

Notes of KEIFCA Seafood Sector and Fisheries Communities Working Group meeting held on 23 March 2021 at 7pm

Present: Mr J Nichols (Chairman - KEIFCA), Mr A Rattley (KEIFCA), Cllr T Hills (KEIFCA), Cllr A Goggin (KEIFCA), Mr D Ferris (Fisheries sector), Mr M Jackson (Fisheries sector), Ms A Pryor (TEP), Mr J Seaward (Band Agency)

Apologies: Mr R Eves

In Attendance: Dr W Wright (CIFCO), Mr D Bailey (ACIFCO), Mrs D O'Shea (Office Manager)

The Working Group met with the aim of identifying opportunities, plans and projects that could help local communities within Kent and Essex to gain better access to national funds and quota and to develop a stronger local market for fish and shellfish.

Key Points considered by the meeting

BACKGROUND

Feedback received from the newly created Seafood and Fisheries Fund had been that Government wanted to listen to local communities and would be prepared to brief local groups on how to apply for funding. Local infrastructure such as windfarms were looking to fund projects at a community level (known as blue funding). Charities such as Thames Estuary Partnership (TEP) could look at these opportunities and help to put together projects to tap into these payments. Fish Local had been developed by KEIFCA during the first lockdown period using the professional input of a local media/marketing agency. Social media and a website were introduced to allow the Industry to interact with the public to sell in a different way, not just be exporting. This idea had reasonable success and helped to allow some sales to new markets. It drew the attention of the MMO and Defra and through a PR campaign received a lot of radio and TV interest which showed a real desire to help the inshore fleet. Funding of this project had been challenging. London Gateway had provided a small amount of funding and had offered long term support, SeaFarers had been approached to apply for funds for a dedicated coordinator for the whole area, although that had not been successful as it was felt the project was similar to other projects it had funded and funding was now being focused on safety at sea projects. Other potential funding opportunities were being looked at.

Matters considered:

What are the things that could be done to develop a stronger local market for fish in the next 5 years?

Mr J Nichols:

Fishermen were very good at catching fish but not as good at selling it on.

- There was a lack of interest by the Local Authorities to allow fish retail outlets to be based on Council property, particularly in Thanet. More pop up facilities such as those at Whitstable Harbour would provide Industry with outlets to sell their catch locally.
- Consider the possibility of local distribution hubs if fish could not be sold locally and had to be exported. For Kent this could be based in Ashford.
- Fishermen could achieve added value to their catch by marketing it themselves or through family to the public.
- Rebranding, traceability, and MCA accreditation. The byword was education.

Mr A Rattley:

- In respect of Fish Local, the strongest thing to do would be to encourage Local Authorities, particularly Environmental Health Officers, to become involved. There were simple and easy ways to conform with hygiene requirements to enable catch to be sold.
- Biggest issue is advertising local fish. Anyone coming to local coastal towns want to be able to buy fish and shellfish. Buying off the quayside is the way forward. The weekend would be the time when sales would be predominant.
- Class B shellfish could not be exported. This was a major issue for the mussel and oyster industry and could potentially wipe those industries out. Encouraging people to eat locally would help, although not save, all those involved in this industry.
- There was a need for younger people to come into the industry. Look at funding to set up small co-operatives with the management structure part funded. Apprenticeships could be set up to learn fishmonger skills as well as fishing skills. This would be a boost to all Local Authorities as well as a boost to the fishing industry.

Mr D Ferris:

Fish Local needed to have a clear message where it was going and what it wanted to achieve. The initial aim of encouraging local fishermen to sell their fish had changed to more out of area operators selling on there. It had been successful as people were asking where the fish had come from, but the momentum had slowed. He agreed with Mr Nichol's comment that fishermen just wanted to catch fish and then go home. In selling on their catch directly to the public there was the danger that fish would need to be brought in rather than selling only what had been caught. At present he could not sell as much locally as he could to Europe. The European demand for fish was huge and the UK would not pay the same money as the EU would. Seafish had invested a considerable amount of money into a responsible fishing scheme with those who joined it aiming to be as green as they could. Those that joined up were given stickers to use on their fish but ultimately the consumer was interested only in the cost of the fish.

