

MINUTES

**of the MEETING of the
NORTH AND WEST DISTRICT
SALMON FISHERY BOARD
held on Tuesday 5th November 2013
at 1.30pm at Reay House, 17 Old
Edinburgh Road, INVERNESS**

Present:

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

Mr D Lindsay

Mr C MacLeod
Mr A Balfour

In attendance:

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

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from; Mr R Bradford, Mr J Allingham, Mr J Watson

2. MEMBERS DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Mr Lindsay declared an interest for Item 10 of the agenda.

3. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 8th MAY 2013

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

4. MATTERS ARISING

The Clerk confirmed all action points had been covered but updated Members on the Pentland Firth Energy developments. Work is on-going at ASFB and local levels to try and influence the quality and timing of research work being done by Marine Scotland and Developers. The Clerk said he was in touch with ASFB and Pelamis in this regard.

5. REGISTER OF MEMBERS RELEVANT FINANCIAL INTEREST

The Clerk ran through the details of the Register of Members Relevant Financial Interest, in particular that it would be available to the Public on request.

6. REGISTER OF COMPLAINTS

The Clerk ran through the details of the Register of Complaints, in particular that it would be available to the Public on request and Members considered and adopted the Complaints Procedure supplied with the meeting papers.

The Clerk explained the Procedure would be submitted to the Scottish Government in line with the requirements of the new Aquaculture Act and uploaded to the web site.

7. FINANCIAL REPORT

A financial report was tabled. The Clerk advised that the Management charge would exceed the budget this year due to the additional work required in complying with the Aquaculture Act. Members considered the likely surplus at the end of the financial year and agreed to review the rate used to calculate the assessment at the next meeting.

8. WEST SUTHERLAND FISHERIES TRUST - REPORT

Shona Marshall talked to the following report covering the work undertaken so far by the West Sutherland Fisheries Trust in line with the funding proposal approved by the Board for 2013/4

Report to North & West District Salmon Fishery Board Work undertaken between 1st May – 1st October 2013

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. The production of reports on this work will be completed in the new year and circulated to proprietors, with a general report also produced, supplied to the Board and available on the Trust website.
2. Broodstock Netting - this is yet to start but will be undertaken in November and early December together with the Estates, if requested.
3. Education – the Ghillies seminar will take place in April 2014.

The school projects were very well received by all attending. We undertook 3 field trips, giving the children a good oversight of the environment, its organisms and potential threats.

Scourie Detectives went well, with a mix of demonstrations and guided walks. All who attended appeared to enjoy themselves and learn about the Scourie area.

4. Sweep netting surveys were undertaken within the Laxford and Polla where possible. A number of fish were caught and tagged, and lice and predator damage recorded. In addition sampling was undertaken in the Kyle of Durness during May, June and July, although no fish were captured. There were 8 recaptures during 2013, one of which, J77, was first tagged in 2005. The full report will be completed in the new year, supplied to the Board and published on the Trust website.

5. Biosecurity. The Trust was again involved in the pulling of Himalayan Balsam at Nedd and Clashnessie. The population in both areas has been significantly reduced.

The Trust continued to work with the Scottish Mink Initiative to monitor mink populations within the area. With the closure of this initiative, the Trust has now taken over the management of the project within the area. Despite several sightings, no physical signs have been found in traps or rafts.

6. Smolt traps were installed in Badna Bay and Bhadaidh Daraich during April and May. These worked well, with a number of salmon and sea trout smolts trapped before high water once again made the Badna Bay trap inoperable.
7. The Trust has worked with the Clerk to the Board as required, providing advice on different matters, including planning applications.

Dr Shona Marshall
Fisheries Biologist

9. ASSOCIATION OF SALMON FISHERY BOARD REPORT

Members considered and discussed the report supplied by Mr Allingham and expressed their thanks to him for producing it:

1. **Aquaculture.**

I have received information that Marine Harvest is to seek AQUACULTURE STEWARDSHIP COUNCIL ACCREDITATION for it's sites. Perhaps Alan Balfour would like to comment.

2. **Sea Lice numbers.**

Regretfully, we are not getting a breakdown of site by site sea lice numbers.

A typical case of Marine Scotland shielding it's favorite industry from criticism by the wild fish lobby. Another indication that wild salmon and sea trout on the West coast are considered by some in government as expendable.

3. **Poaching.**

There is a report that during 2012, 129 illegal nets were recovered round Scotland.

Closer to home, on 2nd August, a 90 meters long gill net was recovered in the sea in the area of Loch Roan, near Handa . It did not appear to have been there very long as there was no sea weed or jelly fish on it. It was reported to John Murray the Lochinver Police Officer. Searches by Marine Scotland did not discover any others at that time but I am tempted to wonder how many illegal nets are set off the coast of our area.

4. **Marine Electricity Generation.**

As part of the Government's investigations into the possible impact on wild salmon of the Government's Marine Energy Generating devices a number of wild salmon have been fitted with small devices which monitor a fish's movements, swimming depth, water temperature etc for a limited period after which they become detached from the fish, float to the surface and transmit the information gathered. I circulated members about this earlier and wonder if any of these tags were actually found.

