

FISHERIES WORKING GROUP

MICROSOFT TEAMS MEETING

WEDNESDAY 22 SEPTEMBER 2021

Present: Councillors I Sutherland (Chair), A Allan, C C Buchan, M Findlater, D Beagrie, P Johnston, M Roy and D Mair

Apologies: None

Officers: Paul Macari, Head of Service, Planning and Economy, Derek McDonald, Industry Support Executive (Rural and Maritime); John Grant, Team Manager (Public Health), Alistair Reid, Team Manager, Economic Development & Protective Services; Martin Brebner, Team Manager – Economic Strategy & Policy, Jamie Wilkinson, Investments & Projects Executive

In attendance: David Anderson, CEO, AFPO and Jimmy Buchan, CEO, SSA.

1. DECLARATION OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

The Chair noted an interest in item 8 but not to the extent that a formal declaration was required. There were no other declarations of interest relating to the Councillors' Code of Conduct,

2. PUBLIC SECTOR EQUALITY DUTY

In making decisions on the undernoted items of business, the Working Group **agreed**, in terms of Section 149 of the Equality Act, 2010:-

- (1) to have due regard to the need to:-
 - (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation;
 - (b) advance equality of opportunity between those who share a protected characteristic and persons who do not share it; and
 - (c) foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
- (2) where an Equality Impact Assessment was provided, to consider its contents and take those into account when reaching their decision.

3. MINUTE OF MEETING OF 20 MAY 2021

The Minute was **agreed** as a correct record.

4. MATTERS ARISING

The three action points from the last meeting were actioned or covered in the agenda.

5. PRESENTATION: AN OVERVIEW OF FISHING OPPORTUNITIES IN 2021 FOR THE SCOTTISH DEMERSAL FLEET by DAVID ANDERSON, CEO, ABERDEEN FISH PRODUCERS ORGANISATION

Mr Anderson opened by reviewing the UK/EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA) and its consequences relating to fisheries and noted that whilst the pelagic sector had benefitted, demersal fishermen were experiencing a very difficult year due to the terms of TCA including loss of the Hague Preference Agreement, the absence of quota swaps with EU Producer Organisations (POs) for the first 5 months of the year and no access to Norwegian or Faroese waters. Apparent TCA benefits worth £148M - for the likes of plaice and dover sole - had been described by industry as 'paper fish' (minimal market value). The importance of North Sea cod as a high value catch was highlighted, but fishing opportunities were very scarce due to scientific advice on the stock which appeared to be at odds with what fishermen were experiencing on the fishing grounds, particularly around Shetland, resulting in 'choke' species concerns for the remainder of 2021. While Haddock quota was abundant, the lack of access to Norwegian and Faroese focused activity solely on the UK EEZ, in which stocks sizes were generally small and market returns low. Mr Anderson advised the resumption of UK PO/EU PO quota swaps in June 2021 had helped address some constraints but by that time the Dutch and Danish had caught more North Sea cod than usual, the quota for which would probably otherwise have been made available to the Scottish fleet. And while the original plan under the TCA had been for quota swaps to be negotiated at state level, relatively normal service resumed in June 2021 in which UK and EU POs were able to trade quota directly, albeit that Marine Scotland had the final say. An example was cited in which an exchange proposed by AFPO (Nephrops quota offered to secure additional North Sea cod quota) had been declined by Marine Scotland.

Mr Anderson then fielded questions from members on quota swap arrangements, the TCA impacts on other POs, on the accuracy of the science underpinning catching opportunities and how it is interpreted, and the demersal fleet's prospects for 2022. The Chair then expressed members' thanks for his highly detailed and insightful presentation.

Action point 1: Write to the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Islands to establish why the proposed Nephrops quota swap for North Sea cod was declined.

