

**MINUTES of the MEETING of the NORTHERN DISTRICT SALMON FISHERY BOARD held on
TUESDAY 9th MAY 2017 at 2.15PM at the BETTYHILL HOTEL**

Present: Mr M T Ward (Convener)
Lord Iliffe
Mr D Hurst-Brown
Hon G Lopes
Mr S Green
Mr J Stewart
Mrs A Nicholson (Mandate - Mr A Nicholson)

In attendance: Mr A Youngson
Mrs S Lopes
Mr H Lopes
Mr J Mason
Mr M Heeps
Mrs A MacAuslan (Clerk)

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Mr J Gray, Mr T Chetwynd, Mr P Gwyn, Mr A Nicholson and Mr D Buchan.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No adjustments were required to the existing members' declarations of interest.

3. MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 10TH MAY 2016

The minutes of the meeting held on 27th September 2016 were confirmed as an accurate record, having previously been approved by the Board via email following the September 2016 meeting.

4. MATTERS ARISING

The Clerk confirmed that all actions from the previous Board meeting had been completed. The Clerk reported that she had spoken with Simon Dryden from Marine Scotland regarding possible compensation for the Board due to loss of income from coastal netting station assessments. Mr Dryden had thought this unlikely to be forthcoming however he did advise that local assessors were due to meet to discuss valuation rates for both coastal netting stations and category 3 rivers with a proposal being put forward that these would be rated as £0.

5. NORTH COAST PATROLS AND BAILIFF LIAISON GROUP

- 5.1 *Bailiff Liaison Group Update:*** Mr M Heeps, Superintendent for the River Naver, reported that the boat patrol had been ready to operate from 1st March and to date four patrols have been carried out. There has been no suspicious activity seen to date. The boat will continue to be launched from both the East and West ends of the

area and the upgrade of the slipway at Portskerra should provide the crew with an additional few hours to operate either side of high tide.

The Bailiff Liaison Group met on 2nd March with representation from the Naver, the Halladale and Police Scotland. Both J Stewart (Borgie) and H Montgomery (Kinloch) have also both been kept updated since the meeting.

PC Hunter has offered to provide ground support where possible and Police Scotland are made aware of all patrols when they occur.

'Buyer Beware' leaflets continue to be distributed around the area to increase awareness of the illegal sale of salmon.

There is no further update on the provision of an additional boat from Kinloch. The Chairman enquired about additional equipment requirements which W Grant had mentioned; this included personal locator beacons for all crew members; M Heeps was not aware of any additional requests and confirmed that all lifejackets were fitted with a light .

- 5.2 ***Operation of Boat Patrol, 2017 Season:*** The Chairman asked for confirmation on the cost of the boat patrol for the 2017 season. Mr Mason confirmed that the boat patrol would be charged to the Board at £18,000 plus VAT for the season; this figure is based on approximately 15 patrols however no further payment will be sought for additional patrols if carried out. The remuneration to the Halladale for W Grant's contribution to the boat patrol is to be agreed separately between the Rivers Naver and Halladale.

The Chairman commented that the Board is unique in the area for operating a boat to carry out sea patrols for enforcement. Mr Hurst-Brown wondered whether it may be useful to explore the possibility of other forms of protection and deterrent for future seasons, including the possible use of drones, advanced communication systems and/or helicopters covering much wider regional areas.

It was agreed that a sub-committee be formed to look at the different available models of protection/deterrence and that this sub-committee would report back to the Board at the September meeting. It was agreed that Mr Hurst-Brown, Mr H Lopes and Mr S Green would all be members of the sub-committee.

6. **FLOW COUNTRY RIVERS TRUST UPDATE**

Mr A Youngson provided the Board with a verbal update on the work of the Flow Country Rivers Trust and the Chairman thanked the Trust on the production of another excellent newsletter.

A Youngson informed the Board that full reports on both the Wick Smolt Tracking Project and the Fishermen's Knowledge project were now available; these have been circulated to Board members and will also be available on the Trust website.

