

NORTHERN DISTRICT SALMON FISHERY BOARD

ANNUAL REPORT – 2011

This is the fifth 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 of 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. In this respect it is important to mention that Hugh Montgomery from the Kinloch Estate, a Bailiff of many years experience, successfully passed the IFM Bailiff's exam in March this year.

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 in the middle of April (a month earlier than last year) across nearly the full extent of the District's coastline with an emphasis on the coastline and waters about Strathy Point and Boursa Island. The Patrols stopped and inspected a number of vessels and vehicles with the circumstances of one vehicle inspection resulting in a salmon being seized and the driver of the car being reported under S.9 of the Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries (Consolidation) (Scotland) Act 2003 with a case file now being presented to the Procurator Fiscal by the Police. 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.

Whilst no illegal activity was detected as a result of this year's North Coast Patrols it is clear that a number of incidents did occur within the District. In addition to this reports suggest that illegal fishing for salmon may be occurring along the north coast at very low levels. This may or may not be true but it is clear that the locals are aware of the presence of both the NDSFB patrol boats and coastal watchers and there seems little doubt that without the threat of being detected by the Patrol illegal fishing activity would increase.

In April the Board were advised by Pelamis Wave Power that they had 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. The Board responded to consultation requests from the company expressing concern that any development must have as a core principle that the current and future fortunes of salmonid populations will not be affected. The agreement the developers have secured does not mean that the work will inevitably go ahead. The developers have a current hope of the project at some level being energised by 2014/15 but have yet to begin negotiations on even the extent of the work they will be required to do to complete an Environmental Impact Assessment which, along with a Navigational Risk Assessment, would accompany the application to the Scottish Government for consent to develop. The Board will continue to engage in influencing the extent of the work required as part of the consenting process, on its own account but also in liaison with the ASFB and neighbouring Boards where required.

Scottish and Southern Energy (SSE) appear close to securing consent for the Strathy North wind farm. The Board continues to maintain an objection to the project with the Scottish Government Energy Consents Unit (ECU). The Board are a Statutory Consultee and are actively engaged in the consenting process. The main aim of the involvement is 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. Draft terms for an agreement along these lines are under negotiation with SSE in liaison with the ECU.

In June 2010 the Caithness DSFB applied for a Designation Order to amend the boundaries of the Northern Fishery District effectively to incorporate the Halladale River within the Caithness District. This was done following discussions between the Proprietors of the Halladale River and the Caithness DSFB. The Northern DSFB considered the matter very carefully and formally objected to the application in favour of the status quo. The matter currently rests with the Scottish Government.

On the fishing front – the District has had a very dry year with the lowest river levels on record being recorded in May. As a result the catches have been sporadic with the majority of fish being captured during the few 'wet' periods. The spring fish arrived approximately three weeks late but did so in extremely good numbers with a lot of fish over the 15lb mark. Grilse also arrived approximately three weeks late but unfortunately they did so in relatively low numbers when compared to the 2010 season.

Overall, despite being an extremely dry year with an average grilse run, the high numbers of spring salmon mean that 2011 will still be a good year.
