

**MINUTES of the MEETING of the NORTHERN DISTRICT SALMON FISHERY BOARD held on  
TUESDAY 26th SEPTEMBER 2017 at 2.15PM at the BETTYHILL HOTEL**

**Present:** Mr M T Ward (Convener)  
Lord Iliffe  
Mr J Gray  
Mr D Hurst-Brown  
Hon G Lopes  
Mr S Green  
Mr J Stewart  
Mr J Mackay  
Mr A Nicholson  
Mr A Adamson  
Mr T Chetwynd

**In attendance:** Mr A Youngson  
Mrs S Lopes  
Mr J Mason  
Mr M Heeps  
Mr T MacDonell  
Mr A Muat  
Mr D Buchan  
Mrs A MacAuslan (Clerk)

**1. APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from Mr P Gwyn and Mr V Hackel.

**2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No adjustments were required to the existing members' declarations of interest. The Clerk advised as per the Annual Meeting of Qualified Proprietors, that she would forward Mr Adamson a set of the declaration of financial interest paperwork for completion.

**3. MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 9th MAY 2017**

The minutes of the meeting held on 9th May 2017 were confirmed as an accurate record, having previously been approved by the Board via email following the May 2017 meeting.

**4. MATTERS ARISING**

The Clerk confirmed that all actions from the previous Board meeting had been completed or were in hand.

Mr D Hurst-Brown and Mr J Mason agreed to finalise the remuneration payment for W Grant as part of the boat patrol crew for 2017.

**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 Bailiff Liaison Group met on 4th March with follow up meetings and/or emails with those not able to attend.

The boat patrol operated a total of 17 sea patrols during the course of the season (the same number as the previous year). The patrol was able to carry out more early morning and evening patrols this year due to the upgrade of the Portskerra slipway. The patrol found instances of net marked fish, primarily on the Naver and Borgie; additionally, pins cemented into the rock were found East of strathy point as part of a foot patrol.

M Heeps advised that Marine Scotland would be keen to join the patrol boat next season in relation to inspecting licensed creel fishing, if the NDSFB approved this request.

Mr MacDonell enquired whether the Bailiff Liaison Group had considered installing cameras at known sites of illegal activity. M Heeps reported that this had been considered however the legalities and procedures involved with this become quite complicated as it is deemed as direct surveillance.

Mr Heeps confirmed that no nets had been found as part of the patrols.

Mr J Mackay reported that he felt illegal activity will become more of an issue with the moratorium on coastal netting.

5.2 **Future Models of Enforcement/Deterrence:** Mr D Hurst-Brown summarised the conclusions and recommendations of the working group that was set up to look at future models of enforcement. The Clerk apologised to the Board that this paper was only circulated a few days before the meeting.

Recommendations included retaining the boat patrol but reducing the number of patrols undertaken.

Drone regulations are changing rapidly at present and therefore it was felt that the Board did not want to be 'early adopters' of this technology. It was reported however that Fisheries Management Scotland are looking into the possibility of forming a working group to look into drone technology for the future.

The report recommends that the patrol boat could be hired out to neighbouring boards using the Northern DSFB crew to operate it. It was confirmed that this possibility has not yet been discussed with other Boards.

Mr A Nicholson felt that there needed to be a critical mass of patrols to ensure that the kit is used frequently enough and that the crew maintain their skills etc. It was queried what the relative financial savings would be of less patrols being undertaken.

The issue of Marine Scotland joining the boat patrols was discussed in relation to illegal creel fishing. Mr G Lopes reported that he felt that the Board had a clear remit for protecting salmon and that it was not the Board's role to be the 'police force' for the North.

It was noted that Marine Scotland should be operating their fisheries protection vessels across the North coast and this should be looking at all species including salmon. A Youngson confirmed that environmental DNA technology had improved recently and it was now quite easy and relatively cheap to swab vessel decks for traces of salmon.

It was agreed that it would be useful to do a further cost benefit analysis on reducing the number of sea patrols as it was agreed that illegal activity had reduced over the past few years however it was not known if this was a real reduction or because the sea patrols have been effective in keeping numbers down.

The Chairman asked Mr D Hurst-Brown and Mr S Green to carry out this cost benefit analysis on behalf of the Board.

Mr T MacDonell reported that Kinloch have purchased a RIB which should be in operation by the end of October. In addition, they have a variety of thermal imaging equipment which has recording facilities.

