

MINUTES

**of the MEETING of the
NORTH AND WEST DISTRICT
SALMON FISHERY BOARD
held on Wednesday 20th May 2015
at 1.30pm at the MacPhail Centre,
Ullapool**

Present:

Mr R Vestey (Convener)
Mr D Davies
Mr J Allingham
Mr C Marsham
Ms C Acheson

Mr A Balfour

In attendance:

Mr C Cook (Clerk, Bell Ingram)
Dr S Marshall (WSFT)
Dr K Williams (Kyle Fisheries)

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from; Mr G Osborne, Mr D Lindsay, Mr J Watson

2. MEMBERS DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

See Item 7.

3. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 22nd OCTOBER 2014

There being no comments the Convenor signed the Minutes as an accurate record of the meeting.

4. MATTERS ARISING

None.

5. FINANCIAL REPORT

A financial report was tabled. The Clerk advised that expenditure for the year to the 28th May 2014 was expected to be per the budget for the same period leading to an estimated bank balance of about £13,000 by the year end.

6. BUDGET AND ASSESSMENT – YEAR TO 28th MAY 2016

The draft budget for the year to the 28th May 2016 was tabled. Members adjusted the expenditure by £1000 plus VAT to allow for the additional work required of the Clerk on the Wild Fishery Review and other government initiatives.

Members discussed the likely costs of winding up the affairs of the Board when finally abolished by legislative change and held to the view that a sum in the region of about £10,000 would be sufficient for that purpose. The Clerk predicted that a bank balance of that level would be achieved in one year's time based on the adjusted budget.

Members agreed that in order to achieve a balance of income and expenditure in the 2016/17 financial year an assessment of about 53p/£1RV will need to be implemented.

The assessment for the year to 28th May 2016 was agreed at 48p/£1 RV

7. WEST SUTHERLAND FISHERIES TRUST - REPORT

Shona Marshall talked to the following report covering the work undertaken by the West Sutherland Fisheries Trust in line with the funding proposal approved by the Board for 2014/5

Report to North & West District Salmon Fishery Board Work undertaken between 1st May 2014 – 30th April 2015

The following work has been undertaken:

1. Juvenile surveys. 12 catchments were sampled. These were: Gleann Leireag, Sandwood, Achriesgill, Loch Innis, Badna Bay, Oldshoremore, Culag, Kirkaig, Garvie, Polly, Loch nam Brac and Rhiconich. The reports on these surveys have now been produced and circulated to the proprietors.
2. Broodstock Netting – there were no requests for assistance during 2014.
3. Education – much of this was detailed in the Interim Report. The 2015 Ghillies Seminar took place on the 24th April 2015. This was attended by several of the Ghillies within the area and appeared to be well received.
4. Sweep netting surveys were detailed in the Interim Report. The full report has now been completed, supplied to the Board and published on the Trust website. Sweep netting for the 2015 season started in April.
5. Biosecurity. This was reported in the interim report.

The Trust has taken over the management of the Scottish Mink Initiative within the area, working with the volunteers as well as monitoring some rafts. Tracks were found on one of the rafts, but trapping failed to catch any animal.

We continue to promote, and exercise, biosecurity at all times, particularly the 'Check, Clean and Dry' campaign.

6. A smolt trap was installed in Badna Bay during April. It will remain in place until mid May, depending on weather conditions.
7. The Trust has worked with the Clerk to the Board as required, providing advice on different matters.

Members thanked Dr Marshall for her report. Mr Marsham and Mr Davies declared an interest as WSFT trustees and took no part in the discussion and vote that followed. The remaining Board gave unanimous approval to making the budgeted donation to the WSFT of £12,000.

Dr Marshall then set out the WSFT funding proposal to the Board for the period May 2015 - April 2016 as follows:

The assessment and improvement of migratory salmonid populations in West Sutherland.

Established in 1995, the West Sutherland Fisheries Trust aims to restore salmonid populations within west Sutherland towards their 1970's level. This is undertaken through the provision of advice and assistance on the populations within the area and restoration policies. As part of this the Trust undertakes a variety of activities aimed at monitoring present stocks and assisting with improvement activities where requested.

The following work is proposed for the period May 2015 to April 2016. This forms a part of the overall work undertaken by the Trust, which also includes work on other species as well as administration. However, the funding requested here is purely for work on migratory salmonids.

