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ISA Campaign Wins Vital Virus Battle

Irish oyster farmers have been saved from total wipe-out by ISA's professional and successful campaign against EU plans to set unworkable limits for Noroviruses.

The ISA marshalled every resource at its disposal to run a short, forceful and scientifically robust argument that mustered a coalition of partners across the EU to win a success for common-sense when the Commission and Community Reference Lab seemed hell-bent on introducing the limit just a couple of short months ago.

All oyster producers in Ireland should recognize that their very future hung in the balance and was only saved by quick and decisive action by the organisation.

EMPA and ISA were invited to meet with the European Commission (DG SANCO) and 27 member state health authorities at the headquarters of the EU Food and Veterinary Office in Grange, Co. Meath. Under ISA's leadership, EMPA was well-prepared and put forward a sound and reasoned argument against the flawed PCR technique

Abolishing the crude, untrustworthy and badly thought-out PCR method with all its many false positives other side.

At the meeting in Grange attended by J Gallagher, R Flynn, F O'Sullivan and J Sullivan for ISA as well as industry representatives from France, Holland, Spain, Italy and the UK, the Commission confirmed that the regulatory proposal had been dropped. They now propose that the Community Reference Lab carry out a questionnaire on NV prevalence in the EU

ISA/EMPA put forward the following as the basis for replacing the PCR method:

1. **There should be a full baseline survey of NV prevalence in the EU**
2. **A full Regulatory Impact Assessment**
3. **A cost-benefit analysis of the imposition of any regulation must be carried out**
4. **The Water Framework Directive must contain specific regulatory limits on maximum Norovirus levels in sewage outfalls**
5. **The Rapid Health Alert System must only be initiated when an outbreak of**

Norovirus has been PROVEN to have originated in identified shellfish

DG SANCO responded by asking for more information on the French system where bays are only closed AFTER illness is reported and confirmed and the bay is closed for 28 days). SANCO also suggested that the American system of imposing "buffer zones" around sewage outfalls should be examined. EMPA responded that both of these proposals should be fully investigated to find out if they were possible to implement in every country, the costs involved and the effectiveness of the regulation on actual NV infectivity in the EU, as established through the baseline survey.

Down the Road

EMPA and the Commission will work together on these issues which will take a considerable length of time. Oyster producers will continue to operate and satisfy customer demands on the bases of their needs without reference to any "limits" imposed by Brussels which would exclude them from the market or downgrade the value of their stocks automatically.

Some of the Speakers (M Keatinge, BIM; Minister Coveney; IFA President, Eddie Downey) and substantial attendance of ISA members and guests at the recent 25th Anniversary AGM and Conference in the Red Cow Hotel



Harvest 2025

In amongst all the other news over the past few weeks, most people will have missed a vital announcement: Harvest 2020 is being replaced by Harvest 2025! While the Minister may argue otherwise, that is certainly the clear message and IFA Aquaculture has strongly pointed out in our "Removing Barriers" document that the lack of licensing and bureaucratic inertia undermined the original targets in any case. Now Minister Coveney has produced a further report which is short on detail or commitments and asked for submissions by January 9th. Understandably all food sectors were taken aback by the announcement and will be working over the New Year to meet this deadline. Aquaculture producers will be wondering why such tight deadlines cannot be imposed on the processing of licences? The document and questionnaire are on www.agriculture.gov.ie under "2025 Agri-Food Strategy".

ISA Activity

ISA has been busy in the final quarter of 2014 with meetings on the Norovirus issue at home and in Brussels as well as:

Aqua-business course

Discussions with BIM and Carlow/Waterford IT on an "Aqua-business" degree and diploma course is in its very early stages. This valuable initiative is at an early stage but discussions are encouraging and the IT staff very enthusiastic about proposals.

Oyster Triploid Group

Along with BIM and the Marine Institute, ISA is involved as an observer and advisor to the oyster triploid national broodstock project, The Association's role is to ensure that the industry's needs regarding commercial, competitive and and mortality resistant stocks are produced.

MSSC

As well as Norovirus, the MSSC has been busy with recent meetings involving the ISA, particularly regarding toxin issues in the south west, ongoing attempts to engage with Irish Water, classification and Christmas arrangements at the labs.

