

**MINUTES of the MEETING of the NORTHERN DISTRICT SALMON FISHERY BOARD held on
WEDNESDAY 8th MAY 2019 at 2.10PM at the BETTYHILL HOTEL**

Present: Mr Toby Ward (Convener)
Mr A Adamson
The Hon G Lopes
Mr D Buchan
The Rt. Hon Lord Iliffe
Mr S Green
Mrs A Nicholson (Mandate - Mr A Nicolson)
Mr J Mackay
Mr D Hurst-Brown

In Attendance: Mrs S Lopes
Mr P Gray
Mrs M Gwyn
Mr A Youngson
Mr A Muat
Mr R Wright
Mr W Grant
Mrs A MacAuslan (Clerk)

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Mr J Stewart, Mr J Gray, Mr P Gwyn, Mr A Nicholson and Mr V Hackel.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

3. MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 25th SEPTEMBER 2018

The Clerk advised that a correction had been made to item 8.1 since the original draft minutes were circulated to the Board. With this correction noted the minutes of the meeting held on 25th September 2018 were confirmed as an accurate record.

4. MATTERS ARISING

- 4.1 **Seal Counts:** The Chairman referred to an update circulated with the agenda on seal numbers provided by the Seal Mammal Research Unit (SMRU). Mr Mackay felt that these figures were misleading and that the damage to fish populations by seals was underestimated. Seal licenses are in place for the Halladale, Naver, Borgie and Kinloch. R Wright reported that 31 seals were spotted in the Kyle of Tongue in early May but that not many are spotted when out on sea patrols. It was suggested that anglers be encouraged to report any seal sightings to keep a track of potential numbers. A Muat confirmed that the Bettyhill Angling Club reported seal sightings to R Wright.

5. NORTH COAST SEA PATROLS

- 5.1 **Boat Patrols - 2019 Season:** The Chairman reported that R Wright, W Grant and D Hodge were liaising between them the best times for carrying out patrols. The first patrol of the season on D Hodge's vessel took place on 30th April 2019 and the budget for sea patrols amounts to 10 patrols on the Guiding Star. R Wright also reported that Patrolla had been out on patrol on 12th April 2019 and a verbal report was provided to the meeting on this patrol.

Mr Adamson advised that the Kinloch boat was put back in the water this morning and will be out weekly with either H Montgomery or I MacDonald on board.

- 5.2 **Bailiff Liaison Group:** R Wright reported that a meeting of the Bailiff Liaison Group took place in February 2019 with nine bailiffs in attendance from the Northern Board, the Helmsdale, Brora, Kyle, Assynt and Inver Kirkaig. The Caithness Board were also invited but were not able to attend.

6. FINANCIAL REPORT

- 6.1 **2018 Year End Statement of Income & Expenditure:** The Clerk referred to the 2018 income and expenditure statement which had been circulated to all Board members with the agenda prior to the meeting. The Clerk reported a Year End overspend of just under £6,000.00 and a Year End Bank Balance of £5,200.68. This figure did not include any of the 2018 NEPS grant funding which has now been allocated out accordingly.
- 6.2 **Draft Budget for Year ending 31st December 2019:** The Clerk referred to the draft 2019 budget which had been circulated prior to the meeting. The Clerk advised that the assessment poundage has been set at 17p per £RV to provide a projected year end bank balance of just under £6,000. The Clerk advised however that the draft budget contained a £2k contribution towards the research application by ERI to Leader. A Youngson has confirmed that this application was not successful therefore the £2k budgeted for this is no longer required. It was agreed to retain the assessment poundage at 17p per £RV and the Clerk undertook to update the draft budget and issue the assessment invoices accordingly.
- 6.3 **Assessment Income Rate for 2019**
The Clerk reported that included in the meeting papers was a revised Rateable Value Table for the Northern Board fisheries. This has been updated following successful appeals against the revised rateable values by some Proprietors.