6. PRESENTATION: THE POST-BREXIT REALITY FOR THE SCOTTISH SEAFOOD PROCESSING SECTOR by JIMMY BUCHAN, CEO, SCOTTISH SEAFOOD ASSOCIATION

As a member of the Seafood Task Force convened in January 2021 by Parliamentary Under Secretary of State David Duguid MP to address post-Brexit EU trade issues, SSA CEO Mr Buchan commented on his perceptions of the UK's preparedness for its departure from the Single Market on 1 January 2021 and actions taken thereafter to alleviate friction at the EU border and compensation schemes for businesses adversely affected. Mr Buchan noted that the Scottish seafood processing sector had been struggling to secure factory labour for the past 2-3 years but the position had worsened sharply since the start of the pandemic and again post-Brexit, constraining the response of the sector to address additional administrative, logistics and timeframe requirements. Mr Buchan alluded to the need for enhanced uptake by the sector of automated processing, quality control and packaging technology to better utilise scarce personnel, though this would take time. He also cited the 'Sea a Bright Future' campaign, hosted by SSA and funded by Seafish, to reach out to the workforce of the future. Mr Buchan commended the council's Environmental Health team which had worked tirelessly to ensure export health certification was generated accurately and timeously to enable seafood export consignments to meet tight delivery timescales. Members posed questions on seafood export arrangements, including the performance of export hubs in central Scotland, the impact of the pandemic, staff recruitment and retention, training, and the extent to which the entire seafood value chain had come together to

navigate its way through an extremely challenging set of circumstances, following which the Chair thanked Mr Buchan for his excellent presentation.

7. VERBAL UPDATE: EXPORT HEALTH CERTIFICATION ARRANGEMENTS IN ABERDEENSHIRE by JOHN GRANT, TEAM MANAGER, PUBLIC HEALTH AND ANIMAL HEALTH & WELFARE, ABERDEENSHIRE COUNCIL

In his latest update to the Group, Mr Grant advised that 392 fishing vessels had now been registered in Aberdeenshire, including 3 factory vessels. On seafood exports from Aberdeenshire, a total of 1300 Export Health Certificates (EHCs) had been issued by the council's Environmental Health Service (EH) for EU destinations with a further 332 to 'third countries' and 117 to China and Australia. Pelagic exports figured strongly (though seasonally). Eighteen exporters had to date exported seafood directly from Aberdeenshire to 19 EU Member States – around 26,000 Tonnes in all. The flow at the EU border is generally improving and there have been no rejections to date. More detailed export attestations are being sought by the EU but further progress towards an 'end-to-end' online process is expected. Import controls on EU produce to the UK have again been delayed (physical checks to start in July 2022). Peterhead Port is already an approved border control point for frozen seafood imports but has been little trade in recent years. Mr Grant concluded by advising the demand upon EH services continues to be very high and that staff recruitment is challenging. He then answered several questions from members, following which the Chair expressed the group's thanks for his very helpful update.

8. BULLETIN: PUBLIC FUNDS FOR FISHING AND SEAFOOD SECTORS

A bulletin was presented setting out current funding opportunities for the fishing, seafood and related sectors. Members **noted** the bulletin.

Action point 2: Provide update at next meeting of FWG.

9. BULLETIN: EVALUATIONS OF COMMUNITY LED LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES

A bulletin was presented by Martin Brebner, setting out the findings of an independent, council-commissioned review into the North and South Aberdeenshire Local Development Strategies. The contents of the report focused primarily on the evaluation of the NESFLAG programme 2014-2020. Members **noted** the bulletin.

10. BULLETIN: SEAWEED PROJECT

A bulletin was presented setting out the current state of play of the council's commercial seaweed feasibility study. Members **noted** the bulletin.

Action point 3: Provide update at next meeting of FWG.

11. VERBAL UPDATES

Brief verbal updates were then provided on the Scottish Seafood Centre of Excellence project, Opportunity North East's Seafood Transformation Project, and the relationship between the two.

12. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business

13. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

- Virtual meeting to be arranged

SUMMARY OF FISHERIES WORKING GROUP ACTION POINTS 22 SEPTEMBER 2021

1: Write to the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Islands to establish why the proposed Nephrops quota swap for North Sea cod was declined.

2: Provide an update on structural funding opportunities at the next meeting of FWG.

3: Provide an update on the seaweed project at the next meeting of FWG.