23 March 2021

Appendix 1 to Agenda item B6

- In respect of funding. It was very important from the outset to establish a clear directive. If the Industry could see that the project would support them then they would support it.
- Advertising was very important especially the use of social media. Rebranding of products done in the right way could make a lot of difference, in particular the fish that were less popular such as skate, sprat and herring.
- Online, mail order may work. A company could be joined and fish sold through them. However, that could not be run by general crew or the fishermen themselves.
- Fish Local would struggle with the Industry. Some fishermen that had used it had now fallen by the wayside. The last thing that they wanted to do after fishing was to look at facebook and fulfil an order for a skate wing. He knew of 6 boats at Queenborough with 1 wet fish shop. If those boats were to start selling from the quayside then the fish shop would shut. The role of Fish Local should be one of education. Show people what they can do.

Cllr T Hills:

Rye Harbour had 30 commercial boats operating from it, three local fish processors and three trucks taking fish each week to France. He had liked Fish Local and thought it was a great concept, however he felt it should be a national initiative.

- There were five years available to change the fishing industry. Post Covid there would be a cultural change and a green revolution would take place. In ten years' time it was possible boats would be hydrogen powered. The IFCA had one chance to promote the fishing industry by speaking to MPs to work towards a better deal in five years' time. It would be useful to bring Sussex IFCA in on this.
- The average age of fishermen was 57. Young people were needed to join the industry. It was necessary to think outside the box, to rejuvenate the industry, processors and harbours. We needed to speak to and engage with MPs and think big.

Ms A Pryor:

- This would be a great opportunity to get marine infrastructure, ports, larger industries to give money to improve the fishing industry. TEP could help on a project by project basis at a strategic level but it would need to be committee led.

Mr M Jackson:

- Education was important to get the public eating what the fishermen caught. The British palate needed to be re-educated particularly in regard to the less popular fish – herring, sprat, skate. The public was now more aware of what it was eating and there was a push to get away from meat. France eats fish on average 3 to 4 times per week, the UK is 3 to 4 times per month.
- Morrison's "Our Fish" is a significant drive by the company. They have bought into fishing vessels with the aim to focus on fish caught in UK waters.
- There was a lack of understanding from the windfarms and other infrastructure on what they thought fishermen caught.

- The lack of youth within the industry was a real issue for the fishing industry. A keenness for the work was needed which was missing.

Cllr A Goggin:

Good points had been made. He agreed that it was necessary to go national.

- There was a danger that selling fish from quaysides and vans would have an impact on wet fish hopes within the coastal towns. He was aware of one shop within Brightlingsea that was not able to compete with two fish vans that were selling off the boats
- We should be innovative. Give out menus and recipes. More enthusiasm was needed.

Mr J Seaward:

Equally frustrated that the availability of local fish on Fish Local was not as strident as it could have been. It had been hoped that there would be much more interaction with the local fleet. The aim going forward was to try to make Fish Local a lot more focussed around the local fish. It all came back to key factors on improving margins on the fish; improved outlets, redistribution, advertising. Talks had been held with London Gateway. They were interested in a project based around reduction of carbon footprint. Fish Local could gather opinion from Industry on the development of projects that could be funded. It was accepted that 9 out of 10 fishermen barely had enough time to do more than fish. It was necessary to build Fish Local in a different way, respectful in how the Industry had to work. It made sense to support not change them.

The Chairman thanked all those who had attended the meeting and commented that although the majority of the statements made had been heard before, it was useful that these thoughts had been brought together and refreshed at this meeting. He stated that in summary he felt that what was required was rebranding, traceability, MSC accreditation and above all education.

Meeting closed at 20:40