**Consultative Committee to undertake a review of the issues surrounding the impact of gulls in urban areas**

**90 North King Street, 23 October 2019**

**Meeting 2**

**Minutes**

**Attendees:**

Dr. Derek McLoughlin (Chairman) (Chair)

Tom Cardiff (Balbriggan Community Committee) (BCC)

Don Costigan (Balbriggan Community Committee) (BCC)

Oonagh Duggan (Birdwatch Ireland) (BWI)

Dr. Steve Newton (Birdwatch Ireland) (BWI)

Dr. Hans Visser (Fingal County Council) (FCC)

Dr. David Tierney (National Parks and Wildlife Service, (NPWS)

 Department of Culture, Heritage and

 The Gaeltacht)

Joe McMahon (National Parks and Wildlife Service, (NPWS)

(Secretary) Department of Culture, Heritage and

 The Gaeltacht)

**Apologies:**

John Daly (Fingal County Council) (FCC)

Gerry Leckey (National Parks and Wildlife Service, (NPWS)

 Department of Culture, Heritage and

 The Gaeltacht)

Roy Thompson (National Parks and Wildlife Service, (NPWS)

 Department of Culture, Heritage and

 The Gaeltacht)

**Presenters:**

Associate Professor Barry Mc Mahon, UCD

Peter Rock (Gulls Expert) – via phone

**AMR (Anti-microbial resistance) and the AREST project (Associate Professor Barry McMahon, UCD)**

Associate Professor Barry Mc Mahon Barry McMahon is based in the School of Agriculture and Food Science at UCD. His academic background is in biodiversity and agriculture, particularly in birds. He currently focuses his research on zoonoses, diseases disseminated by wildlife. He is a member of the AREST project team.

Barry gave a slideshow presentation on his background and work relating to AMR. The presentation has been subsequently been circulated to all Committee members.

He gave an overview of current research and studies on the topic of AMR in gulls and other wildlife. AMR is widespread in animals and is even found in the poles. He highlighted a study on gulls in Europe where 3158 fecal swabs were taken from gulls in nine European countries including Ireland which found that Ireland had the second lowest levels of AMR in gulls (11.6%) in comparison to other countries also tested (e.g Spain had the highest level 61.5% and Denmark the lowest 8.3%). Barry stated that there was no evidence of a case of human enteritis in derived from gulls.

He suggested that an Adaptive Management Approach programme could be an option where change has been implemented, assessed, refined and repeated.

In the Question and Answer session following the presentation, items discussed included:

* He suggested that of over 280 peer reviewed papers related to studies of general wildlife (some including gulls) and AMR, due to the nature of these studies, it is difficult to ascertain the nature of wildlife as a source of AMR.
* Pathways of AMR are very complex and not fully understood.
* Proportion of Gulls with AMR may be similar to that of other wildlife.
* Adaptive Management Approach - parameters of the approach – he gave example that if gulls in area fed for 1 year – what difference that would make to area and not fed the following year etc.
* AREST project is looking at potential hotspots for Gulls – he indicated that this appeared to be focussed around areas of intensive agriculture (agricultural waste), wastewater treatment plants and effluent release spots
* Other bird species are also high with AMR levels (e.g. rooks)

BCC stated that they believe that there is high risk of AMR transmission from Gulls in Balbriggan area due to their high density of numbers compared to other bird species and that a ’’abundance of caution principle’’ to their public health concerns should be included in the annual Wild Birds derogation.

**Recommendation/Action**

Peer reviewed papers to be evaluated in the context of gulls, needs to be a Veterinary/Public Health representation on Committee e.g. HSE/Health Protection Surveillance Centre/EPA Public Health.

**Associate Professor McMahon specifically recommended asking in Professor Martin Cormican, and Professor Dearbhaile Morris (Lead of the AREST Project) and the EPA.**

**Managing Urban gull populations (Peter Rock, UK)**

Peter gave his background over the past 40 years of dealing with Gulls having given advice and written Reports for local authorities in UK. He has done bird ringing exercises on birds in the South-West of UK area, and that some have been recorded in Ireland, Liverpool and Mediterranean. He also went through some of the facts and myths and his experience relating to gulls including:

* Closure of landfill sites since 1950s (UK) lead to gulls migrating to Urban centres and that gull chicks mature sooner than rural chicks due to heat and food sources.
* Breeding season primarily from March to July and many then go to Southern latitudes
* Most aggression of Adult gulls is when gulls chicks are fledging and that primarily is when they are at their noisiest (July);
* Biggest issues from members of the public relating to gulls is noise, mess of their droppings, and rubbish prevalent, Carriage rate of disease pathogens in gulls very low (2.5%) and lose this within a few days compared to 10% in sewage
* Vast majority of Pest control industry solutions are not effective (tension wire, spikes, fire gels), unless constantly monitored
* In Bristol feeding gulls fine of up to £2,500
* 3 colonies in UK Bristol, Gloucester and Cardiff have been 2,500 and 3,100 breeding pairs each
* If gulls removed from one area, other gulls will move in to area from different location
* Large decrease in Herring Gull and Lesser Black Gulled in UK, however since the Seabird 2000 survey the number of colonies has gone up from 239 to over 500

