

NORTH AND WEST DISTRICT SALMON FISHERY BOARD

ANNUAL REPORT – 2024

This is the 25th 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 Salmon 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 2023/24

GOOD GOVERNANCE

The NWDSFB has adopted The Code of Good Practice for District Salmon Fishery Boards produced by Fisheries Management Scotland.

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 2022, Board meetings have taken place by means of Zoom video conferencing and in person.

A meeting of Qualified Proprietors was held on the 10th November 2023. The next meeting will be held via Zoom video conference on 19th November 2024.

Board meetings took place on 10th November 2023 by Zoom video conference and on 24th May 2024 in person. The next meeting will take place via zoom video conference on 19th November 2024.

The Annual Public Meeting was held in Ullapool on 24th May 2024.

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 2023 Annual Report and Accounts for the year to the 28th May 2023 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.

At this stage, the Board have received requests to introduce youngstock in to the system from Inver only.

ELECTRO-FISHING

Written consent from the NWDSFB to carry out electro-fishing in rivers within the District is a legal requirement.

Work on the National Electrofishing Survey did not take place in 2024.

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 2025 season was published in August 2024.

WEST SUTHERLAND FISHERIES TRUST

The Board made a financial contribution to the WSFT in 2023/24 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 did not take place in 2024. We therefore completed several of our own surveys. We surveyed in 8 catchments (Hope, Polla, Dionard, Laxford, Duart, Oldany, Clashnessie and Inver) as part of this 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.

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 took place in April 2024. This was opened to Trust volunteers as well as ghillies from the area. While there were few present, it seemed to be well received and there was a lively and informed discussion. Talks were given on the West Coast Tracking Project, Loch Duart Ltd and Riparian woodland.

We attended the Moy Country Fair in August, sharing a stall with the Skye and Loch Alsh Rivers Trust. This was an opportunity to meet the public, discuss the work of the Trust and promote the area, fisheries and biosecurity.

Sweep netting surveys were undertaken within the Laxford and Polla where possible from April to August. A number of fish were caught, and lice and predator damage recorded. We had 3 recaptures during 2024, 1 tagged in 2023 and the other 2 in 2024. 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, and volunteers, were again involved in the pulling of Himalayan Balsam at Clashnessie. We also undertook monitoring and treatment of Japanese knotweed and Gunnera populations within the area.

The Trust continues to manage the mink project within the area. We have had some sightings but no captures this summer. With thanks to our volunteers for their efforts in monitoring and reacting to sightings.

A smolt trap was installed in the River Inver during April and May. The trap operated successfully, with useful information obtained. A report on the work is available on request.

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.

LOOK AHEAD TO 2025

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

Appendix 1

North and West District Salmon Fishery Board

Elected on 10th May 2023

Upper Proprietors.

Mr R Vestey	(Mandatory for the EH Vestey Marriage Settlement Trust)
Mr D Davies	(Mandatory for Polly Estates)
Ms S Harkins	(Mandatory for SN Barr Trustees)
Mr T Kirkwood	(Mandatory for Braesgill Ltd)
Mr R Bradford	(Retired from the board, 24 th September 2024)
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: Ms A Young MRICS, Bell Ingram LLP
