DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, ENVIRONMENT AND RURAL AFFAIRS SALMON AND INLAND FISHERIES FORUM

-Note of Proceedings-

MINUTES OF THE QUARTERLY MEETING OF THE SALMON AND INLAND

FISHERIES FORUM NI HELD AT DAERA FISHERIES, MAHON ROAD

PORTADOWN ON **WEDNESDAY 14 JUNE 2017 AT 2 PM**

Present Mr Edward Montgomery (Chairman)

Mr. Francis Conlon

Mr John Mc Williams

Mr Jim Haughey

Mr Robert Murtland

Mr Maurice Parkinson

Apologies Mr Pat Close

Dr Paul Johnston

Mr. Michael Crilly

Mr Robbie Marshall

Mr. Aiden Hannon

In attendance

DAERA Mrs Fiona Lavery (Minutes)

DAERA Mr Seamus Connor.

DAERA Mr David Mann

Mileage sheets were distributed to members for completion.

IFM 48th Annual Conference leaflets were distributed to members.

1. Apologies

- As listed above.

1. **Minutes of the last meeting –15 March 2017 for approval** – No amendments.
2. **Matters arising from last meeting –15 March 2017**

It was agreed to send an invitation to Alan Morrow to attend the September 2017 meeting. Mr Murtland highlighted the Draft Strategic Growth Plan which is now the responsibility of local Government; this could be clarified at the presentation. Seamus Connor advised that flooding matters remain with the Department of Infrastructure (Rivers Agency) and not local government and there was a new Agri Environmental Scheme. Mr Murtland mentioned the matter of access to river banks. Mr Haughey noted the existence of a Memo of Understanding between UFU and NIEA which could be clarified. Seamus Connor suggested that NIEA may be best placed to do a presentation.

* **Seamus Connor to source a possible contact for a presentation.**

1. **Hydro Sub Group Meeting 24 May 2017**

The Chairman asked Maurice Parkinson to provide an update from the meeting. Mr Parkinson noted it was a very helpful and informative meeting and that Ms Stephanie Millar was very aware of the issues. Mr Parkinson outlined the importance placed on inspections and highlighted the proposed pilot scheme to be introduced by DAERA IF on the Agivey River, using Private Water Bailiffs. Comparisons were made with Scotland where a self-regulating system was used. Seamus Connor outlined the role of Inland Fisheries regarding Hydros, as a background, and mentioned some suitable sites for the pilot had been identified. The Chairman queried if the PWBs had been chosen and Seamus Connor advised that the process was at the initial stages and no agreements had been made yet, but it would be similar to the pollution response with NIEA and roles and responsibilities would be worked out. Mr Parkinson moved to report on the local difficulties with the planning process and highlighted the importance of following the guidance and noted the role of the Central Shared Services, which all Councils have access to. A short discussion was held on the role of the Central Shared Services. Mr Mc Williams asked if Stephanie Miller had forwarded the information. It was agreed to retain this Agenda item for the September 2017 meeting.

* **Fiona Lavery to follow up with Stephanie Miller’s information.**

1. **Sand Extraction Lough Neagh. – Update**

The Chairman noted that this topic has recently again been a local news item and the Sand Traders had stated their position that there was no detrimental effect to the environment. Mr Conlon noted that the PAC hearing was at the end of June. Mr Murtland highlighted that this issue was a global problem and that, for example, Sri Lanka experiences similar problems. Mr Conlon advised that the dredging was still ongoing and that there had been no decrease in levels of extraction. Mr Haughey outlined the background to a recent High Court case taken by Friends of the Earth , the proceedings were against the DOE for maladministration of procedure in relation to the actions taken by the then Minister Mark Durkan. Each party involved had a number of representing barristers who had made a variety of presentations. Mr Haughey outlined the context of the defence from each perspective and concluded that the Judge is considering the appeal at present. Continuing Mr Haughey noted that the whole process had been further complicated by the actions of the Sand Traders to “muddy the waters” by submitting additional issues and a revised Environmental Statement to the PAC. There are now two legal cases on gong 1. Friends of the Earth – High Court appeal and 2. PAC appeal hearing.

Mr Conlon noted that while all the legal challenges were on going the sand extraction was still happening. Discussion was held on what further actions SIFF could take and it was agreed in the absence of a Minister that a letter should be sent to the DAERA Permanent Secretary voicing the continuing concerns of SIFF.

* **Chairman to write to DAERA Permanent Secretary**

1. **Any other Business.**

**Carnroe Weir**

1. Mr Haughey raised the matter of the proposed repairs to the large Weir at Carnroe on the Lower Bann by Waterways Ireland. The Chairman advised that he was best placed to respond and provided an update for members. No engineering work has been carried out to date, partly due to issues with funding. Preliminary work has been carried out, such as the bore holes on the top side. The work may now take two seasons and will have an impact on fishing. The Chairman raised concerns in relation to fish passage and ongoing operation of the salmon angling business during the works, noting the project would be a very complicated process. Seamus Connor clarified that initially the Weir is the main focus for the work but that the fish passes were also subject to repair or amendment. Discussion was held on environment/wildlife issues. The Chairman noted that the next WI repair project will be the Movanagher Weir.
2. **NASCO**

Mr Haughey distributed a leaflet to members –*Opening Statement submitted by* *NASCO’s accredited Non Government Organisations.* Discussion was held on the text and the impact on wild Salmon stocks from proposals to increase Salmon farming in Ireland and also from general water temperature changes.

1. **Crumlin River Weir.**

Mr Haughey provided a short slide presentation on the Crumlin River Weir. Discussion was held on the Weir and its obstruction to migratory fish passage. Seamus Connor advised that there are a lot of historical issues at this site, which did not currently have a licence. Continuing, Seamus Connor outlined some positive feedback from the NASCO meeting and noted that NASCO had recognised the good work that had been done in Northern Ireland and the general adoption of the precautionary approach toward salmon conservation. This included all the work done by Angling Clubs and Weir owners to improve fish passage. Mr Haughey asked Seamus Connor for an update on the North Coast Commercial Nets. In reply, Seamus Connor advised that currently three licences remained in existence, but could not operate unless the stock quota was reached for 3 out of 5 years.

1. **Date of next meeting.**

**The next SIFF meeting will be held on Wednesday 13 September 2017 in DAERA Inland Fisheries at 1 Mahon Road Portadown at 2pm.**

As there were no other items for discussion, the meeting ended and the Chairman thanked the members and DAERA staff for attending.