In the Question and Answer session following the presentation, items discussed included:

* BCC view that gulls do not belong in residential areas, schools, etc., and that they encourage systematic nest removal scheme and that some UK authorities doing extensive pest control and that Irish response to this has only been recent. Peter Rock responded to this stating that rural numbers of gulls is very low and that birds that inhabited urban areas wouldn’t breed in rural location. He said that Gulls viewed towns as “colonies”. In relation to pest control measure, these are ineffective unless done regularly and gulls see these as ‘minor inconvenience’ and only going to move problem. However, pest control measures on Schools and Hospital should be monitored daily
* FCC asked about displacement of birds and measures used by local authorities. Peter gave example of Bath offering paid service to homeowners to remove nests and Bristol uses a lot of netting, and that Gloucester birds have moved into residential area due to style of housing.
* BWI asked about education and how it is being used. Peter said that Worcester there are nest cams set up and how this is being used to educate people about gulls and that education is key to helping people understand gulls.
* NPWS asked about the noise levels from gulls and variances in this and a source of conflict for people living in areas of large number of gulls. Peter went through the different noise levels, courtship – high, incubation – low, fledging – high. He mentioned that as urban areas are well lit up, birds are noisier later as they don’t differentiate the time of day. BCC stated that they believe the true extent of the noise problem remains seriously underestimated (potential impacts for example on drivers etc.)

 **Matters arising from CC1**

The Chair asked what style of meeting note was preferred by Committee, and it was agreed with the exception of BCC that a shorter concise note with actions arising was preferred than the style from CC1. BCC stated they wanted details minutes “for their contributions and the Department’s contributions” as they didn’t trust the Department’s response to issues they have raised in the past relating to the Derogation.

BCC queried interpretation of public health in Article 6(4) of Birds Directive. FCC stated that this Article relates specifically to plans and projects and has to be evidence based risk to public health and is not related to urban gull issues.

BCC raised the issue of Department’s “contacts with the HSE relating to public health and safety issue, and the reason why the change in policy from public health to public safety and that the Department is not competent to evaluate public health issues. They also seek an answer to the question **‘’**who on this CC has the authority and responsibility to act and ensure that the provisions of Article 9.1.(a) viz. control actions on species “in the interests of public health and safety” are fully availed of in order to protect citizens’’. They expressed concern that the feels that DCHG sees its role in this matter as being a “passive issuer of licences”**.**  There was nobody from NPWS present at meeting to respond to this point.

BCC also asked about the Committee’s Interim Report and when it would be available and that this needed to be done before next breeding season in February 2020, and whether the Department would be implementing recommendations of the 2018 Review of Derogation (7. 13) and whether citizens who live in areas of high density gull area would have relief measures included in 2020/2021 Derogation.

**Obligations of Member States where Gull – human conflicts arise (National Parks and Wildlife Service)**

As the NPWS Representatives were not present, this was not discussed.

**Gull Management Strategy**

The Chair opened the discussion by stating that any recommendations/output would have to be in compliance with the law, and that examples of work that could be undertaken, include monitoring, bird census, ringing of birds and threshold for public health and safety and risk of same.

NPWS stated that public health issues should be significant and proportionate, the scale of this and what resources needed, and Committee need to establish and agree solutions and scope of any work to be undertaken (e.g. favourable status of gulls, control measures (scaring etc.) and scale of what to be done, and critical to ensure compliance with Birds Directive and to have monitoring data.

BCC stated that there is no law that would intentionally or accidentally cause harm to citizens.

BWI stated that a science based approach is needed before any strategy put in place and would have to stand up in Court and conditions of risk needs to be underpinned. There was no data collected before derogation for Balbriggan was put in place and nothing has been learned from this as no monitoring has taken place. The Roughan & O’Donovan information collected from drone survey in FCC area could be utilised, and that the need for intervention would have to be established before alternative put in place and that any public spending be done effectively.

FCC suggestion of items to be looked at were around noise levels, aggressive behaviour, fouling (quantify) and disease risk. BCC added that AMR is not classed as a disease, it is a form of contamination.

The Chair asked BCC what their vision for Balbriggan area would be in relation to the Committee’s work.

BCC highlighted that noise major concern up to 22 hours a day in some places and that once gulls nests that householders have to accept they will be there for 7 months of year and no relief therefore for householders. They put forward their preference was for a policy could be put in place that residences where children/people with immune systems health problems (plus people’s homes, schools, hospitals, etc.) that nest removal be undertaken and removal of nests from residential areas.

**Action**

**Decision Tree Template to be created.**

**Timeframe for reporting progress**

The Chair stated that his draft interim report would be completed for next meeting and suggested date of mid-November for next meeting.

**AOB**

BCC raised their concerns that citizens are not being considered in the Committee’s work around public health, that BCC are the only ones speaking up for citizens, and expressed concerns and that dates of derogation should be brought forward to February following the Aniar Article 9 review recommendations.

FCC suggested that the AMR steering group be asked if they have any observations on gulls issue.

Date of next meeting proposed for mid-November.