1. Juvenile surveys – it is proposed to continue with the current programme of juvenile surveys. Juvenile surveys are a useful technique to determine the status of the stock and its fluctuations with time. They give the Biologist the opportunity to identify issues within the catchments, both in terms of fish numbers and also physical changes to the burns. They can also be used to monitor the impacts of different restoration policies, such as habitat management and stocking, in order to determine their effectiveness or otherwise. This information is then fed into management plans in those and other catchments within the area. Field work relating to this survey must be undertaken between July and October in order to minimise damage to spawning populations and also give the most accurate measure of population structure and dynamics.
2. At the request of the appropriate Estates, the Trust assists with the capture of broodstock for re-stocking purposes.
3. Education forms an important part of the work of the Trust, helping to raise awareness of the different issues and promote sustainable management of the fisheries. During 2015/16 a variety of events have been planned, including the Ghillies Seminar in April, work with P5 - 7 pupils from the area in cooperation with the Highland Ranger Service, the undertaking of Guided Walks in conjunction with the HC Ranger Service and the manning of stalls at the Highland Field Sports Fair and the Scourie Gala. Field trips will give the pupils a chance to monitor the habitat, invertebrates and fish populations within the area and learn about their ecology.
4. Sea trout form an important part of the fisheries within the Sutherland area. The Trust has been undertaking a survey of the fish in some of the estuaries, work previously fully funded by the Crown Estate Commission. While this funding has now been significantly reduced, the Trust considers the work to remain important. Sweep netting will be undertaken in the estuaries of the Polla and Laxford monthly from March to October. Length and weight will be measured, sea lice counted, and predator marks (including nets) recorded. The fish will also be tagged to provide additional information on growth rates and movements.

This work feeds into the management of the systems, particularly where net marked fish have been identified, enabling the Estates to target bailiff activities. In addition, within this work we are able to identify other issues relating to the sea trout populations and any changes in population dynamics. It also forms part of a wider study into the potential impacts of Aquaculture on wild fish and the development of sensitivity models to assist in marine planning.

5. Biosecurity is an important aspect in the conservation and restoration of the fish populations. In 2009 the Trust produced a Biosecurity Plan for the area. As part of this plan the removal of several non-native plant species was identified as important. The Trust proposes to undertake this work over the coming year with the pulling of Himalayan Balsam and the injection of Japanese Knotweed with pesticides. In addition, the Trust is involved in the monitoring of American Mink within the area by

checking rafts, managing volunteers and acting as a conduit for information between the different parties. This practical work will assist in the management of the area and its fish populations.

Education is also seen as an important aspect of Biosecurity and as such the Trust will continue to promote biosecurity within the area and to provide advice and assistance where required to Estates and other users on biosecurity and the prevention of the spread of non-native species.

6. While we now have an indication of the juvenile abundance within the catchments of west Sutherland, and also adult abundance through catch records, the translation of this into the number of smolts produced is still relatively unknown. As such, the Trust plans to operate a smolt trap within one of the catchments. This will give further information on the systems and assist with their management. In addition, it is hoped that the data can be translated into the wider area by identifying the bottlenecks to freshwater production.
7. The Trust would request that a further £1000 be set aside, to support the provision of better informed responses to aquaculture planning applications made by the Board. This money will only be drawn in the event of this advice being required. This will enable the Biologist to spend time on the applications and enable an assessment of the available GIS models.

The Trust would like to approach the North & West District Salmon Fishery Board for assistance with the completion of the items 1 - 6 listed above.

The West Sutherland Fisheries Trust requests a contribution of £12000 from the DSFB towards the completion of the above work. The West Sutherland Fisheries Trust also requests that an additional £1000 be made available for the undertaking of item 7 above.

Members thanked Dr Marshall for the WSFT funding proposal. Mr Marsham and Mr Davies declared an interest as WSFT trustees and took no part in the discussion and vote that followed. The remaining Board gave approval to the funding proposal and the electro-fishing needed for the Juvenile Survey work.

