	Open a - On today's agenda - Close b & c - To be scheduled
	Salmon Scotland to share the report from the improved containment working group regarding industry standards for equipment when it is available	Open A publication date for this is not yet known [post meeting update: an updated Scottish Technical Standard is currently with Marine Scotland]
	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)	Close Marine Scotland representative explained that this data is available on Scotland's aquaculture website via the data provided by the Fish Health Inspectorate
	SEPA to circulate new framework template once finalised	Open This will be done in coming weeks
	SEPA to arrange a more detailed session on DNA monitoring methods for relevant stakeholders once procedure for collection, storage and extraction has been defined	Close Workshop arranged for Wed 18 May and invite circulated to FFAP members, operators and labs.
5.	AOB	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A representative of CCN requested more transparency on what is discharged from pens and the impact of fish farm discharges, including fuller publication of data. • A representative from finfish producers suggested that aquaculture is more transparent than other sectors such as agricultural farming and noted that operators report medicine usage to SEPA quarterly and this is published on Scotland's Aquaculture website. • A representative of SEPA noted that SEPA are looking to add hydrogen peroxide to the published data. • A representative of Fisheries Management Scotland noted that regulators use different references to identify fish farms making data comparison difficult. It was suggested regulators adopt a common unique reference number for each site to link data together. 	

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6.	Next meeting
	TBC