

NORTH AND WEST DISTRICT SALMON FISHERY BOARD

ANNUAL REPORT – 2017

This is the 18th annual report for the North and West District Salmon Fishery Board since it was formed by the North and West District Salmon Fishery Board Designation Order in May 1999.

BACKGROUND

The Board has a statutory role to play in the protection and improvement of fisheries within its district. The list of Board Members and Officers can be found in Appendix 1. The Board does not employ any members of staff and therefore supports services or activities carried out by others which in its view are appropriate and appear to assist it to fulfil its role. The control of poaching and illegal netting activity is an activity which the Board endorses by the issuing of Warrant Cards to qualified Bailiffs within the district.

A REVIEW OF 2016/7

GOOD GOVERNANCE

The NWDSFB has adopted The Code of Good Practice for District Salmon Fishery Boards produced by the Association of Salmon Fishery Boards.

The Aquaculture and Fisheries (Scotland) Act 2013 ('2013 Act') introduced a number of significant changes and obligations to the governance of Boards. According to Marine Scotland:

'The purpose of the obligations is to enhance openness, transparency and accountability of the management of salmon fisheries by DSFBs. The obligations seek to mainstream existing best practice by DSFBs to ensure that all Boards act in a manner consistent with bodies operating in the public sphere. It is not the intention that the obligations seek to micromanage the business of Boards.'

The NWDSFB has fully implemented changes and obligations to the governance of Boards introduced in 2013 by the Aquaculture and Fisheries (Scotland) Act 2013 including a Complaints Procedure, a Register of Members interests and the commencement of the reporting of notices of meetings, annual reports and annual accounts to the Scottish Government.

A website, northwest.dsfb.org.uk, is maintained listing the Board Members, all notices of meetings, minutes of meetings, annual reports and audited accounts along with additional relevant publications.

Meetings

A meeting of Qualified Proprietors was held on the 23rd May 2017 to conduct the triennial election prior to which the last Annual Meeting of Qualified Proprietors took place on the 26th October 2016. The next meeting will be held in Inverness on the 24th October 2017.

Board meetings took place on the 26th October 2016, the 23rd May 2017 and the next one will take place in Inverness on the 24th October 2017.

The third Annual Public Meeting was held in Ullapool on the 23rd May 2017.

All meetings were notified to the public by posting on the NWDSFB website. The Scottish Government have received a copy of the notices. In addition a notice for the Annual Public Meeting and the triennial election was placed in the Northern Times in line with statute.

Annual Report and Accounts

Once approved these will continue to be posted on the NWDSFB website and sent to the Scottish Government. The 2016 Annual Report and Accounts for the year to the 28th May 2016 have been submitted to the Scottish Government.

Complaints

At the time of preparing this report NO complaints had been received.

Members' Interests

Board members are expected to declare new/amend existing interests at the start of Board meetings and all such interests are recorded in the minutes of those meetings.

INTRODUCTION OF YOUNGSTOCK

Consent from the NWDSFB for the introduction of salmon young stock to rivers within the District is a legal requirement and failure to secure consent is an Offence following the 2013 Act.

No requests were made in the last year.

ELECTRO-FISHING

Written consent from the NWDSFB to carry out electro-fishing in rivers within the District is a legal requirement.

In the last year the Board consented to electro-fishing work being conducted by the WSFT as a part of their Juvenile Survey within the District.

WILD FISH REVIEW

Wild Fisheries Reform was a prominent feature of 2014 - 6 and considerable effort was expended in positioning the Board and the District to cope with any future changes to the structure of fishery management organisations.

The Scottish Government announcement in early 2017 that fishery boards were, after all, to continue as the management bodies and organisations that will be responsible for delivering fishery management in Scotland.

The process of wild fisheries reform is not over with one of the next steps, albeit with an uncertain timetable, being the creation of Fishery Management Plans to cover all Districts. The terms of reference for the plans is to:

'facilitate a consistent approach to be taken by local FMOs, inform development/review of the National Wild Fisheries Strategy and allow Scottish Ministers to identify, quantify and prioritise action to mitigate impacts on wild fish and fisheries in Scotland'.

When more is known on this subject the Board will report further to Proprietors.

FUTURE OF ASFB/RAFTS

Following the ASFB AGM on the 17th October 2016 Fisheries Management Scotland was formed. as the single representative organisation for the District Salmon Fishery Boards, River Tweed Commission and Fisheries Trusts and Foundations in Scotland.

The Board is very pleased to report that Mr Alan Wells, the Chief Executive of FMS will, together with Simon Dryden who leads the Scottish Government's Salmon & Recreational Fisheries team, attend the Annual Meeting of Qualified Proprietors on the 24th October 2017.

THE SALMON CARCASS TAGGING (SCOTLAND) REGULATIONS 2016

It is important to remember the only source of wild Scottish Atlantic salmon which may be purchased are those caught from net and coble fisheries in Category 1 or 2 waters. It is an offence to sell rod caught wild Scottish Atlantic salmon.

It is now a legal requirement that any wild Scottish Atlantic salmon killed at a net and coble fishery is tagged with a carcass tag as soon as it is brought to the shore.

The North West salmon fishery district has no active Net & Coble fisheries and the majority of the waters are category 3.

