

MINUTES

**of the MEETING of the
NORTH AND WEST DISTRICT
SALMON FISHERY BOARD
held on Tuesday 17th May 2016
at 1.30pm at the MacPhail Centre,
Ullapool**

Present:

Mr R Vestey (Convener)
Mr A Balfour
Mr C Marsham
Mr J Allingham
Mr D Lindsay
Mr D Davies
Mr G Osborne

In attendance:

Mr C Cook (Clerk, Bell Ingram)
Dr S Marshall (WSFT)

The Convenor updated the Board that very sadly Jack Watson, a long time Member of the Board, had passed away and said he felt that we were very much the poorer for his passing. He advised that the Clerk had written to his Widow to express condolences on behalf of the Board. At this time, the Board agreed that no replacement should be sought with the role of representative of Salmon Anglers also being covered by Cathel MacLeod.

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from; Mr R Bradford and Ms C Acheson

2. MEMBERS DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Mr Marsham updated Members that he had stepped down as Chairman of the WSFT but remained a Trustee. Mr Balfour advised that he was no longer an employee of Loch Duart Ltd but would continue to act as its Mandatory as a Representative of Tenant Netsmen.

3. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 21st OCTOBER 2015

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 2015 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 2017

The draft budget for the year to the 28th May 2017 was tabled.

Members reviewed their previous decision and reasoning to set the assessment for 2016/7 at 53p/£1RV. The general consensus was that the timetable for the implementation of the Wild Fishery Review was such that a move to this higher rate could be delayed a year.

Members discussed that the creation of Conservation Plans for the local fishery districts would result in unbudgeted expense. However because the plan templates, being prepared by Scot Gov, were some way off being released the timing and extent of the work required to complete the job was unknown. This means that the WSFT cannot not give an indication of the likely cost of completion at this time. Members agreed to revisit the subject at the October meeting when the WSFT would be asked to update the Board.

The assessment for the year to 28th May 2017 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 2015/6

Report to North & West District Salmon Fishery Board Work undertaken between 1st May 2015 – 30th April 2016

This report covers the work undertaken by the West Sutherland Fisheries Trust in line with the funding proposal approved by the District Fishery Board for 2015/16.

The following work has been undertaken:

1. Juvenile surveys. 7 catchments were sampled. These were: Hope, Polla, Laxford, Bhadaidh Daraich, Geisgeil, Duart and Inver. The reports on these surveys have now been produced and circulated to the proprietors. The 'all catchment' report has been supplied to the Board and published on the Trust website.
2. Broodstock Netting – there were no requests for assistance during 2015.
3. Education – much of this was detailed in the Interim Report. The 2016 Ghillies Seminar took place on the 22nd April 2016. This was attended by a variety of individuals within the area and appeared to be well received.

We have also assisted with 'Fish 2 Dish', teaching High School pupils about salmonid biology and threats, and attended the Highland Wildlife Fair.

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 2016 season started in March.

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 have been 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.

This report, together with that from October 2015, indicates the parts of the programme proposed for funding in 2015 that have been completed.

Dr Shona Marshall
Fisheries Biologist

Members thanked Dr Marshall for her report. Mr Marsham then updated Members on the financial state of the WSFT. He explained that with the uncertainty over the Wild Fishery Review and the tightness of the economy the Trust was biting into its reserves. He predicted that the WSFT was viable for perhaps the next 18 months unless funding sources were found. The WSFT used to breakeven but is now forecasting a shortfall of £20 - £50,000 for the current financial year. He explained that the WSFT had under consideration canvassing salmon proprietors and its own membership for suggestions on its future funding and its continuation. He concluded by saying that the anticipated delay in implementation of the Wild Fishery Review to 2019/20 means, as things stand, it is unlikely to survive that long but that the absence of the WSFT will not help a future FMO, setting it back many years due to a lack of data, knowledgeable staff, goodwill etc..

Members considered and approved payment of the 2015/6 £13,000 donation to the WSFT with Mr Balfour proposing and Mr Osborne seconding the motion.

Dr Marshall then set out the WSFT funding proposal to the Board for the period May 2016 - April 2017 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 2016 to April 2017. 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 will assist 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 2016/17 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, a transitional project with P7 pupils and the manning of stalls at the Assynt Fishing Fèis, 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. Monitoring of the Kyle of Durness will also take place, in accordance with the protocol for a west coast-wide project initiated by RAFTS.

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.

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 2016/7 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 control achieved the previous year. He said he understood a seal survey was to take place this year.

