

MINUTES

**of the MEETING of the
NORTH AND WEST DISTRICT
SALMON FISHERY BOARD held on
TUESDAY 20th May 2014 at 1.45pm at the
MACPHAIL CENTRE, ULLAPOOL**

Present:

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

Mr J Watson

Mr A Balfour

In attendance:

Mr C Cook (Clerk, Bell Ingram)
Dr Shona Marshall (WSFT)
Mr T MacDonnell (Wildlands Limited)

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from; Mr R Bradford, Mr C MacLeod, Mr D Lindsay

2. CO-OPTION OF REPRESENTATIVES OF SALMON ANGLERS AND TENANT NETSMEN

The Clerk explained to the elected Members that their first role was to consider and appoint representatives of salmon anglers and tenant netsmen in the District to join the Board. He added that where there were both in the District and they were willing to be co-opted they should be appointed.

Members discussed the matter and for the salmon anglers Mr Cathel Macleod and Mr Jack Watson were re-appointed unanimously. Mr Alan Balfour, Commercial Director for Loch Duart Limited, was unanimously re-appointed as the representative for tenant netsmen.

3. ELECTION OF CONVENER

A discussion was held about the position of Convener during the next three year term. A decision was made that a Vice Convener should also be appointed. Mr Vestey was unanimously elected Convener. Mr Davies was unanimously elected Vice Convener

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No adjustments were required to existing Members declarations of interest.

5. MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 5th NOVEMBER 2013

The Minutes of the Board Meeting held on 5th November 2013 were approved by the Board by email following the change in publishing requirements but were re-affirmed as an accurate record and signed by the Convener.

6. MATTERS ARISING

The Clerk reported the following comment from Dougal Lindsay in respect of the Reay Forest hydro scheme proposals:

‘All of the schemes have been granted the CAR licences just awaiting planning (access tracks, wild land and eagles are the main issues that we are discussing). Because of potential conflict that I have, the consultants are going to liaise with the downstream proprietors- they haven't yet as we have taken our foot off the gas for various reasons- but they will contact Hope Estate in the next couple of weeks. Strathmore are fully aware of the proposals’.

Members asked the Clerk to ensure that the consultation did take place on behalf of the developer and that the Board learnt the outcome of the consultation. Mr MacDonnell commented that he would make his own enquiries on behalf of his employer who owned the Hope Estate.

7. FINANCIAL REPORT

The Clerk talked to the Financial Report and explained the Management Expenditure would exceed budget by approximately £1,500 plus VAT, as previously approved by the Board, to cover some of the additional cost incurred in assisting the Board to be compliant with the Aquaculture and Fisheries (Scotland) Act 2013. Most other expenditure items would be on budget. The Bank Account currently stood at £32,783.42 but approximately £17,000 of expenditure (principally the Board donation to the WSFT) would be due before the financial year end.

8. BUDGET AND ASSESSMENT – YEAR TO 28th MAY 2014

The Board considered and approved the budget presented by the Clerk.

The assessment was retained at 48p/£1RV in order to make use of some of the surplus funds in the bank account.

The Convener commented that with the Wild Fisheries review now underway the extent of the additional work required from the Clerk was unknown and was something that the Board would keep under review with the Clerk as the new financial year progressed.

The Clerk agreed to distribute the joint NWDSFB/WSFT Bio-Security notice to proprietors along with the Assessment notice and also offered to distribute any WSFT funding appeal paperwork supplied to him by the WSFT.

9. WEST SUTHERLAND FISHERIES TRUST - REPORT

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 2013/14.

The following work has been undertaken:

1. Juvenile surveys – 7 catchments were sampled. These were: Duart, Laxford, Inver, Polla, Bhadaidh Daraich, Loch na Thull and Clashfern, as reported in the Interim Report. The reports on these surveys have now been produced and circulated to the proprietors.
2. Broodstock Netting – there were no requests for assistance during 2013.
3. Education – much of this was detailed in the Interim Report. The 2014 Ghillies Seminar took place on the 11th April 2014. This was attended by many 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 2014 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. No physical signs have been found in traps or rafts. However a mink carcass has been found on the shore at Achiltibuie.

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, including planning applications over the past 2 years. I would like to request the release of the additional £1000 agreed at the Board meeting.

This report, together with that from October 2013, indicates the parts of the programme proposed for funding in 2013 that have been completed.

Dr Shona Marshall
Fisheries Biologist

Members considered and approved the £12,000 donation plus the additional £1,000 payment sought. Mr Marsham as Chairman for the WSFT thanked the Board for their support and added that the Board and individual Proprietors were encouraged to contact the Trust for suggestions of future work/projects.