BIO-SECURITY

The Board once again collaborated with the WSFT in the production and distribution of leaflets to remind proprietors and the wider public of the danger of allowing certain alien species, for example *Gyrodactylus salaris*, in to the country.

THE CONSERVATION OF SALMON (SCOTLAND) REGULATIONS 2018

At the time of writing the proposed Conservation Assessment for the 2018 season is out to consultation.

It is clear from many Proprietors that they cannot see reflected in the Assessment of their fisheries the condition of the rivers they know so well, certainly an awful lot better than Marine Scotland. With the Assessment based on restricted data including data drawn from very different parts of Scotland and other parts of the world (the egg requirements figures come from outside Scotland as there are none apparently for Scottish rivers) to the NW it is perhaps easier to understand why. The ability for rivers to drop two conservation grades in the space of a year or indeed go up two places and fall as far again the next year, whilst making sense to Marine Scotland, does not make sense locally and it is the lack of 'ground truthing' or 'sense checking' that seems so absurd. A wholesale lack of trust in the work of a Government body cannot be a desired outcome.

Equally absurd is the reliance on catch records as the principal measure of conservation degradation. If a river is not fished the conclusion is that the fishery has no fish which is, of course, nonsense.

Let us please have recognition of catch effort on each river, of the exploitation rate (how helpful is the exploitation rate of fish on the North Esk in lowland Angus in assessing the health of a spate river in Sutherland?) and of the health of the juvenile populations in each river.

The Board recognises that annual assessments are not going to go away but the erratic outcomes of the Marine Scotland model help no one and disrupt and potentially harm the fortunes of many. The real outcomes of the Assessment are reputational damage for Marine Scotland and, whilst they persist with annual adjustments that flip flop so wildly, damage to the reputation of fisheries in the North West.

When 99% of the problems affecting Salmon are at sea and outwith the control of DSFB's and Proprietors, there has to be a better way to approach salmon conservation than the current concentration of effort on the 1% in such an inadequate and untrustworthy manner.

WEST SUTHERLAND FISHERIES TRUST

The Board made a financial contribution to the WSFT in 2016/7 to assist with the following work which supports the statutory role of the Board within the District:

The following work has been undertaken:

1. Juvenile surveys. 14 catchments were sampled, some as part of a freshwater pearl mussel survey. These were: Achriesgill, Oldshoremore, Loch na Thull, Laxford, Badna Bay, Claise na Fearn, Loch nam Brac, Gleann Leireag, Clashnessie, Badnaban, Kirkaig, Rhegreanoch Burn, Polly and Garvie. 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 2016/7.
3. Education –The 2017 Ghillies Seminar took place on the 28th April 2017. This was attended by a variety of individuals within the area and appeared to be well received. The notes from the Seminar are available on the Website. The WSFT also assisted Durness, Kinlochbervie and Scourie Primary Schools with a project on animal migration.
4. Sweep netting. The full report has now been completed, supplied to the Board and published on the Trust website. Sweep netting for the 2017 season started in April.
5. Biosecurity. 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. While tracks continue to be found on rafts in the Coigach area, trapping has failed to catch any animal.

They 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 until mid-May.
7. The Trust worked with the Clerk to the Board as required, providing advice on different matters.

PLANNING CONSULTATIONS ETC.

Scottish Sea Farms proposed a new fish farm near Horse Island by Ullapool and within the Wester Ross ASFB District. The Clerk liaised with the WRASFB and offered support as necessary.

NORTH WEST SALMON MANAGEMENT GROUP

The Board continues to collaborate in the North and West Salmon Management group and operate the Northern Salmon Management Group, the function of both being to apply for licences to shoot seals. The application for licences to shoot seal, in the absence of realistically economic and workable alternatives, is the only means available in law that a Board has to try and protect wild salmon and fisheries from predation and damage by seals.

LOOK AHEAD TO 2017/8

Looking ahead to next year the Board will continue to monitor and make representations on developments that may affect salmon or salmon fisheries within the District in fulfilment of its statutory brief.

The Board will continue its close working relationship with the West Sutherland Fisheries Trust (WSFT) in respect of its salmon and sea trout related work.

AND FINALLY

Once again in a turbulent year with much set to change in the salmon fishery world it is important to record a vote of thanks to Board members who are all unpaid volunteers and whose role covers a vital aspect of the Scottish regulatory framework in the protection salmon and the improvement of wild salmon fisheries. The participation of the Board members now and going forward into legislative change is and will continue to be of considerable importance within our District with the ripple effect on hotels, suppliers and so on in this otherwise fragile economic area.



D Davies
Vice Convenor
North and West District Salmon Fishery Board

Appendix 1

North and West District Salmon Fishery Board

(Correct at 1st October 2017)

Convenor:	Mr Robin Vestey	
Upper Proprietors:	Mr Andrew Adamson Mr James Allingham Mr Robin Bradford Mr David Davies Mr Gerald Osborne	
(Vice Convenor)		
Lower Proprietors:	Mr Dougal Lindsay Mr Alan Balfour	
Co-opted:	Mr Charles Marsham Mr Cathel Macleod Vacant	(Rep. Salmon Angler) (Rep. Salmon Angler) (Tenant Netsmen)
Clerk	Mr Crispian Cook MRICS, Bell Ingram LLP	
