

NORTHERN DISTRICT SALMON FISHERY BOARD

ANNUAL REPORT – 2012

This is the sixth annual report for the Northern District Salmon Fishery Board since it was formed by the Northern District Salmon Fishery Board Designation Order in September 2006.

The Board has a statutory role to play in the protection and improvement of fisheries within its district and has actively participated on a number fronts this year. 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 by boat and foot patrols is an activity which the Board endorses by the issuing of Warrant Cards to qualified or well experienced Bailiffs within the district.

The North Coast Sea Patrol has been active this year coordinated by the River Naver Superintendent Chris Conroy. The patrol is a collaborative venture to deter illegal netting at sea which intercepts fish on the way to their natal rivers in areas that are not normally monitored by Proprietors of fishing rights within the District. Sea and foot patrols started on the 27th March across nearly the full extent of the District's coastline with a total of 23 sea patrols expected by the end of September. Two coastal watchers were once again employed concentrating on the area around Boursa Island and Strathy Point as before but were more mobile this year stretching their reach between Talmine and Melvich. A total of 58 patrols were conducted by the coastal watchers. The Patrols have been particularly effective this year this year and close liaison with the Police has led to the detection of what are believed to be two separate illegal fishing incidents. Since 2010 three monofilament gill nets have been seized and four covert pulley systems decommissioned. The Patrol is to be congratulated on its level of professionalism and effort directed at enforcement action and the effort made by the Northern Constabulary in support of the Bailiffs work and in responding to the intelligence they receive is very much appreciated and continues to be encouraged.

The Board continues to take an active interest in marine renewable projects and invited Pelamis Wave Power (who last year secured an Agreement for Lease from the Crown Estate to develop a wave energy farm of up to 15MW capacity, at Farr Point, off the Bettyhill Coast) to attend the September 2012 meeting which they declined. They have however offered to attend the May 2013 meeting and have indicated that there may shortly be a workshop with the Crown Estate and others to discuss a range of topics including salmonids that will be of interest to proprietors. The Board also recently collaborated with the ASFB in their submission to MayGen in response to their development application. The Board adheres to the view that any development must have as a core principle that the current and future fortunes of salmonid populations will not be affected and works closely with the ASFB and other groups to this end.

Scottish and Southern Energy (SSE) have secured consent for the Strathy North wind farm and the Board are now actively engaged in agreeing the terms of a Water Quality Monitoring Plan to secure a monitoring and mitigation programme to be put in place at the developers expense to ensure that in the event the development does go ahead the interests of the salmon fisheries are in no way compromised. SSE continue to progress their plans for Strathy South Wind Farm and are intending to make adjustments to their 2007 application to reduce the total number of turbines to 68 from 77 later on in the year.

In May this year Andrew Wallace from RAFTS (Rivers and Fisheries Trusts of Scotland) attended a Board meeting with the purpose of opening a discussion about the possibility of setting up a fishery trust or trusts to cover the northern district and those parts to the east also not presently covered by a fishery trust.

Mr Wallace went through a series of frequently aired concerns about the creation of Trusts, such as control, costs and the optimum size of such an organisation.

The key points were that Trusts are separate organisations not subordinate to a Board – so of necessity have a management structure and bureaucracy of their own. This has a cost which in some examples has been controlled by sharing administration with the Board.

He said he thought a minimum size for a Trust would be a DSFB foot print - it should be big enough to be financially viable but small enough to be manageable.

Most Boards make a contribution to the funding of Trusts and this funding is something upon which most heavily rely. Working well however Trusts should be able to secure through applications for project funding etc. to bring in 4 – 6 time this 'core funding'.

There is little/no funding for the management of salmon but there is for catchment management, education and the support of other species so careful choosing of projects can, indirectly help salmon and salmon fisheries.

He acknowledged that the northern parts of Scotland were fortunate in having few problems, so arguably at the moment a Trust might not be needed. However he said that there are issues down the line and mentioned, alien species, forestry and renewable energy as areas where the support of a fisheries trust could provide knowledge, support and additional clout.

Mr Wallace went on to explain that RAFTS was a membership organisation with a current annual subscription of £1,000. RAFTS raised funds for Members through the creation of projects or the development of partnerships for their completion. It also assists in ensuring good governance to ensure compliance with OSCR rules. It also assists with PR, conducts seminars etc.

Examples of projects which it is involved with and are on-going are:

- Barrier removal (*barriers to the passage of fish*)
- Invasive species programme
- Aqua-culture planning programme
- Genetics programme

He said it was not difficult to set up a Trust but the relationship of those taking part must be firm from the start. He said progress should be methodical, not rushed and in liaison with neighbouring Boards and other interest groups (e.g Trout fishing interests, public bodies, angling associations, possible crafting bodies).

The view of the Board is that it is appropriate to explore the idea further with the consequence that a meeting is scheduled for the 28th September at Dunbeath which will be chaired by RAFTS and which four Proprietors from the northern and some from other districts have volunteered to attend. The aim of the meeting will be to consider all the various options and make recommendations to the participating Boards in due course. The Board will not be under any obligation to accept the recommendations of the working group and will report further to Proprietors on the matter in due course.

Finally, the Board would like to thank Alastair Campbell from Bidwells for his contribution and help as a Board Member. Alastair acted as the estate manager for the Sykes family who until recently owned the Kinloch Estate and stood down as a Board member in May.