The Clerk asked for confirmation from the meeting that the Proprietors agreed that the 2018 assessments were based on the 2017 rates available at the time, despite some rateable values having been successfully appealed subsequently. The meeting confirmed their agreement of this.

7. FLOW COUNTRY RIVERS TRUST / SCIENTIFIC UPDATE

- 7.1 **National Electrofishing Programme:** A Youngson advised that he had circulated previously the draft Trust report on the first year results of the National Electrofishing Programme for Scotland (NEPS). The two main points derived from the report are that all rivers within the Trust area show a healthy density of fry and parr. The second point is that there are distinct differences between the two Board areas in the Trust and this may partly be due to geological differences.

A Youngson has a couple of revisions to make to the draft report and it was then agreed that the Clerk would contact John Mackay as Chair of the Trust and the report would be published on both the Trust website and the NDSFB website.

A Youngson also advised that he had attended a meeting in Pitlochry in early May 2019 to discuss the findings and report by Marine Scotland on NEPS. The report itself is embargoed until mid May 2019 until some changes are made to it following the meeting. The report itself is quite a complicated read and the data is only reported to Regional (Board) level and not down to individual level. The report however shows that the Far North rivers are looking healthy both against the benchmarks designed by Marine Scotland and against the rest of the rivers in Scotland.

- 7.2 **Scientific Sub-Group Proposal:** A Youngson advised that he has been looking at options for the Far North Board areas to have continuing scientific support for future years, provided through the Environmental Research Institute in Thurso. Roxanne Anderson has been awarded a 3 year ERI studentship focusing on the Effect of Peatland Restoration on Salmon populations. This research project is in collaboration with RSPB and a hydrologist. The studentship is due to commence in September 2019 and A Youngson advised the Board to support and assist the project as it will likely be of mutual benefit to the Board.

A Youngson also advised that there may be the potential to do some work with regards to forestry and the impact on forestry works on river systems. There is more forestry work due to commence in the Borgie area which may impact on the river.

A Youngson outlined his proposal for a Scientific sub group which would allow items to be discussed in more depth than is currently possible at the Board meetings. The proposal would be that the sub-group would meet 3-4 times a year and would be open to anyone with an interest in the Board however would likely involve those that are permanently resident in the Far North. The meetings would be minuted and any issues/concerns fed back to Board members.

Mr Lopes raised his concern that these meetings could take up time that the Bailiffs did not necessarily have during the height of the season. It was agreed that the group would meet once shortly to discuss the NEPS sites when available, and then a further meeting would not be arranged until after the summer. The meeting is to be held in Bettyhill and the Clerk also agreed to attend and take a note of the meeting.

- 7.3 **Additional Scientific Updates**

A Youngson advised that he had produced a hydrochemistry map of the Caithness Board small streams. The colour coded map shows where the geological transition occurs in the area. If the Board would be interested, A Youngson advised that he could continue this mapping further West, starting with the Halladale.

It was noted that the life cycle of salmon differ significantly between the Caithness and the Northern Board rivers due to the different geology. The fry and parr tend to grow more quickly and smolt at a younger age in the Caithness rivers compared to Northern Board rivers.

8. FISHERIES MANAGEMENT SCOTLAND

8.1 *National Electro-fishing Programme*

It was confirmed at a meeting in Pitlochry that Alan attended on 2nd/3rd May 2019 that the National Electrofishing Programme for Scotland (NEPS) would continue in 2019 and will be funded at a slightly higher rate than 2018. A list of sampling sites should be available later this week. It was reported that only one year's worth of funding has been agreed at present although the programme itself is designed to be carried out over a nine year period.

10 of the 30 sites in the Northern Board area will be the same as last year with the remaining 20 sites being different sites to last year. It was agreed that the following would take the lead in sampling the Northern Board rivers:

- Halladale: W Grant
- Strathy: W Grant
- Naver: R Wright
- Borgie: A Youngson
- Kinloch: R Wright

It was also agreed that it would be useful if A Youngson could produce a further report on behalf of the Trust with a summary of the results from the 2019 NEPS, when available.

