

MINUTES of the **BOARD MEETING** of the **NORTH AND WEST DISTRICT SALMON FISHERY BOARD** held on **16th May 2025**
At 2:30pm At The Macphail Centre, Ullapool

Present: Mr R Vestey (Chairman)
Mr K Dunbar
Mr A Balfour
Ms S Harkins

In attendance: Ms A Young (Clerk, Bell Ingram)
Dr S Marshall (WSFT)
Ms L Richardson (online)
Ms H Feenan (FMS)
Mr C Conroy
Mr C Macleod
Ms B Osborne (Loch Duart)
Ms H Wade (Loch Duart)
Ms A Anderson (Scottish Sea Farms)

The Convenor welcomed everyone to the 2025 Board Meeting.

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from David Davies, Euan Anderson, Dougal Lindsay, Gerald Osborne and Robin Irvine

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.

Seal predation is the main source of loss at the Laxford site. AB asked if they have any idea of seal numbers. Loch Duart said it's all anecdotal however they have noticed a change in behaviour. Loch Duart find it difficult to control and have considered netting however it's not practical for management. SH asked if seals are affecting wild fish, SM confirmed it is.

Loch Duart gave an update on lice for 2025. All Sutherland sites have active lice management plans, including coordinated treatments every 2-8 weeks. None of the sites reached the Marine Scotland threshold. KD noted a 2% rise in June 2023 water temperatures, Loch Duart expect increases again this year. Loch Duart mentioned Sea Lice are adapting to fresh water, KD asked if this will impact wild fish. Loch Duart had been assured by vets that it wouldn't. KD highlighted that sea lice levels were over three times the recommendation and that it's unacceptable, Loch Duart agreed that the numbers are too high.

Loch Duart are chartering a well boat again this season. A chiller has been installed to cool the water and keep longer in the summer. An FLS system is being installed, gill treatment weakens the lice and they are then discharged through FLS. This was used last year with positive results.

KD recalled that Mark Warrington (MD at Loch Duart) had stated at the Board meeting of May 2023 he thought the future of salmon farming is in closed containment and KD asked LD when this would be. Loch Duart would like to see this but investment isn't yet there. KD asked if the 30,000T units being planned in China will impact Loch Duart's business, they feel this is a different market and they are not concerned.

3. SCOTTISH SEA FARMS

Anne Anderson from Scottish Sea Farms was introduced to the meeting. Scottish Sea Farms' owned by SalMar and Leroy. They have 46 marine farms, three freshwater hatcheries and two processing facilities.

The closest site to the Board is Eriboll, which includes Sian and Kempie. Eriboll Farms have 100% compliance with environmental standards and 90% survival.

Sian pen numbers are being reduced under permitted development, from 10 pens down to two or three. SSF are aiming for fewer, larger farms.

AB asked if SSF are self sufficient in eggs, SSF purchase them from Ireland and Norway.

SSF are trialling sub-sea farming pens. SH queried the impact of this against offshore turbines, SSF will be completing noise vibration impact assessments.

The biggest threats to SSF are Jellyfish and gill health.

KD asked for thoughts on the Summer Isles, AA explained that the sites are small and they would like to reduce pen numbers but increase size.

KD noted huge mortalities in Autumn 2023, AA confirmed this was linked to gill health. KD asked if SSF can predict when the jellyfish will bloom, AA receives reports between farms and can stop feeding fish so they drop down.

4. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

No new financial conflicts noted. SH to complete the declaration of financial interest form.

5. COMPLAINTS

KD reported a complaint from Andrew Graham Stewart regarding late publication of minutes and lice information not adding up. It was agreed that we would write to him to explain the difference in sea lice and that minutes are added as soon as possible

6. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 19TH NOVEMBER 2024

The Minutes of the meeting held on 19th November 2024 were reviewed, no comments were made.

7. MATTERS ARISING

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

8. FINANCIAL REPORT

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

The cash position at the date of the meeting was £26,202. The budgeted expenditure to the date of the meeting was £33,253 and the actual expenditure was £31,134.27, giving an underspend of £2118.73. Further payments have been made since the report was produced.

A total of £627 is still outstanding from unpaid assessments, reminders will be sent to debtors.

9. BUDGET – YEAR TO 28TH MAY 2026

The Clerk presented the budget for the year ending 28th May 2026.

