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AN BORD PLEANALA	
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Summary of Oral Presentation by Dr Paddy Gargan, Inland Fisheries Ireland, to the An Bord Pleanala hearing, Connacht hotel, Galway, 14/1/15

I wish to make a brief comment on the concerns of IFI with regard to the proposed Galway Harbour extension and comment on the responses received today from the Galway Harbour Company on the IFI submissions of 11th March and 3rd December 2014.

Galway Fishery

IFI previously expressed concern that this development will encroach into the zone which is legally an integral part of the Galway Fishery. IFI requested that the existing River Corrib mouth boundaries be delineated and an examination of any implications arising from the development be undertaken. I note in the response from the Galway Harbour Company that the location of the markers has been re-established and the markers will be reinstated. The loss of fishing ground is also acknowledged by the Harbour Company and the monetary loss, if any, will be addressed with IFI.

Atlantic Salmon

Lough Corrib is an SAC for Atlantic salmon under the EU Habitats Directive and the Galway fishery is one of the most important salmon angling fisheries in Ireland. IFI raised concerns in their submission regarding the possibility of increased seal predation on returning salmon due to the more restricted nature of the Corrib river mouth if the proposed harbour extension proceeds. The response received from the Harbour Company states that consideration will be given to the introduction of some mitigation measures such as an acoustic deterrent device at the mouth of the river.

On a national scale, salmon marine survival is currently at 5% compared to 15% or more during the 1980s. IFI have concerns that increased seal predation may arise on returning salmon that have spent one or more sea winters at sea. In an era of low marine survival, the impact of increased seal predation could be significant. There is a proposal to monitor seal numbers prior to, during and for a period of years post construction. If this monitoring results in evidence of increased seal numbers and predation on salmon at the Corrib river mouth, IFI wish to see mitigation measures to address this issue. Increased seal predation on salmon is potentially a long-term effect which will need to be addressed.

European Eel

Eels in Ireland are protected under the EU recovery plan, (EC regulation establishing measures for the recovery of the European eel (Council Regulation 11000/2007)) and there is a prohibition on eel fishing since 2009. Ireland has submitted a recovery plan for eel to the EU, one of the elements of which is to ensure adequate upstream migration of juvenile eel (elver). IFI previously expressed concern regarding the possibility that the proposed harbour extension may restrict or hinder the upstream passage of elver into the Corrib river. The response from the Harbour Company notes that the freshwater flow will be narrower and deeper in the context of the new development and this

improved concentration of Corrib water will assist elver to move up the estuary faster. Elver movement into the Corrib may take place when water temperatures rise in May and June and water levels may be low at this time period. Therefore the narrower and deeper nature of the flow may not be significant in attracting elver into the river. The response from the Harbour Company also states that as part of additional mitigation to reduce the impact on elver migration and other fish species, a wildlife pass has been incorporated into the design. It is the view of IFI that the location of this wildlife pass, near the seaward end of the proposed harbour extension, may not be sufficient to address our concerns that elvers may accumulate to the east of the proposed extension and not have access to move into the river.

IFI had requested that an elver monitoring programme be initiated pre construction to determine the existing migration pathways utilised by migrating elvers entering the river Corrib. The response from the Harbour Company states that when the project is approved, a meeting will be held with IFI to agree on the detail of an elver monitoring programme. It is the view of IFI that an elver monitoring programme be initiated now, prior to any development, in order to get baseline data on elver migration routes.

IFI, in its previous submission, requested that should it emerge that the elver migration route could be hindered by the proposed harbour extension, an ongoing recovery programme and elver transportation programme will need to be implemented. This issue is not addressed in the response from the harbour Company.

In summary, IFI wish to have a monitoring programme in place with regard to seal numbers and predation on salmon and a monitoring programme regarding elver migration routes. If it transpires that the proposed development demonstrates an impact from increased seal numbers and predation or an impact on elver migration, adequate mitigation measures need to be put in place to address these issues. It is important to point out that such potential impacts could be long-term in nature and could potentially impact on the status of two protected fish species.

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