

CATEGORY 2 TECHNICAL REVIEW GROUP

Minutes of the meeting held on 29th May 2007, Brampton National Fisheries Office

Attendees

Environment Agency:

Adrian Taylor (AT), Policy Manager (Chairman)
Phil Hickley (PH), Fisheries Technical Manager (Secretary)
Nigel Hewlett (NH), Technical Advisor
Chris Williams (CW), Senior Fisheries Scientist

Independent Advisors ("The Group"):

Dr Ruth Kirk (RK), Parasitologist, Kingston University
Prof. Jimmy Turnbull (JT), Epidemiologist, Stirling University
Dr Steve Feist (SF), Pathologist, Cefas
Bernice Brewster (BB), Independent Practitioner, Aquatic Consultancy

1. Welcome

Adrian Taylor welcomed the attendees to the second meeting of the Group. Attendees were informed that Sarah Chare had moved to another job within the Agency and that her place on the Group was being taken by Phil Hickley.

2. Matters arising from minutes of last meeting

KHV is no longer an agenda item for discussion by the Group because of its change of status to notifiable disease from 6th April 2007. The requested modifications to the Terms of Reference had been made. The paper (by CW & RK) on *A. huronensis* was almost complete but some final distribution data was awaited, although these missing data were not material to the conclusions in the paper.

3. Update on changes to fish health procedures in the Environment Agency

On 1st April 2007 the changes to the fish health team were implemented to increase support of category 2 work, to improve risk assessment of controls and new threats, to enhance work on mortalities and to increase capability for advice and education. This means that health checks for external customers have ceased. Under the review of Science within the Agency, Chris Williams has joined the Fisheries Science team but remains dedicated to work on fish health. Nigel Hewlett's fish health team reduced from 8 to 5 staff.

There then followed implementation of a review of Head Office staff. On 1st May 2007, Sarah Chare moved to head a new Fisheries Permitting & Enforcement Team comprising the former Fisheries Administration Support Team (FAST) plus the enforcement and consent administration teams from Brampton. The

remaining staff at Brampton now all report to Nigel Hewlett as the Health, Ageing & Species Team.

Action: NH to circulate briefing note on staff changes.

4. Update on Chris Williams' PhD

Chapters have all been submitted to JT and amendments are now being made. The key chapters in the thesis are: an introduction to non-native parasites, risk assessment, and four chapters on prioritised species. A submission date of end June 2007 was proposed.

Action: CW to submit PhD thesis by 30th June 2007.

5. The status of *Paraergasilus longidigitus*

A thesis chapter and a covering paper were submitted for consideration. There is little evidence to suggest that *P. longidigitus* poses a serious threat to fisheries in England and Wales. This is supported by observations at host and population levels. In order to reduce impacts upon the fish movement trade and allow more efficient use of available resources, it was proposed to the Group that *P. longidigitus* be no longer restricted from movement.

Concern was expressed that *P. longidigitus* could move to Scotland and impact upon salmon if deregulated. In legislative terms, however, this is not a concern of the Environment Agency. Also, literature does not record infection of salmon and most heavily infected coarse fish are found in still-water fisheries and not rivers. Based upon an assessment of risk and taking into consideration best available information, the concern about salmon is valid but of low risk. Accordingly, having reviewed all the available evidence and finding none to give concern, the Group accepted the proposal to no longer restrict the movement of *P. longidigitus*.

Action: Recommend to the Environment Agency that *P. longidigitus* be removed from its Category 2 Parasite list. AT to arrange ratification and release a press briefing with justification for the decision. Scotland to be informed as a courtesy.

6. The status of *Atractolytococestus huronensis*

A thesis chapter and a covering paper were submitted for consideration. Current evidence indicates that *A. huronensis* does not pose a serious threat to carp fisheries. Whilst there are areas in need of further investigation, in particular, clarification of the morphological identity of British parasites, *A. huronensis* is not considered to be a serious fish pathogen. In view of the increasing socio-economic importance of carp fisheries within England and Wales, the impact caused by the continued restriction of carp movements appears disproportionate to the future risks of disease. The Group was asked to consider removing *A. huronensis* from the category 2 list of controlled parasites.

Consideration was given to the impact of *A. huronensis* on juvenile carp. Recent work on carp farms suggests that there is no evidence of disease in fry associated with the parasite. Also, carp tend not to recruit in intensive carp fisheries, their populations being maintained by re-stocking, so potential impact on juveniles is not an issue. It was agreed that, relative to other challenges, *A. huronensis* is low risk and should be removed from the Category 2 list.

Action: Recommend to the Environment Agency that *A. huronensis* be removed from its Category 2 Parasite list. AT to arrange ratification and release a press briefing with justification for the decision.

7. The status of Tench Rhabdovirus (TRv) in England and Wales

The Group were asked to advise on whether there is sufficient evidence on the distribution of TRv to allow the Environment Agency to consider the virus as widespread within England and Wales. This in the context of their Calverton and Leyland coarse fish farms continuing, or otherwise, testing of broodstock for TRv antibodies. Implications were for Agency fish farms only because it had been unrealistic to exercise such controls on external farms or other fish suppliers. Also, the improved biosecurity measures previously introduced would be retained.

It was agreed that, given the evidence that finding sites which test negative is becoming increasingly difficult, TRv should be considered widespread and the Agency can lift its current, self-imposed restrictions on broodstock collection.

Action: Recommend that Calverton and Leyland review procedures in the context of TRv being considered widespread.

8. Forward look - guidance on next steps

The Group guided the Agency that the changes agreed above should be communicated during the less busy summer period for implementation from 1st September 2007.

Action: AT to ensure that the minutes of this meeting being put onto the efishbusiness website is co-ordinated with the press releases announcing the changes.

Regarding the next target species for further investigation, it was agreed that this should be *Ergasilus briani*.

The next meeting should be arranged for February with papers in advance on *Ergasilus briani* and *Neoergasilus japonicus*. Meeting can be by teleconference if a face to face meeting cannot be justified.

Action: PH to arrange meeting.

9. Any other business

The need was identified for liaison and information exchange between the Group and independent working on fish disease.

Action: NH to ensure that above is discussed at the July meeting of health consultants

It was recommended that persons attending conferences should send a short report to the Group.

Action: Conference delegates to submit feedback reports to the Group.