Income and expenditure is similar to the previous year, with a slight increase in insurance and subscriptions.

WSFT approached the board requesting an increase of approximately £5000 in their donation due to increased costs. The Chairman highlighted that assessments are kept low because of low expenditure, if we are to increase expenditure this may have an impact on assessments. SH offered to provide more information so the Board can make a decision.

10. WEST SUTHERLAND FISHERIES TRUST REPORT

The WSFT report was distributed prior to the meeting. No comments were made.

SM asked attendees to please close rivers or alter habits to protect fish if river temperatures reach 18 degrees.

SM reiterated the importance of biosecurity. FMS can provide posters if required.

HF mentioned funding is available for bailiff equipment.

11. 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 include –

- There has been a 40% reduction in red deer over two years, the population is now 5.7 per kilometre squared.
- 75,000 trees were planted in Kinloch Burn in 2024. A 10ha enclosure of 6000 trees was created in cemetery burn in 2025.
- In 2024, 1999 autumn salmon parr were tagged. In 2023 only 23% made it to the River Mouth however this was skewed by the aurora. In 2024, 60% were detected leaving the river and similar are expected this year.
- Records show the fish were in better condition in 2024 than 2023.
- Smolt trapping took place, 36,202 escaped in 2025.
- An Aris scope has been used to measure movements. In 2024 there were less spring fish but this year saw 3.2% marine survival.
- Planes were used to map and monitor habitat and vegetation.

KD asked if large woody structures have an impact on water chemistry, CC is not aware of any issues.

12. FMS UPDATE

Helen provided an update on recent FMS work -

- FMS have proposed amendments in the Natural Environment (Scotland) Bill to increase penalties to the maximum available for the most serious poaching offences.
- FMS provided an update on a review that is occurring to the Scottish Government's stocking policy which will include an assessment of all interventions that might be possible in rivers that are close to local extinction.
- FMS provided an update on the review to seal licensing with there being a recent acceptance that seals enter rivers for one reason only which is to hunt sea trout and salmon.
- FMS has received a small grant to undertake an analysis of the environmental and socio-economic benefits arising from healthy wild salmon populations.
- FMS updated on the Riverwoods Development Grant which is open for applications until 12 noon, Monday 28th July 2025. Grants of up to £20,000 are available for scoping, planning and designing projects including staff time or contractual work. Eligible activities include but are not limited to GIS analysis, landowner engagement, surveys, woodland

design, and development of a River Woodland Development Plan. Match funding: Minimum 10% (can include in-kind contributions). Grant period: Activities must be completed by March 2027

- FMS updated that the Scottish Government are currently reviewing the working arrangements for aquaculture consenting, this is the document that conveys the roles of statutory bodies in the consenting process, the review is occurring due to recent changes in regulatory remit for aquaculture consenting.
- FMS updated that Scottish Parliament are currently considering an order to extend planning zones to 12 nautical miles for aquaculture developments, this order aims to address a gap in consenting for developers wishing to develop beyond 3 nautical miles.

KD asked for an update on the SEPA appeals. Scottish Sea Farms have found the behaviour of SEPA challenging, they realise the appeal is alarming however they felt it was the only choice. Every business has appealed, SSF received 35 variations and require documents. The affect of the appeals mean conditions don't apply, SSF continue to operate within these conditions but don't agree with the legality. KD expressed that from a wild fish point of view the appeals process gives a very bad impression of the salmon farmers lack of intention to control sea lice. SSF are happy to address concerns but are yet to see the benefit of these regulations as the evidence isn't there. FMS have been pushing for the implementation and have had issues with the way SEPA have treated this also. It's positive that SEPA have been collaborative however FMS feel this has been strung along. FMS are committed to the process and want to collaborate for the best results.

13. CLIMATE CHANGE

KD raised His concerns over the impact of climate change. The flow of the Garvie almost stopped and there has been increased mortalities at spawning due to a lack of water. KD is concerned about the impact on the ecology of the loch and movement to sea. He is worried that sea trout will possibly disappear, CC noticed 2024 was a bad year for sea trout. KD suggested increasing resilience through peatland restoration and shade. KD is working to improve the spawning burn. SM notices the difference from trees and leaky dams. KD has submitted an application to FMS for funding.

14. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

No comments.

15. DATE OF NEXT BOARD MEETING

The next meeting will be in November, AY to check availability of members by email and confirm.