Mr Balfour said that the Wester Ross Marine Protection Area (which covers a part of the southern extent of the district) includes protection for Harbour Porpoises. It is possible, he said that any fish farms in this area could be told not to use Acoustic Deterrent Devices to scare off seals due to the possible problems they may cause porpoises.

9. WILD FISHERIES REVIEW

The Clerk confirmed to Members that he had responded to the ASFB/RAFTS request for comment on their response to the Consultation on the draft provisions for a Wild Fisheries (Scotland) Bill and Draft Wild Fisheries Strategy. He had also responded to the consultation directly to Scot Gov on behalf of the Board. In addition to this he had attended the ASFB/RAFTS Wild Fisheries workshop at Battleby on the 16th March.

The most important area for the Board to focus on now he said was the extent to which it could influence the future landscape of Fishery Management Areas and the Fishery Management Organisations that will run them. Doing nothing would inevitably result in the district having one or more FMA's and by one or possibly more than one FMO imposed. The question was if positive engagement with neighbours could influence an outcome that proprietors might find easier to accept.

The Clerk said he had maintained contact with the Kyle Fisheries as had the WSFT. The Clerk said he thought the Northern, Caithness and Helmsdale Boards were quite well on in developing a draft FMO for their areas. He added that the WRASFB through their Clerk had explained to him that they have no interest in an East/West relationship as he suggested they were being encouraged into and that although they were of the view that a Wester Ross/Skye configuration was sufficient for an FMO they remained interested in talking with the NWDSFB. In this respect the Clerk has said he is happy to meet with the WRASFB to exchange ideas.

As a starting point the Clerk proposed to the Board that he be instructed to contact the Kyle Fisheries with a view to organising a meeting, together with the WSFT, to explore as an exercise how an FMO including the two districts together with the Fleet catchment and the Brora district might operate and be funded.

Members discussed with the Clerk the presently limited detail about the work an FMO would undertake (Members know in outline what an FMO will do and that it will have national and local roles to play but the extent of the roles and level of resources needed is not known). This lack of detail is nevertheless to be balanced against encouragement from ASFB/RAFTS not to be under ambitious in estimating the cost of the work evidenced by some remarkably high staffing estimates and wages bills seen by the Clerk generated by the ASFB/RAFTS joint working group. Members reflected how such ambition was capable of being funding by private salmon fishery proprietors and if the approach was even appropriate, preferring the idea of establishing what, in the first instance, was unavoidable cost in pursuance of national and local objectives.

The Clerk said that the ASFB/RAFTS consensus appeared to be that there would inevitably be a funding shortfall. He said he felt that to be sustainable an FMO would have to be of a scale that was financially viable, which might mean that it has to manage a number of FMA's. Mr Lindsay picked up on the point say that arguably there may end up only being one FMO for the whole of the north of Scotland with a more federal approach taken to the management of the FMA's. Members were relatively well disposed to an FMA for the current district as this would ensure it had its own fishery management plan and associated aims and objectives and could retain local involvement.

The Members concluded by instructing the Clerk to make contact with the Kyle Fisheries on the basis they felt that running an exercise such as he proposed would have no downside to either party and might develop some helpful outcomes to benefit both sides in what is for now a very unclear period.

10. BAN ON THE KILLING OF SALMON EXCEPT UNDER LICENCE

The Clerk explained that the ban was now in place and a plan showing which category (1 – 3) the local fishery boards had been classified into. Mr Osborne queried if it would be possible for e.g a category 3 river to be able to improve to a higher category. The Board discussed this with Shona Marshall saying that, for now, in the absence of a Conservation Plan it would not be possible. She added that the category for next year will be set in July this year.

Members asked that the subject be revisited in October when more may be known about Conservation Plan and their compilation.

11. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Mr Davies mentioned that Marine Harvest might be considering a fish farm development in the Summer Isles. The Clerk said he was aware of this and had discussed it with the WRASFB Clerk within whose district the Summer Isles lie. He added that if requested by the WRASFB the Board have a precedent for writing in support of objections they make.

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 26th October 2016 and to be held at CKD Galbraith, 17 Old Edinburgh Road, Inverness. The Annual Meeting of Qualified Proprietors to start at 10.30am with the Board meeting to follow on from it at about 11.00am.

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

ACTION PLAN

Issue the agreed budget	CRWC
Issue donation to the WSFT	CRWC
Issue joint WSFT/NWDSFB Bio-Security leaflet	CRWC
Write to Kyle Fisheries to set up a joint FMO operations/costings exercise	CRWC
Organise October's meetings	CRWC