A Youngson reported that both projects seem to indicate that the number of fish from Northern Board rivers that travel through the Pentland Firth are very few and therefore renewable energy projects in the Pentland Firth may not be of much

concern to Northern Board rivers. It is likely however that the salmon of the East coast rivers do however take the Pentland Firth route.

The second phase of the smolt tracking project was due to be carried out later this year however this is now planned for next year. The Environmental Research Institute (ERI) has twenty listening stations which are currently not being used.

Armadale Acoustic Tagging Project: Both the Wick Smolt Tracking programme and the Fishermen's knowledge project tie in closely with the proposed acoustic tagging research project at Armadale. The meeting therefore discussed this proposal in detail and Alan Youngson provided further background information where possible.

Marine Scotland are proposing to undertake an acoustic tagging project at the Armadale netting station in the summer. It is proposed that 750 adult salmon will be tagged to monitor their movement patterns. In order to do this, 70 listening stations will be placed on the sea/river beds to capture the salmon's locations.

It is thought that the maximum range of the acoustic tags to be used is 400 metres and the battery life in the tag is approximately 3 months. The listening stations need to be located on the sea or river beds; it is uncertain at present where the listening stations will be located in the Armadale project and if there will be a mixture of coastal and river receiving stations.

It is thought that the primary focus of the Armadale project is from the mixed stock section of Marine Scotland however A Youngson suggested that the data could also be very useful for the marine renewable sector.

The tagging is expected to start in mid June and is predicted to take around 30-35 working days. The tagging will be carried out by Marine Scotland personnel with J Mackay operating the boat and nets.

It was suggested that the scale and scope of this research project meant that it could be a hugely important project to advance our understanding of salmon movements in the Northern Board area and beyond and there may be an opportunity to add to this research locally to further enhance the information available.

A Youngson reported that the FCRT, through John Mackay, has intimated that the Trust may be interested in supporting further research which could 'piggyback' on the main Armadale research project for relatively little additional cost. The scope of this additional research is obviously dependant on receiving further information on the scope of the Armadale project and in particular, the number and location of the listening stations. It may be however that individual rivers or the Board as a whole may wish to contribute towards placing additional listening stations in certain locations to record additional data in river and in the Pentland Firth.

A Youngson agreed to contact Marine Scotland to find out further information on the scope of the project and to intimate the potential keenness of the Board to contribute towards finding out additional data.

A Youngson to also investigate the 'off the shelf' availability of additional listening stations should these be required.

Lord Iliffe asked, given amongst other things the lack of clarity, as to where the listening stations would be located, whether it might be possible for the Armadale Project to be delayed for a year, so as to allow more time for the Project Management group to plan the project's objectives as fully as possible so as to ensure that the maximum benefit was obtained from the Project . However it was felt that this would not be possible, given the Government's commitment to the netting stations to undertake research projects and the timescales have already been held back.

The Chair reported that Marine Scotland have invited the Board to have a representative on the Project Management Group for the project; the Chair asked if A Youngson would be prepared to take on this role on behalf of the Board. A Youngson replied that he would be happy to do so however he may already be a member of the Project Management Board and if this was the case, the Board may wish to appoint someone else to further represent them.

7. WILD FISHERIES REFORM UPDATE

The Chairman drew the meeting's attention to the summary notes prepared by James Joicey following the Fisheries Management Scotland AGM in March 2017, a copy of which was circulated by email.

The Chairman reported that he had had further discussions with both the Chairs of the Caithness and Helmsdale Boards following the scrapping of the Wild Fisheries Reform and FMO proposals; neither the Caithness nor the Helmsdale Boards are keen to progress further with the Flow Country FMO proposal at present; all Boards are however keen to keep working jointly on some scientific projects and it was agreed that this would be something that the Board would wish to participate in and advocate as much as possible. The pooling of electro-fishing data and standardisation of electro-fishing procedures was cited as a very worthwhile exercise. It was also felt important to share information on the Armadale Research Project with the two Boards as and when we had further information.

Mr Hurst-Brown stated that he felt that there were a number of areas which must be relevant to all three Boards and he felt that in these areas in particular it would be beneficial to join together. These included: science, offshore developments, regulations, legislation, planning, forestry, security/enforcement and the ability to lobby.

