

NORTHERN DISTRICT SALMON FISHERY BOARD

ANNUAL REPORT – 2014

This is the seventh 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.

BACKGROUND

The Board has a statutory role to play in the protection and improvement of fisheries within its district. 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 2013/4

GOOD GOVERNANCE

The NDSFB has adopted The Code of Good Practice for District Salmon Fishery Boards produced by the Association of Salmon Fishery Boards.

The NDSFB 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, northern.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.

The list of Board members and Co-opted members can be found in Appendix 1 at the end of the report.

Meetings

The last Annual Meeting of Qualified Proprietors was held on the 24th September 2013. The next meeting will be held at the Bettyhill Hotel on the 23rd September 2014.

Board meetings took place on the 24th September 2013, the 6th May 2014 and the next one will take place at the Bettyhill Hotel on the 23rd September 2014.

The first Annual Public Meeting was held on the 6th May 2014.

All meetings were notified to the public by posting on the NDSFB website on the 2nd September 2013 and the 14th April 2014, Scottish Government received a copy of the notices.

Annual Report and Accounts

Once approved these will continue to be posted on the DSFB website and sent to the Scottish Government

Complaints

At the time of preparing this report NO complaints had been received.

Members' Interests

Board members now declare new/amend existing interests at the start of Board meetings and all such interests are recorded in the minutes of those meetings.

NORTH COAST SEA PATROL

The North Coast Sea Patrol has been active this year coordinated by the Head Bailiff on the River Naver Matt Heeps and supported by fellow NDSFB Bailiff Richard Wright. 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 were conducted across the full extent of the District's coastline with a total of 12 sea patrols completed to the end of August. Two coastal watchers were once again employed concentrating on all the areas within the District known to have previously been targeted by illegal netsmen. A total of 45 patrols were conducted by the coastal watchers up to the end of August. The Sea patrols have been very visible and the professionalism and successful enforcement work of previous years and liaison with both other NDSFB Water Bailiffs and the Police and is believed to have contributed to a lack of any major incidents this year. The NDSFB wishes to record its thanks to all the Water Bailiffs of the Northern Board as well as the local Constabulary for their help and support in this venture.

RENEWABLE ENERGY

At the 2013 Annual Meeting of Qualified Proprietors that Board adopted as policy the procuring of a peer review of all scientific study/evidence produced by developers of renewable energy projects in support of their planning applications – in so far as that scientific study/evidence relates to the statutory brief of the Board.

An independent scientific review has been conducted by Alan Youngson and also Dr John Begg (Clebrig Hydro scheme only) in respect of the following:

Strathy South Windfarm,
Creag Rhiabhach Windfarm
Strathy Wood Wind farm
Clebrig Burn Hydro Scheme
Allt ach an t-strathain Hydro Scheme

Pentland Firth

The Board continues to take an active interest in marine renewable projects in particular the Pelamis Wave Power project. 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. The Board was represented by the Clerk on the Stakeholder group set up to inform the sector of the developing research strategy, which met at Faskally research centre on 2nd July 2014. The purpose being to identify knowledge gaps and information requirements in relation to the potential effects of offshore and marine renewable energy generation on Atlantic salmon and other freshwater fish that migrate to and from the sea.

Strathy South Windfarm

Scottish and Southern Energy (SSE) applied for planning consent to Scottish Ministers under S.36 of the Electricity Act for 77 turbines at Strathy South in 2007. They submitted an addendum to their application in July 2013 to reduce the turbines to 47. The Highland Council rejected the application in June 2014. The rejection will lead to a public enquiry.

Creag Rhiabhach Windfarm

Creag Rhiabhach Windfarm Limited is proposing to develop a windfarm on the Altnaharra Estate which would include 22 turbines with a maximum tip height of 125m and an installed capacity of 72.6 MW. As the proposed wind farm has a generating capacity of over 50 MW it falls under Section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989 and requires planning permission from the Scottish Government. After taking the advice of Alan Youngson the NDSFB lodged an objection to the development with the Scottish Government Energy Consents and Deployment Unit and the Highland Council on the 7th February 2014.

Strathy Wood Windfarm

E-on is proposing to develop a windfarm near Strathy which would include 26 turbines with an installed capacity of 78 MW. As the proposed wind farm has a generating capacity of over 50 MW it falls under Section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989 and requires planning permission from the Scottish Government. After taking the advice of Alan Youngson the NDSFB lodged an objection to the development with the Scottish Government Energy Consents and Deployment Unit and the Highland Council on the 6th February 2014.

