

NORTHERN DISTRICT SALMON FISHERY BOARD

ANNUAL REPORT – 2016

This is the ninth 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 2015/6

GOOD GOVERNANCE

The NDSFB website (<http://northern.dsfb.org.uk>) continues to be maintained, listing the Board Members, all notices of meetings, minutes of meetings, annual reports and audited accounts along with additional relevant publications.

Meetings

The last Annual Meeting of Qualified Proprietors was held on the 29th September 2015 where triennial elections were held to appoint Upper and Lower Proprietors as Board members for the period 2015-2018. The next meeting will be held at the Bettyhill Hotel on the 27th September 2016.

The last Annual Public Meeting was held on the 10th May 2016.

Board meetings took place on the 29th September 2015, the 10th May 2016 and the next one will take place at the Bettyhill Hotel on the 27th September 2016.

All meetings were notified to the public by posting on the NDSFB website with the Annual Public Meeting also advertised in the Northern Times on 14th April 2016; The Scottish Government also received a copy of the notices.

Annual Report and Accounts

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

Complaints

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

Members' Interests

Board members continue to 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 Bailiffs Richard Wright and Willie Grant. 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 patrols have been conducted across the full extent of the District's coastline with a total of 17 sea patrols completed to the end of August 2016. The NDSFB wishes to record its thanks to all the Water Bailiffs of the Northern Board as well as the local Constabulary, who have greatly increased their participation in local fisheries enforcement matters in 2016, for their help and support in this venture.

RENEWABLE ENERGY

In 2013, the 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. The following proposals are currently under review by the Board with assistance from Alan Youngson:

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 (later reduced to 39 in 2015). The Highland Council rejected the application in June 2014. This rejection led to a public inquiry which took place between April and June 2015. The Reporter submitted his final report to the Scottish Ministers in February 2016 and a decision is still awaited.

Strathy Wood Windfarm

E-on applied for planning consent to Scottish Ministers in November 2013 under S.36 of the Electricity Act to develop a windfarm near Strathy which would include 26 turbines with an installed capacity of 78 MW. After taking the advice of Alan Youngson, the NDSFB lodged an objection to the development in February 2014. In May 2015, E-On made revisions to the proposed design which included a reduction in the number of turbines to 18. Further Environmental Information was submitted to support this revision and following advice from Alan Youngson, no further objections were made regarding this revision. A review of the proposal on the Highland Council website suggests that the developer is further proposing to reduce the number of turbines to 16. No further update is currently available.

Creag Riabhach Windfarm

Creag Riabhach Windfarm Limited applied for planning consent in January 2014 under S.36 of the Electricity Act to develop a windfarm which would include 22 turbines with an installed capacity of 72.6 MW. 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. No further update is currently available.

Pentland Firth Offshore Renewables

The Board continues to take an interest in the offshore renewable projects in the Pentland Firth. These include the Meygen tidal project, of which the demonstration phase consisting of 5 tidal turbines is on track to be fully operational by the end of 2016. In addition, the Board has recently been sent information on the Brims Tidal Array project which proposes the installation of up to 200 fully submerged tidal turbines at a site off the southern tip of Hoy, Orkney. Alan Youngson has prepared a briefing paper for both the Caithness and Northern Boards on this proposal and submission of comments is required by 13th September 2016. A further tidal energy project is in the early stages of investigation by Scottish Power Renewables who are investigating the potential of a 95 MW tidal installation at Dunscaaby. The Flow Country Rivers Trust is currently working with the Environmental Research Institute to consider the impact of offshore renewables on the migratory patterns of salmon (see below).

Projects in Screening/Scoping Phase

In addition to the above proposed planning applications, the following proposals within the Board's area are currently in the screening or scoping phase of application:

Extension to Bettyhill Windfarm: In November 2014 a scoping application was submitted to extend the existing Bettyhill Windfarm by up to a further 7 turbines to a maximum of 9 turbines with a maximum generating capacity of up to 46 MW. No further update is currently available on this application.

Drum Hollistan Windfarm: In September 2015 a scoping application was submitted for the erection of 21 wind turbines on the Sandside estate between Reay and Melvich. Whilst just outside the Board's boundary, the proximity of the proposal to the River Halladale may have a

potential impact. It is expected that Drum Hollistan Renewables LLP, the developer, will submit an application to the Scottish Government under S. 36 of the Electricity Act, in the near future.

HABITAT ISSUES

The RSPB are continuing to fell large tracts of The Dyke forest to the immediate west of the River Halladale. This woodland is adjacent to the Dyke River, one of the main spawning rivers for the Halladale. The work and its potential impact on the river is being closely monitored by the Environmental Research Institute (ERI) in Thurso and members of the Strath Halladale Partnership.

FLOW COUNTRY RIVERS TRUST

The Flow Country Rivers Trust continues to promote research and education in the conservation of freshwater fish within the Flow Country. Current projects include working closely with the Pentland Salmon Initiative to address the lack of information on the behaviour of smolts and their migratory routes in the vicinity of the Pentland Firth. A further project to increase understanding of the movement of salmon in the Pentland Firth is being undertaken with support from the Fishmongers Company, whereby salmon netmen have been interviewed to share their insight of salmon and their behaviour in the area. Additionally, the FCRT is liaising with the Peatlands Partnership with regards to drain blocking and deforestation projects, and is working with Marine Science Scotland to analyse data from temperature loggers installed on the Thurso river.

The NDSFB made its third annual payment of £5,000 to the Trust in May 2016 as part of an agreed three year funding programme to assist the early years of the Trust.

The Board is kept informed of the Trust's progress through annual reports, newsletters and regular verbal updates at NDSFB Board Meetings.

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 Borgie by Mr Jim Stewart 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.

It was agreed at the Board meeting in May 2016, that the results from these and future electro-fishing surveys would be shared with the Board members.

WILD FISHERIES REFORM

The Board continues to be actively involved in the ongoing discussions and consultations regarding the Wild Fisheries Reform. The Board has had discussions with its neighbouring Boards regarding the potential to create a Flow Country Fisheries Management Organisation (FMO) consisting of the current Northern, Caithness and Helmsdale Boards. A draft Analysis Paper and Local Management Plan has been drawn up by the 3 Boards in anticipation of further information and direction becoming available from the Scottish Government in the near future.

As part of the Wild Fisheries Reform, a package of conservation measures were introduced in April 2016. These measures include a 3 year temporary ban on the killing of salmon beyond estuary limits due to the mixed stock nature of the fishery. This has had an impact on the netting stations at Armadale and Melvich within the Northern Board area.

In addition, killing of salmon in inland waters is now managed on an annual basis based on the conservation status of each fishery district. A recent re-assessment of all river systems in September 2016 has classified all river systems within the Northern Board as Grade 1 rivers in terms of conservation status, with the exception of the River Strathy (Grade 2) for 2017.

LOOK AHEAD TO 2016/7

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 impact of ongoing and any future renewable energy projects.

The Board will continue its work to ensure the best outcome for the conservation and improvement of freshwater fisheries as the Wild Fisheries Reform progresses towards legislative change.

Chairman
Northern District Salmon Fishery Board
