Salmon Aquaculture and Seals Working Group Meeting No 13

21st Nov 2013, Marine Harvest Offices, Edinburgh

Attendees: [redacted] SMRU (SN, Chair), [redacted] IAR(AK), [redacted] Marine Harvest (SB), [redacted] RSPCA (JA), [redacted] SPAG (AO) , [redacted] SSPO (JW), [redacted] HSI (MJ)

Apologies: [redacted], Marine Scotland (IW), [redacted], Freedom Foods (BW), [redacted], Scottish Salmon Company (RD), [redacted], SNH (CT), [redacted], Hammond PR (CS), [redacted] (Sainsbury's).

1. **Minutes from Meeting No 12 and Current Agenda (Meeting No 13) adopted**.

   Operational Group Membership: SN had met up with Alex Adrian from Crown Estates with a view to them joining the working group. SN explained that they licence the sea bed to the aquaculture industry among others on behalf of the Crown and would possibly be in a position to fund some of our initiatives. All agreed it would be good to invite them to be members.

   SN cautioned on the group becoming too large to be effective.

   AO suggested that as Freedom Foods are responsible for making all farms conform to their standards, so no need to have other farms represented on the working group.

   It was agreed not to invite more members at the moment

   Outstanding Action Points: Anti predator nets – Birds and seals are drowned in these nets and the Group had previously wondered whether there is any obligation to report such deaths back to Marine Scotland.

   AP: SN to check with IW about this.

2. **Work Plan Implementation**

   a) **Net Trials –** SB reported that trials were ongoing but nothing new to report. AO asked about the of time scale of these trials. SB said that the trials normally last a year or one cycle (22 months).

   AP: SB will look at when MHS trials started and when they will finish and will report back to the group.

   SN had heard from RD that SSC was conducting trials on different nets including Sapphire nets, and that they were also looking at electric nets and acoustic deterrents.

   SN asked to what extent site managers in different companies might be working on trials without their environmental department knowing about them. It was agreed that this is entirely feasible in some companies where individual sites are treated as separate cost units. SB suggested that net manufacturers would be likely to know of ongoing net trials and that the

group might ask one or more of them to present information on this. There are three main companies, Net Services Shetland, Knox nets and Boris Nets. Roger Delaney at Knox Nets was suggested.

AP: SB to invite net manufacturer to a meeting

AO suggested that the group should commission net companies to look into the problem of keeping seals out of nets

b) Startle response ADD. SN had emailed [redacted] and was told that the report of field trials at several farm sites two years ago would be on the Marine Scotland website on Friday 22nd November. [redacted] said that the devices would be ready by the end of the year and several sites were lined up to test them. SB said Marine Harvest were not part of this trial.

AP: SB & JW will attempt to discover which salmon farm companies have agreed to test the new startle response ADD .

c) Acoustic testing stick. JA said that it seemed to be working well on the farms it was being used on. SB suggested that the companies that make ADDs and/or those making environmental monitoring kits could incorporate an ADD testing module into their set of instruments.

AP: SB to contact Airmar to see if they have any plans to introduce a testing device

AP: JA to speak with [redacted] (FF) about discussing testing devices with [redacted] and fish Farms

SN suggested that SNH should also have an interest in exactly what noise was being broadcast into the environment and might therefore also like to contact ADD manufacturers on this matter.

AP- SN suggested that the group should write to ADD manufacturers to ask what steps they would be taking to ensure that operators can check that their devices are producing the intended acoustic output.

AP: AO and JA to draft letter, SB to supply contact details for manufacturers to JA.

d) Analysis of existing data. SN showed the group a presentation of some preliminary data analysed by SMRU looking at the spatial distribution of ADDs and where seals were still being shot. Some areas appear to have no ADDs, yet seals are being shot suggesting that sites may not be allowed to use ADDs there.