Mr S Green enquired whether the Kinloch boat could potentially be hired out for the odd patrol. It was felt that even one outing a year by this boat would help to increase speculation about when patrols were being deployed. This was something which Mr T MacDonell agreed could be discussed further.

- 5.3 **Future Operation of Boat Patrol:** The Chairman reported that a proposal had been put to the Board that the Board purchase the patrol boat from the River Naver Fisheries, with the Board owning and operating the boat in the future. Lord Iliffe reported that before the Board agreed to buy the boat from the Naver we would need to look closely at the cost of the boat to the Board, the cost analysis that is being completed for the number of patrols per season, and whether there was any possibility of grant funding to support the Board in operational costs for the boat.

The Chairman asked that Mr D Hurst Brown and Mr S Green look at the potential costs to the Board of purchasing the boat, in addition to considering the cost benefit analysis of the number of patrols per season.

The Chairman also reported that he and the Clerk would look into the possibility of available funding for operating the boat.

It was agreed that both of these actions would be completed by the 15th December 2017 and fed back to the Board.

## 6. **FLOW COUNTRY RIVERS TRUST UPDATE**

Mrs S Lopes reported that James Fleming has stood down as Chair of the Flow Country Rivers Trust and Mr John Mackay has been duly appointed as the new Chair.

It was reported that the FCRT has been fairly quiet over the past few months; the Trust were not successful in securing funding and equipment for deploying further receiving stations along the Pentland Firth as part of the Armadale Tagging project.

Mrs S Lopes informed the Board of a smolt tagging project being run by the Atlantic Salmon Trust. The project involves an array of receivers from the Deveron up to the Wick River. Whilst not impacting directly on the North Coast it was felt that it was useful to be kept informed and the AST have appointed a scientist who is co-ordinating all tagging projects thus hopefully ensuring link-ins with other similar projects.

The Clerk undertook to circulate the summary information of the AST project round the Board.

## 7. FISHERIES MANAGEMENT SCOTLAND

### 7.1 *Wild Fisheries Reform Update*

The Chairman confirmed that he is continuing to have dialogue with the Chairs of the Caithness and Helmsdale Boards. Both Boards are keen to continue to collaborate in scientific matters. A Youngson confirmed that work on joining together the electro-fishing procedures and data is still on track for this winter. Mr G Lopes asked how often individual sites should be electro-fished; A Youngson reported that they should know the answer to this after the winter.

### 7.2 *Armadale Tagging Research Project:* It was agreed that overall the Armadale Tagging Project had not been a success. Mr J Mackay reported that the main reasons for this were that the project was too late in starting and the lack of seal scarers available meant that there were resident seals in the mouth of the nets. The final numbers were that 86 fish were tagged and a further 30 fish were damaged and/or destroyed by seals.

It was reported that the Scottish Government are planning on repeating the project next year and A Youngson reported that that would allow us time to gather funding for putting the North/South Pentland Firth array of receiver stations in place. Additionally, lessons learnt from this year can be used to improve on the project for next year.

Mr J Mackay reported that he is in discussion at present with the Scottish Government regarding his payment for the project. The Board offered to write a letter to Simon Dryden supporting his case if Mr Mackay felt this would be beneficial. Mr J Mackay to contact the Clerk in the next couple of weeks if he would like the Board to intervene.

Mr J Mackay reported that he felt the following needed to be in place in time for next year if the project was to go ahead and be successful:-

- More crew to help with tagging
- More nets/gear
- A seal license to be in place prior to the start
- A full de-brief from this year's projects to learn lessons
- The project should be in place ready to start from early May

The Clerk reported that she had received communication from John Armstrong who has requested that the receiver stations be left in the water until the end of October. The Scottish Government is due to email out a briefing paper following the end of the project and the Clerk will circulate this round the Board once available.

## 8. FINANCIAL REPORT

### 8.1 *Valuation Rates Re-assessment*

The Clerk had previously circulated a list of the new rateable values for each fishery which showed a total rateable value increase from £114,900 in 2011 to £180,450 in

2017. It was confirmed that a number of fisheries had appealed their new rateable value. It was confirmed that the process involved a simple letter of appeal within six months of the rateable value letter. A lot of appeals are resolved at the first stage which involves a discussion with the local assessor. If not resolved at this stage it will go forward to a more formal rates appeal panel.

