

NORTH AND WEST DISTRICT SALMON FISHERY BOARD

ANNUAL REPORT – 2013

This is the 14th 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 A. 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 2012/3

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 commencement date for the Aquaculture and Fisheries (Scotland) Act 2013 ('2013 Act') was the 16th September 2013 and 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 Board introduced the obligations of the 2013 Act at the 16th September, including a Complaints Procedure which will be formally adopted at the Board meeting on the 5th November, a Register of Members interests and the commencement of the reporting of notices of meetings, annual reports and annual accounts to the Scottish Government. An annual public meeting will now be held, the first of which is currently proposed for the middle of next year.

Meetings

The last Annual Meeting of Qualified Proprietors was held on the 25th October 2012. The next meeting will be held in Inverness on the 5th November 2013.

Board meetings took place on the 25th October 2012, the 8th May 2013 and the next one will take place in Inverness on the 5th November 2013.

The November meetings were all notified to the public by posting on the NWDSFB website on the 11th October 2013 and the Scottish Government received a copy of the notices on the 11th October 2013.

The minutes of meetings and annual reports and annual accounts approved by the Board are or will be posted on the NWDSFB website – northwest.dsfb.org.uk

Annual Report and Accounts

Once approved these will continue to be posted on the NWDSFB website and sent to the Scottish Government.

Complaints

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

Members' Interests

Board members will now be expected to declare new/amend existing interests at the start of Board meetings and all such interests will be 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.

In the last year the Board did not receive or consent any applications.

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, following consultation with SNH, to electro-fishing work being conducted by SEPA on the Abhainn Srath Coir an Easaidh and Allt a' Choire Ghraide, part of the Reay Forest Estate. – the focus of the Abhainn Strath hydroscheme CAR application (CAR/L/1114084).

RENEWABLE ENERGY

Pentland Firth

The Board continues to take an active interest in marine renewable projects of the north and western coastlines. The Board adheres to the view that any development must have as a core principle that the current and future fortunes of salmonid populations will not be affected and works closely with the ASFB and other groups to this end. The Board was represented at the Pentland Firth and Orkney Waters migratory salmonid workshop promoted by the Crown Estate in April, the purpose being to reinforce the need for salmonids to be fully considered in the planning process and in the scientific research work being conducted by the Scottish Government as part of the development process into matters such as electro magnetism, noise and other issues that may effect the migratory patterns of salmonids including sea trout and their use of coastal waters. The theme continued with representation on the Stakeholder group set up to inform the sector of the developing research strategy, which met at Faskally research centre on 26th July.

Reay Forest Estate

The Reay Forest Estate has made three applications to the Highland Council:

1. 13/02382/FUL – Construction of a "run-of-river" hydroelectric system with intake structure, buried pipeline, borrow pits and powerhouse etc. at Allt A' Chraois, Governuigach.
2. 13/02384/FUL - Construction of a "run-of-river" hydroelectric system with intake structures, buried pipelines, borrow pit and power house etc. at Abhainn Strath, Governuigach.
3. 13/02385/FUL - Construction of a "run-of-river" hydroelectric scheme with intake structures, buried pipelines, access tracks and power house etc. at Allnabad Strath, Governuigach.

The NWDSFB have been recently consulted on the applications by the Highland Council. The Board have responded to the Council that 'Until there is a chance for the Board to be appraised of the development (the Estate are represented on the Board and it is only proper that they should present the development to the Board) the Board must object to the three schemes on the grounds that they could represent a threat to the passage of migratory fish and harm to migratory fish if their interests are not covered by the proper construction of the intakes and tail races and access to spawning ground is lost. This object is in fulfilment of the statutory responsibilities of the Board in its protection of salmon and sea trout'.

Wester Ross Fisheries Limited

The Board considered a planning application in the neighbouring district for alteration of existing fish farm to 46 square steel pens at Loch Kanaird, eastern side of Isle of Martin – Reference 13/01494/FUL. The Board fully endorsed the WRASFB response to the Highland Council and for the same reasons as the WRASFB objected to the fish farm application as it currently stands, (a) for the protection and improvement of fisheries within their district (which neighbours the WRASFB and the location of this application) and (b) for the increase of wild salmon in their district, and would recommend to the Highland Council to reject this application. The application is 'pending consideration' at this time.

WEST SUTHERLAND FISHERIES TRUST

The Board made a financial contribution to the WSFT in 2012/3 to assist with the following work which supports the statutory role of the Board within the District:

1. Juvenile surveys –are a useful technique to determine the status of the stock and its fluctuations with time and give the opportunity to identify issues within the catchments, both in terms of fish numbers and also physical changes to the burns. They can be used to monitor the impacts of different restoration policies, such as habitat management and stocking, and determine their effectiveness or otherwise. This information feeds into management plans for catchments within the area.
2. The Trust assists Proprietors 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. Education extends to the annual Ghillies Seminar, assisting with courses in KLB High School and field trips giving younger 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 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 proposed 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 by pulling or herbicides was identified as important. In addition, the Trust is involved in the monitoring of American Mink within the area by checking some rafts and acting as a conduit for information between gamekeepers, crofters and the North Area Mink Officer. This practical work will assist in the management of the area and its fish populations.

The promotion of 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. Operation of two smolt traps in the area to determine the production of smolts in the wild against records of juvenile and adult abundance This will give further information on the river 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.

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.

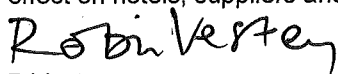
LOOK AHEAD TO 2013/4

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 in respect of its salmon and sea trout related work.

AND FINALLY

Future editions of this report will see this part of the report used for more light hearted or fishing based commentary. In this first edition however it is important to record the Chairman's 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. This is of considerable importance within our District with the ripple effect on hotels, suppliers and so on in this otherwise fragile economic area.



R Vestey
Convenor
North and West District Salmon Fishery Board

Appendix 1

North and West District Salmon Fishery Board

(Correct at 4th October 2013)

Convenor:	Mr Robin Vestey	
Upper Proprietors:	Ms. Clare Acheson Mr James Allingham Mr Robin Bradford Mr David Davies Mr Charles Marsham Mr Gerald Osborne	
Lower Proprietors:	Mr Dougal Lindsay	
Co-opted:	Mr Cathel Macleod Mr Jack Watson Mr Alan Balfour	(Tenant Angler) (Tenant Angler) (Tenant Netsmen)

Clerk
Crispian Cook MRICS, Bell Ingram Limited.