A discussion took place regarding the level of attendance and the profile of those who attend the ghillies seminar. The Board recognised the valuable facility it offered to a wide range of people but in particular Water Bailiffs to assist with their Continuing Professional Development. The last two years had seen presentations by Police Scotland and the Fishery Protection arm of Marine Scotland as well as by the Clerk on Seal control matters. The Board were disappointed to learn that so few Water Bailiffs attended the annual seminar and asked the Clerk to liaise with Dr Marshall to ensure knowledge of the event reached the widest audience and that Water bailiffs were encouraged by their Employers to attend.

The Clerk explained that, once again the WSFT/NWDSFB circular on Bio Security would be circulated to proprietors.

8. SALMON MANAGEMENT GROUPS

The Clerk reported on the work of the two Salmon Management Groups. He explained that both had secured quota for the 2015/6 period. He commented however that there was evidence to suggest that rather than basing their licencing decisions on the potential biological recruitment of Common and Grey seal populations quota was being based in large part on the level of cull achieved the previous year. The quota available to the North West Salmon Management Group would appear to be based on this approach with a reduction in Common Seal numbers for 2015/6 where the group had not achieved the previous years quota.

The Clerk explained he had again attended the Ghillies Seminar to update ghillies on the work of the seal management groups and to encourage the capture of evidence of seal damage to fish or presence in the river. The Clerk asked Members to similarly encourage their staff and guests and to pass the information to him.

Mr Allingham observed that Cod stocks are understood to be very low, in no small part due to the number of seals eating them and they would not improve if seal numbers were left unchecked.

9 WILD FISHERIES REVIEW

Members included Dr Williams in a discussion about this subject in light of the Scottish Government response that was issued on the 15th May to the report in to the Wild Fishery Review chaired by Andrew Thin during 2014. Members noted that the response is a further consultation paper aiming to take peoples thoughts on broad themes arising from the Review and does not provide any detailed commentary. That said many of the questions the paper seeks answers to start; 'Do you agree..' and Members were suspicious that this more or less tells the reader what is very likely to take place.

A development members discussed is the suggestion that rather than Trusts and DSFB's discussing amongst themselves the shape and extent of future FMO boundaries that they will be decided by Scottish Ministers. Dr Williams held to the view notwithstanding this that government might be steered by Trusts/DSFB's making well thought through suggestions of their own. Members agreed that the Clerk should meet further with Dr Williams and other Clerks from the northern part of Scotland to explore this further.

The Clerk agreed to circulate a copy of the Government response to Members and also to produce a draft consultation response for Members to develop ahead of a submission deadline of the 15th August.

10 BAN ON THE KILLING OF SALMON EXCEPT UNDER LICENCE

Members only held a short discussion about various aspects of this government proposal as the initial consultation exercise had been completed by the Clerk and the consultation on the draft bill would require detailed consideration in the coming months. A particular comment made that members strongly agreed upon was that the cost of securing a licence should be the same for salmon anglers and netsmen.

11. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Clerk updated Members on an application for approval to survey Loch Ocsgaig by means of Gill Netting and Fyke Traps. The survey is necessary as part of their on-going surveillance of 40 water bodies within Scotland as part of the duties required of them by the Water Framework Directive. The survey method follows European and UK protocols to ensure consistency of approach.

Members gave their approval to the application but wished SEPA to be aware that the administration of Salmon Fishery Districts was entirely funded by Salmon Fishery Proprietors and that given the additional burden being placed upon the Board by recent legislation and the current initiatives of the Scottish Government they should not rely upon future applications being handled without charge.

There was no other business

12. DATE OF NEXT BOARD MEETING

The date of the next Board meeting and the Annual Public meeting was set as Wednesday 21st October 2015 and to be held at CKD Galbraith, 17 Old Edinburgh Road, Inverness. The Annual Meeting of Qualified Proprietors to start at 1.00pm with the Board meeting to follow on from it at about 1.30pm.

There being no other business there was a vote of thanks to the Convener and the meeting closed at 3.15pm

ACTION PLAN

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| Issue the agreed budget | CRWC |
| Issue joint WSFT/NWDSFB Bio-Security leaflet | CRWC |
| Liaise with WSFT on raising the profile of the 2016 Ghillies Meeting | CRWC |
| Write to SEPA approving the Loch Osaig Survey | CRWC |
| Circulate a copy of the ScotGov response to the Wild Fishery Review | CRWC |
| Draft a Board response to the ScotGov response/consultation for the 15th August | CRWC |
| Organise October's meetings | CRWC |

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CRWC/NW/1/3
May 2015