The Board were supportive of carrying on communications with the Chairs of the two other Boards and it was suggested that the Chairman may wish to draft a letter to the other Boards proposing greater co-operation in the areas suggested by Mr Hurst-Brown.

8. FINANCIAL REPORT

8.1 Statement of Income & Expenditure – Year to Date

The Clerk presented a statement of income and expenditure from 1st January 2017 to 5th April 2017. The Clerk reported that the Board's donation to the upgrade of the Portskerra slipway had been paid and gratefully received.

8.2 **Draft Budget for Year Ending 31st December 2017**

The Clerk presented the draft budget for the year ending 31st December 2017 which had last been revised on 25th October 2016 following the previous Board Meeting. The Clerk asked for confirmation that the 2017 assessment invoices be based on the 2010 valuation rates as the 2017 rates had not yet been published. This was agreed by the Board and the Clerk undertook to send out the 2017 invoices within the next couple of weeks.

9. **PLANNING CONSULTATIONS/APPLICATIONS UPDATE**

The Clerk drew the Board's attention to the summary of current or proposed renewable energy projects within the Board's area which had been circulated with the agenda. The Chairman reported that he was of the understanding that the Scottish Government's focus is currently on offshore renewable energy projects and therefore decisions on onshore developments (such as Strathy South) are likely to be further delayed. There were no further comments raised on this item.

10. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

10.1 **Armadale Acoustic Tagging Project:** This item was discussed previously in the meeting under agenda item 6. The Clerk undertook to contact Mr J Mackay to update him on discussions from the meeting.

10.2 **Electro-fishing Applications:** The Clerk reported that she had received applications from both the River Naver and the River Halladale to undertake electro-fishing surveys in 2017. Consent was duly given by the Board to both of these applications, subject to consulting with SNH where applicable in respect of the applications impacting upon SAC's.

10.3 **Introduction of Broodstock:** The Clerk reported that she had received an application from the River Halladale to catch small numbers of salmon broodstock for a hatchery containing up to 70,000 eggs. In addition, Mr J Stewart reported that the River Borgie wished to catch broodstock for a hatchery on the Borgie, as per previous years. Consent was duly given by the Board to both of these applications, subject to consulting with SNH where applicable in respect of the applications impacting upon SAC's.

10.4 **Flow Country - Wold Heritage Site Application:** The Chairman reported that Dr Pete Mayhew had addressed the Northern Deer Management Group meeting on 8th May to report on an application by the Flow Country to be awarded Unesco World Heritage site status. The Flow Country covers almost one million acres of land bounded by Loch Hope and Loch Shin in the West to the lowland areas of Caithness in the East (covering the 3 board areas of Northern, Caithness & Helmsdale). At

present, it is not known if World Heritage site status would have any impact on sporting practices in the area however it was not thought likely. The Chair was unsure of any timescales associated with when a decision on WHS status would be made but the Board will be updated as and when further information becomes available.

11. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Annual Meeting of Qualified Proprietors and Board Meeting will be held on Tuesday 26th September 2017 at the Bettyhill Hotel. The Annual Meeting of Qualified Proprietors will start at 2pm followed by the Board Meeting at around 2.15pm.

LIST OF ACTIONS ARISING FROM MEETING

Representatives from the Rivers Naver and Halladale to agree remuneration for W Grant's contribution to the boat patrol	J Mason/D Hurst-Brown
Sub-committee to be formed to draw up potential future models of enforcement/deterrence.	D Hurst-Brown to co-ordinate
Contact Marine Scotland to find out further information the acoustic tagging project at Armadale and report findings back to the Clerk for dissemination	A Youngson
Investigate availability of additional listening stations	A Youngson
Continue communications with the Chairs of the Caithness and Helmsdale Boards and push for greater collaboration wherever possible	Chair
Send out 2017 assessment invoices	Clerk
Contact J Mackay to update him on the Armadale project discussions	Clerk
Arrange venue for the next meeting	Clerk