

Urban Waste “Greatest Threat To Shellfish Farmers” - ISA

Shellfish producers around the coast have had their worst fears confirmed by a recent EPA report on the poor state of urban waste water treatment plants. Irish Shellfish Association (ISA) chairman, Jerry Gallagher, said that untreated sewage from inadequate wastewater treatment plants in towns and villages around the coast was the single biggest threat to the environment and food safety for the Irish seafood industry.

Mr Gallagher said, "The ISA recognised this problem over a decade ago but the government failed to act or adequately invest in solutions. The aquaculture industry has had a long and frustrating battle with local authorities to upgrade and properly monitor treatment plants.

As an industry that relies on pristine water quality, shellfish and fish farmers are constantly aware of the threat of untreated urban waste pumped into the sea. Bad planning, lack of investment and a generally apathetic attitude to the seafood sector in general led to a situation where our organisation had to take the Irish government to the European Court of Justice ten years ago to highlight the situation and protect shellfish growing areas."

Mr Gallagher continued, "Today's EPA report confirms the continued appalling state

of our inadequate and primitive coastal treatment plants. Local authorities must take their responsibilities to coastal aquaculture and inshore fishing seriously and actively monitor spills and persistent problems and co-operate closely with the industry locally instead of adopting a traditionally defensive and blinkered approach to this serious problem."

The ISA leader said that county councils needed to work closely with producers of fish and shellfish who are in the frontline when it comes to monitoring water quality and the first to be impacted by unnecessary urban pollution. "It is imperative that inadequate treatment plants near important aquaculture growing areas are prioritised for investment for the sake of the environment, food safety, the image of Irish seafood as well as vital jobs and exports", concluded Mr Gallagher.

Licence templates published – when will licences follow?

Following two well-attended meetings in Clonakilty and Galway to introduce the new licence templates for the various shellfish and finfish species and production types, IFA Aquaculture has welcomed progress on streamlining the documents.

Speaking at the meetings, IFA Aquaculture Executive Secretary Richie Flynn, made the following points on behalf of farmers, saying the work on licensing was only beginning:

- Industry strongly disagreed with the Department's new policy of including renewals as "new licences" and therefore appealable to ALAB;
- The current ALAB is not properly resourced or set up to deal with the avalanche of appeals heading in its direction;
- Industry is very unhappy with the continuation of the ten year term to licences as it acts as a disincentive to investment;
- Flexibility must be shown throughout the application process to allow for sites to be reconfigured or new equipment employed to deal with environmental, flow dynamics, feed and weather related challenges learned from experience;
- Priority in licensing must be given to those who have been waiting longest for decisions and new projects, no matter how ambitious or welcome, should not impede the progress for existing licence holders.
- Licence applications in non-Habitats Areas should be dealt with immediately

The templates will shortly be available to download from the Department.

New Committee Members welcomed

The ISA Executive Committee welcomed three new members to its number following this year's AGM in Kinsale: Edward Gallagher (Oysters North) Arthur McCarthy (Bottom Mussels, South) Finbarr Daly (Rope Mussels, South)

New ideas for rope mussels

ISA members recently attended a meeting in Dublin on new markets and products related to the rope mussel sector, organized by the rope mussel forum under BIM's Seafood Development Division. Discussions took place on potential new products such as mussel butter, crisps and pasta sauces as well as the potential for new markets in central Europe. This meeting followed a more general meeting held in January at Dublin Airport and attended by Minister Coveney where producers, processors and sales people discussed the merits of a permanent Irish seafood hub as outlined in BIM's 2014 strategy document. This initiative fits in well with IFA Aquaculture's involvement in the Musselsalive project which was presented at the Association's Kinsale conference by Dr Sara Barrento and aims to reduce mortality and breakages and add shelf-life to live mussels transported over long distances.

Oyster news

With prices holding up in France but scarce supplies in evidence, Irish Specials are more than holding their own in retail outlets with French

counterparts. The French industry is still coming to terms with means of management for more expected mortalities in 2012. The Bivalife project on shellfish pathogens is moving ahead, with IFREMER and other institutions looking closely at transmission and mitigation of pathogens like herpes. ISA is involved in this project through our EU umbrella body EMPA, as is the Marine Institute and UCC on the research side.

Crepidula starters Anyone?

One sign of the mood in the French industry is evidenced by the fact that the well-known and universally hated parasite *Crepidula Fornicata* or slipper shell is now the subject of an application by the French industry for Marine Stewardship Council certification as a high-end seafood in itself! Oyster growers in the south west believe there is a market for cooked crepidula which would pay them to remove the pest from oyster beds. Watch this space.

Operational Programme must be spent in full on aquaculture development

While licencing is at the top of the agenda for most producers, those lucky enough to be outside of Habitats areas or whose licence has not yet expired are clamouring for the opening of the 2012 Operational Programme. As this is a co-funded OP, permission needs to be granted by an interdepartmental committee before a call can be opened. IFA campaigned vigorously and won €5 million in the

2012 Budget for capital projects under the OP and the organisation is very frustrated at the lack of progress on this issue.

IFA President, John Bryan, has expressed the industry's annoyance directly to Minister Coveney, saying it would be a huge disappointment if, for the third year in a row, money that should have been spent developing the aquaculture sector would be handed back to the Department of Finance. John Bryan also pointed out that the system whereby projects must be applied for, completed and audited within the same calendar year was discriminatory and unfair to the industry and only served to ensure that budget targets were not achievable.

Executive Committee meets twice

The ISA Executive has met twice since Kinsale at the Irish Farm Centre. As well as licencing and grant aid, the committee has been keeping a close eye on developments regarding Norovirus testing and classification currently being discussed at a high level in Brussels and ensuring that Irish authorities are aware of the industry's acute concerns in this area.

IFA Aquaculture, Irish Farm Centre, Bluebell D12
Ph 01-4508755
Email richieflynn@ifa.ie

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