

**MINUTES of the BOARD MEETING of the  
NORTH AND WEST DISTRICT  
SALMON FISHERY BOARD held on  
Tuesday 17th November 2020  
at 10.30 am by Zoom**

Present: Mr R Vestey (Convener)  
Mr D Davies (Vice-Convener)  
Mr A Adamson  
Mr G Osborne  
Mr K Dunbar  
Mr R Bradford

In Attendance: Mr R Whitson (Bell Ingram - Clerk)  
Dr S Marshall (WSFT)  
Ms S Harkins (Kinlochbervie Estate)  
Ms P Burns (Fishery Management  
Scotland “FMS”) part attendance

Apologies: Mr D Lindsay

The Convener welcomed all present to the video conference Board Meeting.

**1. APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from Mr D Lindsay.

**2. DECLARATION OF INTEREST**

No members declared any relevant interests.

**3. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 22 MAY 2020**

The Minutes were agreed and signed as an accurate record.

**4. MATTERS ARISING**

The Chairman asked what progress there had been with regard to Loch Duart planning applications. The Clerk explained that no planning applications out with those rationalisation programmes previously discussed had been received. The plans for the Enard Bay new fish farm had been permanently shelved for ecological reasons.

The Chairman also asked if anyone on the Board had followed up on the kelt reconditioning programme discussed at the last meeting. There had been no take-up.

Finally, the Chairman mentioned the Missing Smolt Programme, and there was a brief discussion on what had taken place during 2020.

## 5. FINANCIAL REPORT

The Clerk explained that due to problems with the bank referred to in the previous Proprietors' Meeting, he was unable to present the financial statement at this time until access to the account has been resolved.

## 6. PROPOSED FISH FARM DEVELOPMENTS

Polly Burns then joined the meeting. Ms Burns described her role as Fishery Farm Interactions Manager with FMS, with her focus being to support Fishery Management Scotland members in relation to fish farm applications, and interactions between proprietors and fish farms. She gave a brief description of her work history and background, and went on to cover a number of issues.

Firstly, she described the 48,834 fish that escaped from the Mowi Farm in Argyll. She then went on to talk through the issue whereby fish farms need to deal with the process of dealing with escapes and the potential impact on wild fish populations in the vicinity of these fish farm escapes.

She went on to talk about certification and representation and a code of good process with regard to fish farm management.

Thirdly, she addressed the issue of new developments, planning, and the appropriateness of sites and areas that have been potentially designated by developers for fish farm proposals. Leading on from that, she discussed the Horse Island application to be potentially undertaken by Scottish Sea Farms (SSF).

As a first phase of planning, the CAR licence application was undertaken in a hurry as SEPA were putting SSF under pressure. It is likely that a CAR licence will be granted, but a planning application will be delayed for some time while SSF engage with the local community, and bodies such as the local fishery boards. The earliest stocking date is likely be Spring 2023, assuming planning permission is granted.

Polly went on to offer her services in assisting the Board with any responses to planning applications in the future. Further, the Salmon Interactions Working Group would also be brought into the planning discussion in due course.

Robin Bradford asked what the implications are for sexual interactions between farmed and wild fish. The response was that farmed fish can become sexually mature; *however*, fish farmers endeavour to harvest fish before sexual maturity. That said, escaped fish have been known to reach sexual maturity after a period, and there is a risk of hybridisation, which is generally being denied by the industry, however, evidence gathering is very important and if an angler catches a fish that they suspect is a hybrid, or an escapee, scales should be taken and sent for analysis.

Keith Dunbar then gave an update on the CAR licence application. 61 objections had been received to it, with principal objections relating to the exposed site and the risk of cages breaking up in severe weather. Further, the creel and scallop fisheries would lose access to established fishing grounds which was causing distress and frustration. Further, there is a risk to the Maerle in the area.

One of the key problems relating to the Maerle data is that some of it is at least eight years out of date and was gathered using old modelling techniques called DEPOMOD. There are also problems relating to the tidal flow data which is equally concerning.

Polly Burns responded by saying that the CAR licence may not go ahead; however, the likelihood is that the best time to object would be at the planning stage and she would support the Board in the event that help was required pulling together an objection.

The Chairman reiterated the value of Polly and FMS in representing fishery boards, and in particular our own board. The organisation “Sea Change” has made a valuable contribution in many ways as well, as they exist out with the salmon board network and can add great weight to any arguments against new developments.

If the CAR licence is granted, he sees a joint approach as the best solution in conjunction with the Wester Ross Board, and that he is very worried that when taken alongside the Enard Bay site, we have two what might be called “blue field” sites being potentially developed in two years.

David Davis then mentioned a problem with the Marine Harvest smolt farm, and the creation of fungus in the rivers. He has found that SEPA are not good at managing the problem and asked if Polly could help?

Polly responded that she was able to help but she will need data to put to SEPA to represent the problem. This was noted. There was a vote of thanks to Polly for joining the meeting and for the work she is undertaking on our behalf. At that point, Polly left the meeting.

## **7. WEST SUTHERLAND FISHERIES TRUST REPORT**

Shona Marshall’s report had been circulated with the meeting papers, and she asked if any of the Board Members had any questions on it. There were no questions.

## **8. SEAL MANAGEMENT – CHANGES TO LEGISLATION 2021**

The Clerk had circulated two letters from Marine Scotland regarding the future of seal control, the loss of lethal means presently available to fish farms, and the possible implications of that, albeit there will still be limited grounds to kill seals for the protection of wild fisheries.

The Clerk will apply for a new licence at the expiry of the existing licence in February, once Marine Scotland publish guidance on the method and time frame for applications.

## **9. FISH FARM ESCAPES**

The Clerk drew attention to the paperwork issued with the meeting papers regarding escapes that had partly already been discussed whilst Polly Burns was participating in the meeting.

It is very important that anglers understand how to recognise fish farm escapees; that they shouldn’t be consumed as they may still contain residual treatments or drugs that have been administered whilst at sea, and that scale samples should be taken and sent for analysis.

Shona Marshall is able to help through the Trust.

It was mentioned that fish that were clearly escapees were caught in the Kirkaig last season, which goes some way to illustrate the extent of the problem.

## **10. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

Prior to the meeting, The Reay Forest Estate had notified the Clerk that fishing for salmon was to be suspended on the Laxford for the foreseeable future as part of an exercise designed to improve habitats and to increase the availability of spawning grounds for Salmon, as well as looking at riparian planting and other activities. Dougal Lindsay will be invited to brief the Board at the next meeting.

Keith Dunbar had a question regarding season opening and closing and how they were decided. He feels that the opening of rivers is too early, and the closing is too late, and the season should be shortened.

There was a discussion regarding the Inver and Kirkaig, and that there would be a need to apply to Scottish ministers for a legal change; however, individual proprietors do have the ability to make changes to their own opening and closing dates, and without applying to the Scottish Government.

Robin Vestey then went on to expand on the plight of the “Sea Change” and their desire to raise sufficient funds to employ a project manager to undertake research with a view to strengthening the arguments against new fish farm developments.

Sea Change is seeking somebody with a marine science background to co-ordinate information that exists, and to strengthen the argument against unwanted fish farm applications.

The Board cannot directly fund or assist; however, there is a plea to proprietors who feel strongly that they may wish to contribute on a personal basis. The likely costs for the year would be somewhere in the region of £10,000-£12,000. Robin Vestey will contribute, and he asked for other support. Any interested proprietors to contact the Clerk to discuss.

## **11. DATE OF AGM AND NEXT BOARD MEETING**

**Date:** Friday, 21 May 2021.

**Location:** Dependent on Covid-19 position at the time.