

**MINUTES of the BOARD MEETING of the
NORTH AND WEST DISTRICT
SALMON FISHERY BOARD held on
24th May 2024
At 2:30pm At The Macphail Centre,
Ullapool**

Present: Mr D Davies (Vice Convener)
Mr K Dunbar
Mr A Balfour
Ms S Harkins

In attendance: Ms A Young (Clerk, Bell Ingram)
Dr S Marshall (WSFT)
Ms L Richardson
Mr H Joshi
Ms H Feenan
Mr A Wells
Mr C Conroy
Mr C Macleod
Mr D Allison

The Convenor welcomed everyone to the 2024 Board Meeting.

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Robin Vestey, Tim Kirkwood, Richard Seaman, Dougal Lindsay, Gerald Osborne and Robin Bradford.

2. LOCH DUART LTD – SEA LICE CONTROL UPDATE / FUTURE PLANS

A presentation was given by Beth Osborne and Hazel Wade of Loch Duart Ltd, regarding production, present challenges and sea lice control measures.

A key item of note was the level of predation. KD queried whether measures could be implemented to reduce predation on wild fish, the use of seal scarers was suggested. AW asked members to use the FMS app to report predation and sightings.

A wellboat is currently on hire by Loch Duart to provide treatment, this will hopefully reduce sea lice and mortality spikes. KD queried the impacts of the wastewater post-treatment, Hazel assured members this would be disposed of appropriately.

3. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

4. COMPLAINTS

KD reported a complaint from the former Director of Salmon and Trout Conservation over a delay in publishing the meeting minutes on the website. Attendees noted a six month delay in publishing the meeting minutes due to meeting schedules, it was agreed for the Clerk to distribute the minutes by email between meetings with a deadline for comments.

5. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 10 NOVEMBER 2023

The Minutes of the meeting held on 10th November 2023 were reviewed, KD asked for the following amendment - in response to a question from DD, that MD of Loch Duart stated that he felt the future of Salmon farming lays in closed containment, but the technology is not yet reliable.

6. MATTERS ARISING

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

7. FINANCIAL REPORT – BUDGET/ACTUALS

The Clerk gave the meeting an overview of the present financial position.

The cash position at the date of the meeting was £17,869. The budgeted expenditure to the date of the meeting was £30,600, the actual expenditure was £32,214.68, giving an overspend of £1614.68 at that date.

A total of £1814 is still outstanding from unpaid assessments, reminders will be sent to debtors.

8. REVALUATION, BUDGET AND ASSESSMENT – YEAR TO 28TH MAY 2025

The Clerk presented the budget for the year ending 28th May 2025.

The Board queried the requirement for Audited Accounts. AW suggested Audited Accounts may not be required given the nature of the Board, AY is to review and adjust the budget as appropriate.

Bell Ingram's fees were queried for the coming year. AY agreed to discuss the fees with Rob Whitson before adjusting the budget as appropriate.

The assessment was agreed at 37p/£ for the coming year, the budget will be adjusted to reflect this. This would result in a small planned deficit, which would reduce the amount of surplus cash in the account.

SH asked if some of the surplus could be invested. GR suggested a donation to the Blue Hope Alliance, AB reminded the group that legislation sets which charities can receive donations.

Members suggested a larger donation to WSFT would be beneficial. SH asked for this to be kept as an agenda item for the November meeting.

9. WEST SUTHERLAND FISHERIES TRUST REPORT

SM report had been circulated with the meeting papers.

SM confirmed the Inver hatchery has been running.

A successful day was had at the Ghillies seminar, attendance was low however it was effective.

KD queried whether any trends had been noted during the juvenile surveys and netting. SM felt numbers were stable. Sea Lice trends include a drop in numbers on the Laxford due to Loch Duart, however an increase near Scottish Sea Farms.

SM reported working with Loch Duart on sweep netting. SH asked whether Loch Duart could set the standard for other local fish farms. SM has a good relationship with Loch Duart as they are small and local, she is hoping to build a working relationship with Scottish Sea Farms.

10. LAXFORD PROJECT UPDATE – CHRIS CONROY

A very interesting presentation followed by Chris Conroy, from the Laxford Project, regarding the progress with the restoration on the Laxford to date. Key items of note included reports of high temperatures. Temperatures were recorded at 26 degrees in June 2023, where 16 degrees would be expected. Genetic testing has taken place, CC reports 46 clusters of genetically similar fish on the Laxford. The installation of Large Wooded Structures is soon to begin. DA confirmed deer densities are now down to 5.5 per kilometre squared.

AB asked whether the project is still scheduled for 10 years. CC confirmed the project is in year three and hopes to continue to year 10.

CC reported of trapping Atlantic Salmon and Sea Trout smolts to sample as they move downstream. SH queried whether offshore windfarms are required to conduct smolt surveys. AW reported FMS are investigating this and stated that if fish stay on structures, they are likely to become targets for predators.

11. FMS UPDATE

HF introduced herself as a replacement from Charlotte Middleton.

HF is overseeing changes to SEPA framework, it will include new regulations for sea lice and will limit development of future farms. An update is to follow at the next meeting. HF is also liaising with the Marine Directive regarding escapes and penalties.

FMS feel there is a lack of understanding between farmed and wild sectors and would like to build on this. The relationship between WSFT and Loch Duart is a great example of collaboration.

KD reported a complaint made by Wild Fish regarding wild salmon protection zones. KD asked why Sea Trout are not included in the new framework, FMS said they are too different and need a separate approach however they expect this next year.

AB queried the locations for protection zones, there are 58 zones in total, FMS do not agree with the proposed 5km zones and have suggested pinch points instead. LR asked if the Dionard is included in the zones, FMS to flag. KD asked if a meeting could be set up with the committee, FMS to provide details.

The framework is now in place for new farms, FMS expect existing farms to be included from 2025.

FMS are in a steering committee for the delivery of the Wild Salmon Strategy. AW is also chairing a group for fishery management funding, he hopes this will include a river catchment fund.

AB asked members to follow his lead and stop the commercial fishing of salmon. AW urged caution, as this could promote poachers and reduces funding for research. LR suggested instead promoting safe practices, including fishing in cooler temperatures and not lifting fish out of the water.

12. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

KD reported salmon are now classed as endangered, meaning they are likely to go extinct in certain rivers. This has been discussed with the Chairman and the idea of starting broodstock reserves was raised. DA felt the problems are due to a broken ecosystem and a hatchery won't solve this issue. AW said the endangered status is based on the UK as a whole, reclassification for individual rivers can be found online. CC suggested WSFT data should prove useful, SH suggested using the surplus to gather data.

KD proposed speaking to the Marine Directive to provide a briefing based on their catch returns. FMS said the Directive are incredibly busy however they perhaps would join via Teams.

SH asked for her details to be updated on the website.

AY confirmed the proposed MOWI hatchery at Loch Veyatie is no longer going ahead.

SM asked members to join her and Maya from River Revivers for a talk on restoration at Scourie Hall, on the 6th June.

13. DATE OF NEXT BOARD MEETING

The date of the next meeting was provisionally set for Friday 8th November at 14:00 in person, with the option to join on Microsoft Teams.