South West on alert

Toxin profiles and plankton monitoring in the south west bays of west Cork and Kerry are painting a very gloomy picture for harvesting in the first few months of 2015. At the MSSC, The ISA raised this important issue and voiced concerns over the future of 10,000 tonnes of product in the region. Plankton results show that DSP producing phytoplankton dominate at present. Should this trend continue, bays may be closed at lower temperatures only to re-open just before spawning begins.

Other events where ISA represented the Irish Industry

- Inter-Departmental Task Force on "Harvesting Our Ocean Wealth"
- FEAP "Aquaculture In Motion" conference at the Committee of the Regions in Brussels
- BIM Young Fishmonger of the Year Award
- Clarinbridge Oyster producers meeting with Galway County Council
- Cromane local IFA Annual General Meeting
- Department of Marine officials on regulations for Producer Organisations
- Socio-Economic Marine Research Unit of NUIG seminar on marine economy
- Executive Committee of the European Aquaculture Advisory Council
- Keen-eyed members who rear cattle may also have spotted the ISA Executive Secretary on the staff team during the protests at beef factories in Athleague and Ballyjamesduff.

IFA calls for one-stop-shop to solve licencing

Speaking in Dublin at the opening of the 25th Anniversary Conference of the Irish Shellfish Association, IFA President, Eddie Downey, said that Minister Coveney must urgently pull all the various agencies and departments of the state together to solve the licensing problem in shellfish farming. "The agencies must be given a single task of meeting the Harvest 2020 and Ocean Wealth targets and a single, accountable body must be made responsible to government for breaking down the barriers to Irish businesses creating jobs and exports from aquaculture."

The IFA President continued, "Minister Coveney has set ambitious targets to deal with the licencing backlog and IFA needs to see delivery by way of renewals being processed and the entire backlog dealt with within 18 months. His agencies have told us this is possible and he must ensure the will and resources are there to deliver."

Mr Downey said that shellfish producers were frustrated with delays in working progress with excessive and unnecessary bureaucracy. "This lack of co-ordination can no longer be accepted, where the objectives of Harvest 2020 and the Government's "Harvesting our Ocean Wealth" policies form no part of licencing policy and are ignored when farmers ask for simplification and clarity to do their jobs".

Last man as important as the first

Speaking to all producers still waiting on licences, Eddie Downey said, "It is IFA's solid commitment to you today that we will not rest until every producer, down to one person operations in the smallest bay or inlet in the country, is sorted out.

"In Harvest 2020 the Government sees aquaculture as the solution to the seafood "deficit" It calls for a 61% increase in aquaculture production by 2030 where every additional 70 tonnes of production generates one full time equivalent job giving an extra 1500 jobs overall in the sector during the lifetime of the plan. At present day prices, the incremental value at first point of sale of this increased production is approximately €160 million with an additional €40 million from value added activities.

"The European Commission in its "Blue Growth Strategy" highlights the role of



shellfish and says that with current labour productivity, every 1% of our seafood consumption produced by EU aquaculture could help creating 3-4,000 full-time jobs. To do this, the EC says it must do everything to *Reduce administrative burdens, Facilitate access to water and space, Improve competitiveness and Exploit competitive advantages – "level playing field" – with third countries.* What this means is investment, benchmarking of services to industry and a review of legislation. Today the ISA is concentrating on the first of these priorities – investment – and looking forward to new and innovative ways to invest the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund, of which €148 million is coming to Ireland from Brussels.

Foresight

Eddie Downey said, "It is remarkable to think that, while industry had the foresight to join IFA in 1997, it is actually 25 years since you decided to form your own representative body. The producers involved in that inaugural AGM at the Old Ground Hotel should be remembered today for the courage and vision they had, ably supported as ever by BIM, to join together and find common cause.

"Like a lot of sectors in the food business, often getting producers in the same room is an achievement. Getting them to recognise a common cause and work together in a democratic and single minded fashion shows a level of maturity and professionalism.

"The next step is just as challenging and exciting. The sons and daughters of the people who met in Ennis are now involved in

the business and eager to move forward and grow the business.

"Each sector has its own opportunities. With new Asian markets and renewed profitability, where the oyster sector goes is crucial to the success of the industry in general. ISA will help that and counter the threats from Brussels to set unworkable microbiological levels on the sector, of which more later in the day.

