**NORTH AND WEST DISTRICT SALMON FISHERY BOARD**

**ANNUAL REPORT – 2020**

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This is the 21st 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 2019/20**

**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**

Since March 2020, Board meetings have taken place by means of Zoom video conferencing.

A meeting of Qualified Proprietors was held on the 6th November 2019. The next meeting will be held via Zoom video conference on the 17th November 2020.

Board meetings took place on the 6th November 2019, and by Zoom video conference on 22nd May 2020, which incorporated a Triennial Election, with the next one taking place via zoom video conference on the 4th November 2020.

Due to the Corona pandemic, we have been unable to physically meet as a board and all meetings have taken place via Zoom, hence there has not been a public meeting during 2020. We hope that we will be able to conduct the normal round of meetings in 2021.

Due to the inability to physically meet, there have been no advertisements placed in the press this year. We hope to revert to the normal schedule of meetings in 2021 and meetings will be advertised in the traditional manner.

**Annual Report and Accounts**

Once approved these will continue to be posted on the NWDSFB website and sent to the Scottish Government. The 2019 Annual Report and Accounts for the year to the 28th May 2019 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.

Further to an application made in October 2019 by the manager of the River Inver, 70,000 first feeding fry were introduced to the river in early 2020.

We do not anticipate a request during the 2020/21 year. In the event that a request is received, the details will be addressed in next years 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.

**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 2020**

The proposed Conservation Assessment for the 2021 season was published in August 2020.

**WEST SUTHERLAND FISHERIES TRUST**

The Board made a financial contribution to the WSFT in 2019/20 to assist with the following work which supports the statutory role of the Board within the District:

The following work has been undertaken:

Juvenile surveys. The National Electrofishing Survey was not undertaken this year. I surveyed 10 of the previous NEPS sites to get data on the efficiency of the technique and access to the baseline data. In addition we surveyed 17 catchments (Hope, Achriesgill, Oldshoremore, Loch Innis, Loch na Thull, Laxford, Badna Bay, Clashfern, Loch nam Brac, Bhadaidh Daraich, Geisgeil, Duart, Gleann Leireag, Oldany, Clashnessie, Culag and Garvie) previously surveyed as part of the WSFT monitoring programme and one new catchment (Unapool). The full report will be completed in the new year, supplied to the Board and published on the Trust website.

Broodstock Netting - this is yet to start but will be undertaken in November and early December together with the Estates, if requested.

Education – the Ghillies seminar was cancelled in 2020 due to the Covid restrictions but it is hoped it will take place in April 2021, conditions permitting. It has been agreed within the Trust to open this event to the wider public.

Due to the Covid restrictions no school days were completed in 2020.

Due to the Covid restrictions no outreach events were run in 2020.

Sweep netting surveys were undertaken within the Laxford, Polla and Kyle of Durness where possible from July to October. A number of fish were caught and lice and predator damage recorded. There were no recaptures during 2020. The full report will be completed in the new year, supplied to the Board and published on the Trust website.

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. There was a report of a sighting in Assynt during the summer and prints at Tarbet slightly later. With thanks to our volunteers, we managed to respond but no further signs have been reported.

The Trust has treated 11 populations of Japanese knotweed within the area. During 2020 it was noted that 5 populations are now restricted to the host garden and a further 3 had no plants found.

A smolt trap was installed in Badna Bay during April and May. This was during a time of very low flows and the trap did not fish for much of the period but information was obtained.

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 developed proposals to modify a number of their production sites. We are also aware of proposed Salmon farming developments in the area of Horse Island, within the Summer Isles.

**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. This group may fold in early 2021 given the changes to legislation regarding the control of seals.

**LOOK AHEAD TO 2021**

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**

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

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Appendix 1

**North and West District Salmon Fishery Board**

**Elected on 22nd May 2020**

Upper Proprietors.

Mr R Vestey (Mandatory for the EH Vestey Marriage Settlement Trust)

Mr D Davies (Mandatory for Polly Estates)

Ms K Bontoft (Mandatory for Gualin and Dionard proprietors)

Mr A Adamson (Mandatory for Braesgill Ltd)

Mr R Bradford

Mr G Osborne (Mandatory for G&R Osborne)

Lower Proprietors

Mr D Lindsay (Mandatory for Fourth Duke of Westminster’s 1964 Settlement Trust)

Mr A Balfour (Mandatory for Scourie Estate)

Co-opted Members

Mr C Macleod

Mr K Dunbar

Convener and Vice Convener

Mr R Vestey was elected as Convener

Mr D Davies was elected as Vice Convener

 **Clerk:** MrR Whitson MRICS, Bell Ingram LLP

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