

**MINUTES of the BOARD MEETING of the  
NORTH AND WEST DISTRICT  
SALMON FISHERY BOARD held on  
Friday, 11th November 2022  
at 2.30pm via video conference**

Present: Mr R Vestey (Convenor)  
Mr D Davies (Vice-Convener)  
Mr A Balfour  
Mr K Dunbar  
Mr C Macleod  
Ms S Harkins  
Mr D Lindsay

In Attendance: Dr S Marshall (WSFT)  
Mr R Whitson (Bell Ingram – Clerk)  
Miss C Middleton (FMS)  
Mr C Conroy (Laxford Project)  
Mr A Wells (FMS)

Apologies Ms K Bontoft  
Mr R Haldane  
Mr C McLeod; and  
Mr D Last

The Convenor welcomed everyone to the meeting.

**1. APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from Kathryn Bontoft, Richard Haldane, Cathel McLeod and David Last.

**2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

**3. COMPLAINTS**

No complaints have been received.

**4. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 17<sup>TH</sup> MAY 2022**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 17th May 2022 were agreed as an accurate record.

**5. MATTERS ARISING**

All matters arising had all been dealt with in the intervening period since the last meeting.

## **6. FINANCIAL REPORT**

The Clerk took the meeting through the financial report. There is in excess of £15,000 of assessments due in the current financial year, which the Clerk will pursue. In terms of old debts, The River Dionard & Cape Wrath assessment, which is the responsibility of the Secretary of State for Scotland and a payment from the Acheninver Trust are still outstanding assessments from the 2021 financial year which will require payment.

The bank balance is presently £31,943.65 at 31 October 2022. The income and expenditure is roughly in-line with the budget assuming all assessments are paid.

## **7. LOCH LAXFORD PROJECT UPDATE**

Due to time pressures, the agenda was adjusted to allow Chris Conroy to give his presentation.

Chris is the technical project manager for Project Laxford. He gave an overview of the AST, the owners of the Project, the key drivers causing the decline of Atlantic Salmon, the aims and objectives of the project (which have been alluded to previously).

His talk included information on the catchment audit and the effects of increasing water temperatures, the lack of tree cover and some of the impacts associated with that, also pit tagging and how the information gained from it is utilised.

Other investigations undertaken include the use of high resolution sonar, gathering information on the EDNA characteristics of the fish in the Laxford, and taking water samples for DNA analysis.

Keith Dunbar asked whether there was an aspirational increase in smolt production associated with the project. The answer was to at least halt the decline and if possible increase smolt production and ideally to increase the number of returning adult fish.

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

Shona Marshall's report had been circulated with the meeting papers.

A question was raised regarding the production of fishery management plans and who is responsible for their production. This is covered later in the Minutes under the FMS update section.

Keith Dunbar gave a short report on sea lice levels as a result of fish farming activities, which highlighted the consistent failure of fish farms to control sea lice, and it also provided a fascinating insight into the high levels of mortalities on fish farms, when high volumes of biomass are contained in close proximity to very high sea lice populations.

The report took Keith Dunbar some time to put together and the Board are grateful for his efforts. It remains frustrating that the Board is able to exert little or no pressure on fish farms, due to the limited powers granted through the Salmon & Freshwater Fisheries Consolidation Scotland Act 2003.

**9. LOCH DUART LIMITED WRITTEN SUBMISSION**

The submission provided by Sonya Brown (appended) was considered as part and in conjunction with the report at point 8.

**10. FISH FARMING UPDATE & FISHERY MANAGEMENT SCOTLAND**

It was provided by Alan Wells. Alan took the meeting through a number of slides with a focus on regulatory changes. The new Sea lice risk assessment framework with the introduction of regulatory zones and thresholds to protect wild fish, the threshold being relevant to the farm's production. He went on to discuss fish farming escapees, intregression, data, monitoring and EMPs.

**Questions from the proprietors**

David Davies asked a question regarding brood stock monitoring and the end-of-cycle reviews in connection with EMPs with the standard presently not being good enough and can Marine Scotland call for action.

Keith Dunbar asked a question regarding the timing of the roll out for the new framework with consultation taking place in New Year 2023 with the new regulation in place during 2023.

Further questions were asked on gill problems within the farms and the likelihood of crossover to wild fish, also open net versus close containment systems. The Board was very grateful to Alan Wells for giving up his time to provide his briefing.

**11. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

Tim Kirkwood raised the issue of fishery management plans with Alan Wells. Whilst there is no legal obligation to prepare a fishery management plan, the presence of one can only aid trusts and boards, and there is funding available to members of FMS to prepare one.

Gabby Rex raised a question regarding small fish returning to rivers after a year at sea and whether this was a genetic issue or merely that food sources had moved and migrating fish were having less easy access to the existing food sources. It is felt that the former is the case as opposed to any genetic issues.

There being no other business the meeting was closed.

## **12. DATE OF QUALIFIED PROPRIETOR AND NEXT BOARD MEETING**

The date of the next meeting was provisionally set for Tuesday, 9th May 2023 face-to-face in Ullapool.

DRAFT

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RSMW/NW/1  
November 2022