

NORTH AND WEST DISTRICT SALMON FISHERY BOARD

ANNUAL REPORT – 2018

This is the 19th 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 2017/18

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 24th October 2017. The next meeting will be held in Inverness on the 10th October 2018.

Board meetings took place on the 24th October 2017, 22nd May 2018 and the next one will take place in Inverness on the 10th October 2018.

The fourth Annual Public Meeting was held in Ullapool on the 22nd May 2018.

All meetings were notified to the public by posting on the NWDSFB website and where appropriate, they were advertised in the Northern Times. The Scottish Government have received a copy of the notices.

Annual Report and Accounts

Once approved these will continue to be posted on the NWDSFB website and sent to the Scottish Government. The 2017 Annual Report and Accounts for the year to the 28th May 2017 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. We do however, anticipate a request during the 2018/19 year. The extent will be discussed in further detail in our next report.

ELECTRO-FISHING

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

In support of the National Electrofishing Survey, during the last year, the Board has consented to electro-fishing work being conducted by the WSFT.

WILD FISH REVIEW

Further to last year's report, there has been no further progress on this subject.

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 currently 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 2017/18 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. We have concentrated on the National Electrofishing Survey this year, with some additional sampling undertaken. We have surveyed 8 catchments – Hope, Polla, Dionard, Daill, Rhiconich, Oldshoremore, Inver, Polly and Garvie – to date with another 2 to complete. 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. A hot start to the summer, and wet end, has affected our ability to complete the surveys.
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 2019. It has been agreed within the Trust to open this event to the wider public.

There has been no work undertaken with the schools this year, although we have been in discussion about potential project work with KLB High School.

We carried an electrofishing demonstration at the Oldshoremore Open Day with the John Muir Trust.

We attended the Assynt Highland Games, Highland Field Sports Fair, and Scourie Gala, discussing different aspects of fisheries management and the Trusts work with members of the public.

4. Sweep netting surveys were undertaken within the Laxford, Polla and Kyle of Durness where possible. A number of fish were caught and tagged, and lice and predator damage recorded. There were 8 recaptures during 2018. The full report will be completed in the new year, supplied to the Board and published on the Trust website.
5. Biosecurity. The Trust continues to demonstrate biosecurity measures within its own work and promote the practice within the area while talking to members of the public.

The Trust was again involved in the pulling of Himalayan Balsam at Nedd and Clashnessie. The population in Nedd appears to be restricted to the host garden now, while that in Clashnessie is more focussed on the host garden.

The Trust continues to manage the mink project within the area. One mink was captured by one of our volunteers at Inverpolly.

The Trust has treated several populations of Japanese knotweed within the area.

The Trust has treated a population of Skunk cabbage within the area.

7. A smolt trap was installed in Badna Bay during April and May. Unfortunately the trap became damaged while in location, but a number of salmon and sea trout smolts were still trapped and data collected.
8. The Trust was one of the pilot organisations selected to test the mapping software for the Scottish Governments Management Plan. This is a small part of the overall plan but the results will feed into future development.
9. The Trust has worked with the Clerk to the Board as required, providing advice on a number of different matters.

PLANNING CONSULTATIONS ETC.

Loch Duart Salmon Farms have proposed a modification to its Calbha Beag site, whereby 2 existing sites will be taken out of use to be replaced by a larger single site in a more open location.

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 2019

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.



R Vestey
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 | |
| (Vice Convenor) | Mr David Davies | |
| | Mr Gerald Osborne | |
| Lower Proprietors: | Mr Dougal Lindsay | |
| | Mr Alan Balfour | |
| Co-opted: | Mr Charles Marsham | (Rep. Salmon Angler) |
| | Mr Cathel Macleod | (Rep. Salmon Angler) |
| | Vacant | (Tenant Netsmen) |
| Clerk | Mr Robert Whitson MRICS, Bell Ingram LLP | |