"Mussel producers have gone through great change. The sector is remarkably different than a few years ago with consolidation in processing, more involvement in live exports and the certification of some of the industry as Organic.

"IFA's initiatives such as working with the EU industry on the food safety issue, putting in considerable effort on the MSSC and publishing an annual league table of county councils performance is important. A monthly newsletter keeps everyone informed now and the committee is looking at ways to improve its delivery for producers.

"IFA is fully committed to working with the sector. We know the difficulties faced by you, especially in the areas of licencing. We will continue to emphasis at every opportunity the need for agencies and departments to work together for the common cause of shellfish jobs and exports.



Happy Christmas and a Prosperous New Year to All Our Members!

ISA looks forward to meeting the challenges and representing the Irish shellfish industry for the 26th year in 2015. As ever, the association is dependent on you, the members, to ensure its mandate and its ability to work on your behalf.

If your company is not on this list or you know someone who is shirking their share of the burden, then contact them to ask why they won't contribute to their own Association? No-one is entitled to criticise or get assistance while sponging off their fellow farmers.

Nobody needs free-loaders or people who only reluctantly pay up when they have a personal problem that needs addressing. Show respect and responsibility and join ISA for just one euro a day (minimum fee).

Northwest Shellfish	Rainer Krause
Triskell Seafood	Hugh Sheehy
Kush Seafarms	Castlemaine Harbour Co-Op Society (50 members)
Sean and Patricia Daly	Tralee Oyster Fisheries Ltd.,
Bantry Harbour Mussels	Baile Mhic Coda Theoranta IASC
Blackshell Farm	Skibereen Shellfish
Fergal Langley	Donegal Oysters - Damien Reid
Carrowholly Shellfish	Celtic Kerber Ltd.,
Tadhg O'Maoilean	Rodeen Fish Farm
Hook Head Shellfish	Irish Premium Oysters
Southward Ltd.,	Carlingford Oyster Company
G & B Barge Ltd.,	Coney Island Shellfish
Cormorant Mussels	Fitzpatrick Oysters
Snave Harbour Mussels	Oysters for Suir
Martin Coll	Emerald Oysters
Kevin Lydon	Sliogeisc Baigh Traigheanna Teo
Blackpearl Shellfish	Green Oysters / Dungarvan Shellfish
Michael Scannell	Ferguson Shellfish
Sherkin Oysters	Loughros Beg Specials
Ardgroom Shellfish	Sliogeisc Chonamara Teo
Colin Whooley	Treanbeg Shellfish
Meitheal Tra Na Rinne	Seal Harbour Enterprises
Sliogeisc na Ross.	Seabreeze Ltd.
Ostreian Teoranta	Sliogeisc Baigh Gaothbarra

Licencing and Grant Aid

At the ISA Conference, Minister Coveney gave two very important pieces of news: Firstly he said had succeeded in matching the EU money for the 2015-2020 European Maritime and Fisheries Fund with €93 million of national funding to bring the total for spending on monitoring (SFPA) and grant aid to €241 million.

Secondly, Minister Coveney went quickly through a list of proposed licences in 2015 which was subsequently confirmed in a response to a Parliamentary Question to John Browne TD:

"It is not possible, as yet, to confirm the outturn for 2014 in relation to aquaculture licence determinations. I can confirm, however, that the number will be less than the projected outturn due primarily to the delay in the provision of final Appropriate Assessments in respect of which there is broad consensus between the Marine Institute and the National Parks and Wildlife Service, on the scientific inputs. This delay reflects the ongoing complexity inherent in the overall process.

Following discussions with the Marine Institute and the National Parks and Wildlife Service, I am confident that, notwithstanding the complexities involved, 2015 will see a significant and sustained increase in licence determinations. In the order of 120 determinations are projected for Quarter 1, 2015 alone. Based on information currently available, it is expected to achieve licence determinations in respect of the following bays in the first half of 2015:

- Donegal Bay;
- Dungarvan Harbour;
- Clew Bay;
- Valentia/Portmagee Channel;
- Lough Swilly;
- Galway Bav.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

IFA Aquaculture

Home of The Irish Salmon Growers' Association,
The Irish Shellfish Association
Irish Representative:
Federation of European Aquaculture Producers;
European Mollusc Producers' Association;
International Salmon Farmers' Association.

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