AP: SN to ask SNH for a list of which salmon farm sites had been refused permission to use ADD's

AP: SN to report at the next meeting on continued analysis of existing data with a view to determining efficacy of ADDs

AP: SN to talk to IW on flow of analysis of data from Seal licence scheme.

e) **Electric netting:** SN explained that [redacted] had received funding for research. However, AK mentioned that he had asked [redacted] about the research at the BDMLR conference on Oct 12th and he had said he was still looking for funding?

A: SN to ask [redacted] to clarify if he has funding for electric net research

3. **Review of Progress**
4. **Other issues:**

a) **What procedures are in place when seals are shot to identify causes?** SN explained that at previous meetings the Group had discussed establishing a rapid response team to investigate circumstances at sites when a serious seal 'incident' was ongoing, or after a seal had been shot to identify what might have gone wrong in order to learn lessons for the future. At the 12th meeting it had been suggested that existing procedures are sufficient to determine why a seal needed to be shot. JA said that procedures were in place and available on Page 19 of the FF guidelines. Freedom Food guidelines are now in place to report any seals shot within 72 hours[s1].

AP: JA to ask [redacted] and/or [redacted] to come to the next meeting to discuss what procedures were in place either before or after a seal had been shot as a last resort to try to find out why non-lethal measures had been ineffective in each case.

JA reported that 41 seals had been shot by FF registered farms in the first 6 months of 2013.

b) **Other countries approaches**: SN reported that there was no progress with what is being done in other countries

c) Clever Ideas Award: JW and AD had discussed a competition among SSPO members to come up with the most promising suggestion for reducing seal depredation. Sainsbury's had agreed to fund a prize.

AP: SN to remind AD about clever ideas prize

d) **Shooting at Netting stations**. SN gave a presentation on shooting at netting stations and the use of ADD's to deter seals from entering rivers. (80% reduction in seal counts in some rivers when mains power is used to power ADD). Bagnet stations using ADDs had shown an increase in salmon landed, but at one there was a suggestion that the ADD being used may no longer be as effective as in previous years, possibly due to a deaf seal.

e) **Seal Licence – latest returns**. Nothing posted on the Marine Scotland website for the 3rd quarter which ended at the end of Sept 2013. AO asked why 35% of farms don't shoot? It may be that these farms hold the key to improvement? SB reported that the biomass of fish lost by MHS to seals in 2013 showed a reduction on the previous year. 12% down to 6% over a 22 month cycle. Interesting to note that fish numbers taken by

seals had gone up as smaller fish were being taken in 2013 compared to 2012. SB reported that MH shooting figures had reduced

2010 - ~130 seals shot

2011 - 54

2012 - 20

2013 - 5 to date

AO expressed appreciation on behalf of the group on the reductions made by MH, but emphasised that what had been done to achieve them needed to be fully understood. SB confirmed he would be talking to farm managers and report back soon

f) **Web site** – SN suggested that the site had stalled. AO was worried that welfare wasn't discussed enough in the copy. AO had written a paragraph and this was added to by SN. MJ suggested that we get it up and running and we can change it later. AO repeated his concerns that that there was little demonstrable progress that could be directly attributed to the Groups work to go on the website. JA said that the work of the Group was informing the RSPCA / FF standards; SB agreed that the Group's work had been instrumental in helping drive changes within MHS; SN agreed that the Group had enabled and increased scientific collaboration between industry and SMRU.

AP: SN to send AO the latest version of the website copy.

AP: AO to check the status of the updates and if there were any modifications needed

5. **Work Plan review** – Where have we got to, where are we going and how can we get there?

   AP- Working group / sub-group to be reconvened to review actions that need to be fast tracked, and to find ways to facilitate these. SN agreed to send an email out to confirm a date between 16th and 20th Dec.

   AP- JA to ask BW if the Aviemore Aquaculture Conference in May 2014 could have a workshop on predator control/ seals as a topic .

   AP – RD to report back before the next meeting on SSC Trials on Nets, Acoustic , and electric fields.

6. **AOB**

7. **Next meeting** to be arranged by Doodle, with suggested dates centred around the last Thursday of February 2014**.**