Dr Shona Marshall then presented the schedule of works proposed by the WSFT for the year to April 2015:

The following work is proposed for the period May 2014 to April 2015. 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 2014/15 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 as part of 'The Scourie Detectives'. 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 £12,000 from the DSFB towards the completion of the above work. The West Sutherland Fisheries Trust also requests that an additional £1,000 be made available for the undertaking of item 7 above.

10. SALMON MANAGEMENT GROUPS

The Clerk gave Members a review of the work of the North and West Salmon Management Group and the Northern Salmon Management Group. He explained that both groups had sought and achieved licences to control seals in 2014/5. He said he attended the WSFT Ghillies seminar on the 14th April to update Ghillies and had explained to them that the quota levels were dropping year on year, very possibly because the level of activity (evidenced by the number of seals controlled) did not convince the Scottish Government of the need to maintain the quota level. He explained this year that the increased demand on the quota, as a result of more seal incidents, had the potential to put pressure on the availability of quota.

11. WILD FISHERIES REVIEW

Board Members shared their thoughts on the Wild Fishery review process to date.

The Clerk explained that Mr Thin has made a request for written submissions (Members to refer to email from the Clerk dated 2nd May 2014) in particular asking for a response to four questions:

Leadership and Governance – Please give us your thoughts on the kind of governance structure that you believe might best achieve this (strategic leadership, direction and monitor progress), including how best to ensure a direct line of sight back to Scottish Ministers and the national public interest. Thoughts on whether there may be an existing public body or similar organisation that might be adapted to assist with this task would be helpful.

Management and Delivery – Please give us your thoughts on the sort of delivery mechanism/s (public, private and/or third sector) that might be appropriate here, with particular emphasis on the characteristics highlighted in the April progress bulletin (Members to see email from the Clerk dated 29th April 2014). Thoughts on how this might link back to the governance structure would also be appreciated.

Resourcing – Please give us your thoughts on both income generation and resource deployment, bearing in mind the characteristics implied in the April progress bulletin. Ideas about potential new income sources and suggestions about how best to ensure that

resource deployment aligns fully with national and regional strategic priorities would be much appreciated.

Cross Cutting – A number of issues they need to consider will not fall into the above categories – *Please give us your thoughts on these and any other issues you think are of relevance*

Members discussed and agreed that the Clerk would circulate a consultation to the Board members listing Mr Thins questions to enable a Board response to him to be compiled by the Clerk for submission by the end of the month.

Members noted that there was a meeting with the Wild Fish Review Panel on the 1st July in Ullapool. The Vice Convener would attend to represent the Board. Mr Marsham said he was attending to represent the WSFT. The Clerk said that he would contact the Panel to see if there might be scope for him to attend.

12. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

IFM Exam Results

The Clerk was pleased to record the Robert Stuart and George Goodbrand had sat and passed the Water Bailiffs exam.

Water Bailiffs

The news above leaves Iain MacDonald of the Hope Estate as the only Water Bailiff who has not passed the exam and is due to take it at the next available opportunity. A couple of other Water Bailiffs had decided they were not going to sit the exam and had handed in their cards.

Stocking

The Convener declared an interest in this item. The Clerk explained the Board of the River Inver had sought approval to continue the practice of stocking the River Inver with home saved salmon. The ambition this year was to plant in the region of 100,000 eggs.

Mr Allingham queried the approach and said it was quite clear the ASFB were advocating a change of direction away from stocking except in certain circumstances. The Convener explained that the practice would be under review within the next 18 months.

The Board in discussion with Dr Shona Marshall approved the application.

Complaints

The Clerk reminded the Board he holds a register of complaints in line with the 2013 Act and could report there had been none since the last meeting.

13. DATE OF AGM AND NEXT BOARD MEETING

The Annual Meeting of Qualified Proprietors and Board Meeting will be held at 17 Old Edinburgh Road, Inverness at a date to be set. The Clerk will circulate dates to choose

from. The Annual Meeting of Qualified Proprietors will start at 2pm and be followed by the Board at about 2.30pm.

ACTION PLAN

Contact Reay Forest regarding the hydro scheme consultation	CRWC
Issue cheque for £13,000 to WSFT	CRWC
Issue 2014/5 Assessment	CRWC
Attend Wild Fish Review meeting 1st July in Ullapool	DD/CRWC
Compile and issue a response to the Wild Fish Review Group	ALL/CRWC
Circulate dates for the Autumn	CRWC