

**MINUTES of the BOARD MEETING of the NORTH AND WEST DISTRICT SALMON
FISHERY BOARD
19th November 2024, 10:00 via Zoom**

Present:

Mr Euan Anderson
Mr Robin Irvine
Mr Cathal Macleod
Mr Gerald Osborne
Ms Lana Richardson
Mr Robin Vestey (Chairman)

In attendance:

Mr Steven Dora (Marine Directorate)
Dr Shona Marshall (West Sutherland Fishery Trust)
Ms Anastasia Young (Bell Ingram – Clerk)

The Convenor welcomed everyone to the 2024 Board Meeting.

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Mr Dougal Lindsay, Mr Alan Balfour, Mr David Davies (Vice-chair), Mr Keith Dunbar, Ms Sarah Harkins, Mr Stuart Dillett and FMS.

2. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

3. COMPLAINTS

No complaints had been received since the previous meeting.

4. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 24TH MAY 2024

The Minutes of the meeting held on 24th of May were approved.

5. MATTERS ARISING

AY investigated whether Audited Accounts are still required and confirms they are necessary to meet legislative requirements.

Bell Ingram management fees were reduced to £7500 plus VAT and disbursements.

AY confirmed the non-recoverable VAT in the previous budget report was for professional fees.

6. 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 £22,932.

A total of £6800 is outstanding from Debtors, AY will continue to chase.

AY highlighted the budget to actual report. Income received to date totals £31,154 and expenditure totals £20,872. The actual to date appears lower in comparison to the budget, as this is for a full financial year.

7. USE OF SURPLUS FUNDS

Based on the current bank balance and budgeted expenditure, it was agreed that the funds are required for the year. This could be reviewed in the next financial year, it was agreed that any surplus funds should lead to a reduction in the assessment rate.

8. WEST SUTHERLAND FISHERIES TRUST REPORT

SM report had been circulated with the meeting papers.

The report is similar to previous years. No calls for broodstock were received.

SM confirmed the Inver hatchery has been running.

A successful day was had at the Ghillies seminar, attendance was low however it was well received. The next Ghillies Seminar will take place in April next year. RV received positive feedback on the seminar and suggested proprietors representatives attend. SM will circulate dates to the Board.

GO asked whether SM had seen any recent trends on the Laxford. SM has been monitoring for fish farms and is seeing a trend in 1st and 2nd year production. The Laxford was clear last year however SM is seeing more lice and less fish. Data from the Laxford project has been helpful. It was noted that Loch Eriboll is in fallow.

Shona has continued to engage with Scottish Sea Farms.

9. MARINE DIRECTORATE

AY circulated the following questions and answers from Steven Dora of Marine Directorate prior to the meeting:

1. Salmon stocks appear to have increased on some rivers this year and it would be good to understand the MD's view on a) how significant those increases have been and b) what the probable cause was.

- a. *We are aware of reports of increased rod catches on some rivers during the 2024 season. The deadline for fisheries to make their 2024 season returns is 31st December and catches will not be published until the end of February. It's therefore too early to determine what has actually happened in 2024.*
- b. *There has been a long term decline in the numbers of salmon returning to Scotland (See [The status of salmon in Scotland: 2024 - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/resources/consultation-papers/collections/documents/2024-01-29-the-status-of-salmon-in-scotland-2024.pdf)). This decline is seen throughout the North Atlantic with the available evidence showing that this is, at least partly, driven by changes in oceanic conditions associated with climate change. It is not clear what the cause of annual fluctuations around the overall trend is. It is also too early to say if a good year in 2024 would indicate a change in the overall trend or is simply a one-off.*

2. How are the river categorisations arrived at from the reported catch and fishing effort returns?

Marine Directorate has produced a video which explains this, please see here: [Conserving our salmon \(youtube.com\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...) with more information here [Conservation status of individual salmon stocks - The status of salmon in Scotland: 2024 - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/resources/consultation-papers/collections/documents/2024-01-29-the-status-of-salmon-in-scotland-2024.pdf)

3. Which river catchments in the Board's area are most at risk of salmon stocks going extinct (code them to preserve confidentiality) and what should be done in mitigation?

The Scottish Government does not measure the risk of extinction directly for rivers. However, the Conservation Gradings gives an idea of the strength of the stock of different rivers, with those rivers in Poor Conservation Status requiring the most protection. In general, smaller rivers (with smaller stocks) would be likely to be at greater risk of extirpation than larger rivers.

The [Scottish Wild Salmon Strategy](#) provides an overarching framework to tackle pressures on wild salmon with specific actions listed in the [Implementation Plan](#). A key step in considering management interventions is to identify the pressures causing the decline and act on those where possible. In practise, for local managers, this often means concentrating on issues that are within their control, such as riparian management.

With reference to question one, SD added that while anecdotal until the returns are received, the returns seem slightly better as a result of the weather this year.

In response to question two, RV maintains catch and release at all times as he has previously been in different categories, which can be confusing. Attendees noted they have seen an improved season this year.

SD added to question three, assessments are done on a fine scale and managers of the rivers are to decide. Marine Directorate would like to do more work at a local scale.

10. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Robin Irvine is happy to engage with other proprietors if they have any questions, contact details can be provided by the Clerk.

11. DATE OF NEXT BOARD MEETING

The 16th of May was suggested for the next meeting date, AY to check availability with other members before confirming.

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