The next stage of this project is about to involve the installation of a tidal energy project in the Pentland Firth. I believe it will be enlarged in stages until 2020 or so and is expected eventually to be producing sufficient power to power 42000 homes.

ASFB, in objecting, pointed out the need for continual monitoring of the project, so as to provide early detection of any possible negative impact on wild salmon stocks. I believe the fact that presently planning consent is limited to 6 units, against 86 applied for, suggests that ASFB suggestions have been taken into consideration.

5. **Scottish Environment Protection Agency.**

A recent announcement by SEPA is critical of 50 Salmon Farming Sites in West Highlands and the islands area, mostly on account of sea bed pollution under the cages. Singled out for special mention was Dawnfresh in Loch Etive and Loch Duart.

The official return of the 2012 season reveals that all over, 74% of rod caught salmon were released (the C&R figure for the Dionard in 2012 was 87%). An indication of how widely accepted Catch & Release has become in recent years.

10 REAY FOREST - HYDRO SCHEME PROPOSALS

Mr Lindsay gave a presentation on behalf of his client the owner of Reay Forest making reference to plans supplied. He explained that there were three proposed 'run of river' hydro schemes in the North West Salmon Fishery District all in the Strathmore catchment in the vicinity of Governuisgach Lodge which, if all consented, would have a combined installed capacity of 6MW. He did not anticipate the schemes to have connection to the grid until 2019.

The three schemes – Abhainn Srath, Allt Chraois and Allnabad were the continuation of a project started by the creation of a hydro scheme called Allt Beithe in the Kyle district in collaboration with the Merkland Estate. Access to the three new schemes would be a hill road from Allt Beithe and electricity would enter the grid by an underground cable running back to Allt Beithe. He explained that the Allnabad Scheme was being developed in collaboration with the Strathmore Estate. He also explained that the Governuisgach schemes would be financially viable if Allt Chraois and Allnabad alone were consented.

Members discussed the proposal and asked Mr Lindsay to contact the salmon fishery proprietors downstream to explain the proposals to them in detail and to report the responses from the proprietors to the Clerk. They explained to Mr Lindsay that it was vital his client understood that, aside from good design features such as fish friendly tail races, fish passes and screened intake weirs and accuracy and integrity in the amount of water being abstracted, that mitigation plans needed to be in place so the fortunes of salmon and sea trout within the Strathmore catchment were never compromised by the schemes. Members discussed the potential for brown trout breeding upstream of any impassable falls and migrating down to be a potential sea trout resource.

Mr Lindsay said that the maintenance of the sporting interests on the Estate were the key objective of the owners. He explained that Abhainn Srath had the greatest fishery interests whereas Allt Chraois and Allnabad both had very limited spawning ground between their Power houses and the impassable falls on the two burns. He also explained that Shona Marshall had carried out the electro-fishing work and Bob Morgan compiled the Fish and Aquatic Impact Assessment. The discussion continued with Members and Shona Marshall observing that Glen Golly, a catchment to the north of Abhainn Srath was historically a good system for salmonids and that an example of mitigation work could be to improve the fortune of salmonids in Glen Golly. Members asked the Clerk to write to Mr Lindsay to record these points and secure an undertaking from his client to agree mitigation measures against harm to salmonids in the catchment arising from the schemes.

11. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Clerk gave an update on the activities of the two Salmon Management Groups and explained the continued importance of the supply of good data on seal sightings and damaged fish. The Clerk undertook to update Marksmen on the group cull numbers.

The Clerk said that the UHI had expressed a wish to engage with land owners and managers and that he had recently heard a very good and interesting presentation by Professor Stuart Gibb of the Environmental Research Institute (part of the UHI).

He suggested that Members would also find the presentation interesting and that it was worth considering inviting Dr Gibb to the Annual Public meeting to speak. Members thought the idea had merit and the Clerk agreed to liaise with the Convenor on the idea.

Mr Davies updated Members on the perennial fungal problem on the River Polly downstream of the Marine Harvest Hatchery. He said the problem had not been as serious as in previous years but that the lack of action by SEPA remained the same. Members learned from Shona Marshall that Freshwater Pearl Mussel populations had been affected by the fungus and threat the river was an SAC for that species. The Clerk undertook, in liaison with Mr Davies, to write to SNH and also SEPA to maintain the complaint about the lack of action by these two Regulators.

12. DATE OF NEXT BOARD MEETING

The date of the next Board meeting and the Annual Public meeting was set as Tuesday 20th May 2014 and to be held at the MacPhail Centre, Ullapool. The Annual Public meeting 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

Write to Strathmore salmon fishery owners in respect of the Reay Forest Hydro Schemes and report responses to Clerk	DL/CRWC
Write to Grosvenor Estate regarding Reay Forest Hydro Scheme	CRWC
Update Salmon Management Group Marksmen on cull numbers	CRWC
Consider an invitation to UHI to attend the Annual Public meeting	RV/CRWC
Write to SNH & SEPA ref. the River Polly	CRWC/DD
Organise May's meetings	CRWC