

NORTH AND WEST DISTRICT SALMON FISHERY BOARD

ANNUAL REPORT – 2021

This is the 22nd 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 2020/21

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 17th November 2020. The next meeting will be held via Zoom video conference on 10th November 2021.

Board meetings took place on 17th November 2020, and by Zoom video conference on 21st May 2021. The next meeting will take place via zoom video conference on the 10th November 2021.

The Annual Public Meeting was held by Zoom on 21st May 2021.

The Annual Public Meeting was 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 2020 Annual Report and Accounts for the year to the 28th May 2020 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.

Approximately 90,000 unfed fry were released into the Inver in April from broodstock caught up during the previous autumn. No further youngstock introductions are planned for the coming year.

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.

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 2022 season was published in August 2021.

WEST SUTHERLAND FISHERIES TRUST

The Board made a financial contribution to the WSFT in 2020/21 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 again took place in 2021. Thirty randomly generated sites across the area were fished and the final report will be made available by Marine Scotland after analysis in 2022. In addition we surveyed 9 catchments (Polla, Rhiconich, Sandwood, Laxford, Maldie, Oldany, Clashnessie, Inver and Polly) previously surveyed as part of the WSFT monitoring programme or as contract sites for other companies. The full report will be completed in the new year, supplied to the Board and published on the Trust website.

2 reports were produced during the year; one illustrated the findings of the monitoring of Sea Trout post smolts 2020. The second covered the 2020 all catchment juvenile surveys. Both pieces of work were very important ongoing analysis.

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 will take place in April 2022, conditions permitting. It has been agreed within the Trust to open this event to the wider public.

We worked with Scourie Primary School on invasive non-native species. As part of the SISI project they then wrote and produced a video about American mink. This can be viewed at: <https://www.invasivespecies.scot/schools-film-project>

Due to the Covid restrictions no outreach events were run in 2021.

Sweep netting surveys were undertaken within the Laxford, Polla and Kyle of Durness where possible from April to October. A number of fish were caught and lice and predator damage recorded. We had 4 recaptures during 2021, all tagged in that year. 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 is a partner in the Scottish Invasive Species Initiative, a 4 year project managed by SNH. This project is heavily reliant on 'citizen science' but aims to identify and treat non-native invasive species, promote biosecurity and provide education opportunities for angling development.

The Trust continues to manage the mink project within the area. One mink was reported on Handa Island and dispatched by the rangers. We have had other sightings but no other captures. With thanks to our volunteers for their efforts in monitoring and reacting to sightings.

The Trust has treated 11 populations of Japanese knotweed within the area. During 2021 it was noted that populations are declining, with 3 showing no plants.

The Trust, with volunteers, also treated 3 populations of American skunk cabbage.

Smolt traps was installed in Badna Bay, Clashnessie and the River Laxford during April and May. The Laxford trap was run with the AST as part of the West Coast Salmon Tracking project. Both traps operated successfully despite the low flows, with useful information 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 continued to develop proposals to modify a number of their production sites.

NORTH WEST SALMON MANAGEMENT GROUP

This group has folded now as a result of the changes to legislation regarding the lethal control of seals.

LOOK AHEAD TO 2022

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.

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 left and has been replaced by Mr T Kirkwood (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: Mr R Whitson MRICS, Bell Ingram LLP