Clebrig Burn Hydro Scheme

The Proprietor of the Clebrig Estate is investigating the possibility of using the water resource of the Clebrig Burn for a c.100kW hydro scheme. An application for Planning permission was originally lodged with the Highland Council but subsequently withdrawn. A SEPA abstraction licence was also applied for and approved. With the advice of Alan Youngson and John Begg the NDSFB had objected to both applications. Electro fishing again took place this summer in the Clebrig Burn to build up data further on the salmonid population. The Board continues to monitor the project.

Allt Ach An T-Strathain Hydro Scheme

The Proprietor of the Kinloch Estate has applied for planning permission from the Highland Council and a SEPA abstraction licence for a 100kW hydro scheme. There is an existing but redundant scheme already on site. Following advice from Alan Youngson the NDSFB did not object to either application by the Proprietor.

FLOW COUNTRY RIVERS TRUST

The Flow Country Rivers Trust (Reg. SC467897) was incorporated on the 20th January 2014. The four Company Directors are: James Fleming (Chairman), Lord Joicey, Anson Macauslan and John Mackay.

There are four additional directors: Vanya Hackel (NDSFB Representative), Simon Laird (CDSFB Representative), Sarah Lopes and Kevin Porteous. Alan Youngson is the Trust Scientific Advisor.

The Trust has a website under construction - fcrt.org

The FCRT was registered as a charitable trust on the 19th February 2014 with the following objectives:

A. To advance for public benefit the conservation and enhancement of native freshwater fish (including migratory salmonids) and their environments (to include the flora and fauna proximate to the rivers and stillwaters) primarily but not limited to the inland and coastal waters connected to or forming a part of the 'Flow Country' of Caithness and eastern Sutherland including but not limited to the jurisdictional area of the Caithness and the Northern District Salmon Fishery Boards.

B. To advance the education of the public and any association, company, local authority, administrative, or governmental agency or public body or representative body in:- (1) The understanding of aquatic ecosystems, including their fauna, flora and economic and social activity, and river catchment management. (2) The need for, and benefits of, protection, conservation, rehabilitation and improvement of aquatic environments.

The NDSFB has committed to a three year funding programme to assist the early years of the trust with the first payment of £5,000 made in 2014.

The Board will report further to Proprietors as matters progress.

INTRODUCTION OF YOUNGSTOCK

Consent from the NDSFB for the introduction of salmon young stock to rivers within the District is a legal requirement.

In the last year the Board consented, following consultation with SNH where needed, to the introduction of young stock, to the River Mudale and its tributaries by the River Naver Proprietors, the River Borgie by Mr Fred Drummond and the River Halladale by the Strath Halladale Partnership. No other applications were received.

ELECTRO-FISHING

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

In the last year the Board consented, following consultation with SNH, to electro-fishing work being conducted within the River Naver catchment for the purpose of juvenile salmon stock assessment.

The Board also consented to electro-fishing work being conducted in the River Halladale catchment to establish a benchmark of fish populations and the River Strathy catchment as continuing monitoring by the developers of Strathy North Windfarm.

LOOK AHEAD TO 2014/5

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; including the energy development programme in the Pentland Firth and onshore projects such as Creag Riabhach, Strathy Wood and Strathy South windfarms and the Clebrig Estate hydro-scheme.

The Board will discuss terms for the continuation of the North Coast Sea Patrol in 2015 with the River Naver and other fishery proprietors.

The Board will work to ensure the best outcome for the protection and management of salmon and salmon fisheries as the outcome of the Wild Fish Review progresses towards legislative change.

Chairman
Northern District Salmon Fishery Board

Appendix 1

Northern District Salmon Fishery Board (Correct at 2nd September 2014)

Upper Proprietors:

Lord Iliffe (Chairman), Mr Fred Drummond, Mr Dougal Lindsay, Mr Vanya Hackel, Mr Jim Gray, The Hon. George Lopes, Mr Toby Ward, Mr Michael Stone and Mr Andrew Nicholson.

Lower Proprietors:

Mr James Mackay and Mr Phillip Gwyn.

Co-optee:

Representative of Salmon Anglers, Mr Paul Butterworth.

Clerk

Crispian Cook MRICS, Bell Ingram Limited.