Mr G Lopes queried whether we should stick to the 2011 rates for assessments until the appeals had been resolved. It was thought that whichever rate was used there would need to be some adjustment at a later stage.

The Clerk undertook to add a further column to the rateable value spreadsheet which included the percentage change for each fishery from 2011 to 2017.

## 8.2 **Statement of Income & Expenditure – Year to Date**

The Clerk presented a statement of income and expenditure from 1<sup>st</sup> January 2017 to 5th September 2017. All assessments have been paid whilst the majority of the 2017 costs are still to be paid out.

## 8.3 **Draft Budget for Year Ending 31<sup>st</sup> December 2018**

The Clerk presented the draft budget for the year ending 31<sup>st</sup> December 2018 with a proposed assessment poundage rate which would provide approximately the same income as 2017.

It was noted that there was an error in the proposed expenditure and it was also agreed that until a decision had been made on the boat patrol for 2018 (which was the main expenditure) it was not worth agreeing a draft budget.

The Clerk undertook to correct the expenditure error and keep the draft budget on hold until further clarification on both income and expenditure was available.

## 9. **PLANNING CONSULTATIONS/APPLICATIONS UPDATE**

The Clerk reported that this item had been covered in the Annual Meeting of Qualified Proprietors held directly prior to this meeting. There were no further comments raised on this item.

## 10. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

### 10.1 **Re-grading of Rivers:** Mr A Youngson summarised to the group how the new methodology for grading rivers had been worked out. This has led to the downgrade of the Borgie from a Grade 1 to a Grade 2, the Kinloch from a Grade 1 to a Grade 3 and the Strathy from a Grade 2 to a Grade 3. All other rivers in the Board's area have retained their Grade 1 status for 2018.

A Youngson is currently assisting 5 rivers in the North in their appeal of their proposed downgrading and felt that all the rivers had a good chance of a successful appeal.

There was some confusion as to whether all rivers would be required to provide a conservation plan regardless of grading, or whether this would only be required for Grade 2 and 3 rivers. The Clerk undertook to try and get clarification on this.

10.2 **Electro-fishing, Kinloch:** Mr T MacDonell reported that the Kinloch were keen to monitor change of habitat in the river through electro-fishing and enquired about gaining Board approval for this. The Chair explained that approval for electro-fishing was usually sought at the May meetings and that it might be worthwhile discussing their proposals with A Youngson to ensure that they link in with the joint electro-fishing policy being developed.

11. **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

Mr J Gray asked that the dates for both of the 2018 meetings be set at this meeting in order to allow sufficient times for calendars to be organised.

It was therefore confirmed that the 2018 meetings will be held on the following dates:

The Annual Public Meeting will be held on **Tuesday 8th May 2018** at 2pm at the Bettyhill Hotel. This will be followed immediately by the NDSFB Board Meeting.

The Annual Meeting of Qualified Proprietors and Board Meeting will be held on **Tuesday 25th September 2018** at 2pm at the Bettyhill Hotel.

## LIST OF ACTIONS ARISING FROM MEETING

Email Andrew Adamson the Declaration of Financial Interest paperwork for completion	Clerk
Representatives from the Rivers Naver and Halladale to finalise remuneration for W Grant's contribution to the 2017 boat patrol	J Mason/D Hurst-Brown
Complete a cost benefit analysis for reducing the number of sea patrols in a season	D Hurst-Brown/S Green
Discuss the future possibility of hiring the Kinloch boat for one or two sea patrols	D H-B/S Green/T MacDonnell
Confirm purchase and running costs of boat if Board were to take on ownership	D Hurst-Brown/S Green
Explore possibility of grant funding for the Board purchasing the boat	Chair/Clerk
Circulate the summary information of the Atlantic Salmon Trust smolt tagging project to the Board, for information	Clerk
Contact the Clerk if letter of support is required for Armadale Tagging Project payment	J Mackay
Circulate Armadale Tagging Project briefing note from Scottish Government, when available	Clerk
Add a further column to the rateable value spreadsheet showing the percentage change for each fishery	Clerk
Correct error on proposed expenditure in 2018 draft budget and keep on hold until further information available	Clerk
Clarify whether all rivers are required to complete a conservation plan for 2018 fishing season	Clerk
A Youngson and T MacDonnell to discuss options for electro-fishing on the Kinloch	A Youngson/T MacDonnell
Arrange venue for the next meeting	Clerk