9. PLANNING CONSULTATIONS/APPLICATIONS UPDATE

The Clerk reported that she had recently received correspondence in relation to the following planning consultations:-

- Strathy South Wind farm: Planning consent was granted in April 2018 for the construction of 39 turbines. SSE have now put in an amendment proposing that the blade tip height be increased from 135m to 200m. The Clerk will find the Board's original objection to the Strathy South wind farm and liaise with A Youngson as to whether any further objection is required.
- Ackron Wind farm: A scoping study has been submitted to look at the feasibility of constructing 14 turbines near Melvich which may impact on a tributary of the Halladale. A Youngson will review this scoping study and advise if any action is required.

10. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

- 10.1 *Electro-fishing Applications:* The Clerk advised that she has received applications from both the Rivers Naver and Halladale to undertake electro-fishing surveys over the summer. These applications were approved by the Board subject to consulting with SNH where applicable. It was confirmed that W Grant should extend his license application to include the River Strathy in respect of NEPS. R Wright confirmed that his license application included the Kinloch. A Youngson to liaise with J Stewart with regards to ensuring a license is in place to under NEPS on the Borgie.

- 10.2 **Introduction of Broodstock:** The Clerk advised that she had received applications from both the River Halladale and the River Borgie to catch small numbers of salmon broodstock for their hatcheries. 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 **Fisheries Management Scotland:** A Adamson advised that Alan Wells had indicated his willingness to attend a future meeting of the Northern Board to update Board members on the work of the FMS. It was agreed to wait until further information was available on proposed Regional meetings to take place between FMS and local Boards.
- 10.3 **Fish Farm Applications:** Mr Lopes enquired about the process for fish farms applying for planning permission to extend or change their operations. It was reported that Loch Eriboll was the closest fish farm to the Board and it was thought that planning applications would only need to be sent to the North West Board. The Clerk undertook to contact the Clerk of the North West Board to request that we be kept informed of any planning applications pertaining to Loch Eriboll fish farm. Mr Lopes reported that anglers on the River Naver had caught two fish farm escapees to date this year and felt that this should be reported through the Northern Board.
- 10.4 **Publicity regarding Catch Records:** Mr Mackay reported that he felt that the recent press coverage of 2018 being the lowest catch record in history was detrimental to the angling industry and did not fully reflect the full story. It did not differentiate between catches in different areas or fully state the reasons as to why last season's catches were so low. Mr Mackay felt that this negative publicity would also be detrimental to the coastal netting industry in trying to get coastal netting reinstated.
- 10.5 **International Year of the Salmon:** Mr Adamson reported that as part of the International Year of the Salmon events, Wildland is arranging a two day event in which local school children will be invited to learn how to fish, in conjunction with Loop Tackle. There will also be a beach clean and barbecue. Mr Adamson reported that an invite will be extended to all local angling clubs and he will provide further details regarding the event to the Clerk for circulation.

11. **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The Annual Meeting of Qualified Proprietors and Northern DSFB Meeting will take place on **Tuesday 24th September 2019** at 2.00pm in the Bettyhill Hotel.

LIST OF ACTIONS ARISING FROM MEETING

Update draft 2019 budget to reflect revised expenditure	Clerk
Send out 2019 assessment invoices	Clerk
Contact John Mackay, FCRT Chair, to confirm Board's approval of draft Electrofishing Report and publish on NDSFB website	Clerk
Set up first meeting of Scientific Sub-Group to discuss NEPS sites	A Youngson/Clerk
Review Strathy South wind farm original objection against proposed amendments	A Youngson/Clerk
Review Scoping Study for Ackron Wind Farm and advise of any action required	A Youngson
Extend Halladale Electrofishing license to include the River Strathy	W Grant
Organise an Electrofishing license for NEPS Sampling on River Borgie	J Stewart/A Youngson
Contact Clerk of North West DSFB regarding Fish Farm planning applications	Clerk
Circulate information on Planned Wildland Event	A Adamson/Clerk
Confirm Venue for Next Meeting Date	Clerk