

**MINUTES of the MEETING of the NORTHERN DISTRICT SALMON FISHERY BOARD held on
TUESDAY 27th SEPTEMBER 2016 at 2.30PM at the BETTYHILL HOTEL**

Present: Mr M T Ward (Convener)
Lord Iliffe
Hon G Lopes
Mrs S Lopes
Mr S Green
Mr D Lindsay
Mr J Stewart
Mrs A Nicholson (Mandate - Mr A Nicholson)
Mr J MacKay
Mr V Hackel (via Skype)

In attendance: Mr A Youngson
Mr J Mason
Mr M Heeps
Mr A Muat (Bettyhill Angling Club)
Mrs A MacAuslan (Clerk)
Viscount Thurso (*for Wild Fisheries Reform agenda item*)

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Mr D Hurst-Brown, Mr P Gwyn and Mr J Gray.

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 10th May 2016 were confirmed as an accurate record, having previously been approved by the Board via email following the May 2016 meeting.

4. MATTERS ARISING

The Chairman passed on the grateful thanks of the Forsinard Flyfishers Club for the Board's contribution to their start up costs. The club had a very successful first season and now have nearly 100 members.

The Clerk confirmed that all other action points agreed at the meeting on 10th May 2016 had been completed or were in hand. There were no further matters arising.

5. NORTH COAST PATROLS AND BAILIFF LIAISON GROUP

Mr M Heeps, Superintendent for the River Naver, summarised the main points in the enforcement programme paper which had previously been circulated to Board members. M Heeps reported that 17 boat patrols were undertaken during the 2016 season, almost all of which were initiated due to intelligence received. He reported

that there was anecdotal evidence of an increase in wild fish being sold elsewhere and this was something they were keeping an eye on.

The Chair noted his surprise that the boat patrol did not launch earlier in the season. M Heeps reported that he would have liked to have launched earlier in the season however this was not possible due to the weather in the Spring. Mr Mackay also stated that the Spring tides can make launching a boat difficult in March and April. The Chair thanked M Heeps and the rest of the boat patrol for their efforts and requested that he would like to see an earlier start to the season next year if possible, and the boat being launched at more irregular times; M Heeps confirmed that they would try to achieve this, weather and tides permitting.

M Heeps confirmed that the Bailiff Liaison Group is continuing to meet and continues to have the support of the local constabulary.

The Clerk received agreement to pay the invoice for the 2016 coastal patrol season, amounting to £21,600. There was some debate as to the remuneration agreed to the Halladale for W Grant's input into the patrols; the Clerk and Chair undertook to look back at emails with this agreement and arrange the appropriate re-charge.

6. FLOW COUNTRY RIVERS TRUST UPDATE

Mr A Youngson and Mrs S Lopes provided the Board with a verbal update on the Flow Country Rivers Trust.

The FCRT is collaborating with the Environmental Research Institute in Thurso to undertake a smolt tracking survey on the Wick River. The listening station has been recovered from Wick bay and the data will now be analysed. It is hoped that the data will help to address the lack of information on the behaviour of smolts and their migratory routes in the vicinity of the Pentland Firth.

The Fisherman's Knowledge project, funded by a grant from the Fishmongers Company, has been put on hold at present whilst A Youngson was drafting the FMO paper. This project which will gain qualitative information from salmon netmen on the pattern of salmon in the Pentland Firth, will be completed over the winter months.

A number of electro-fishing surveys have been undertaken in the Flow Country area and analysis of the results are now focusing on the total biomass density values for each site as opposed to numerical density values; total biomass density tends to give a more accurate measure of the status and performance of each site. Analysis to date suggests that the majority of sites consistently attained biomass density values that are likely to be near to the maximum possible value for that site.

Mrs S Lopes confirmed that the Trust have held back producing a Winter newsletter this year until further information is available on the future of Trusts as part of the Wild Fisheries Reform process. The Board agreed that the Trust was still a very useful and important body in fisheries management and research in the North. A recent

extra-ordinary meeting of ASFB/RAFTS proposed that an interim organisation based on the current ASFB structure would act on behalf of Trusts as well as Boards and that Trusts would pay a standardised subsidy of £1,000 p.a. to the new organisation (Fisheries Management Scotland).

It was confirmed that funding contributions from the Northern and Caithness Boards had now finished, however whilst exact financial information was not available at the meeting, Mrs S Lopes confirmed that the Trust did have reserves available to continue with their projects.

7. FINANCIAL REPORT

7.1 Statement of Income & Expenditure – Year to Date

The Clerk presented a statement of income and expenditure from 1st January 2016 to 12th September 2016. The Clerk reported that since 12th September 2016, Mr J Mackay has paid his outstanding assessment for 2015 bringing the current balance to £43,986.04.

The Clerk confirmed that the following assessments for 2016 were still outstanding:

- Sutherland Estates - £114
- Amadale Net Salmon Fishings - £1,995
- Melvich Bay Net Salmon Fishings - £1,520

Mr J Mackay reported that the compensation package the Scottish Govt had proposed for the enforced temporary ban on coastal netting was much lower than he had anticipated with unexpected expenses having been deducted from the original proposed figure.

The Hon G Lopes proposed that the Board should not charge assessment rates for coastal netting stations for the period in which the enforced ban is in place, unless the Scottish Government pay the assessment income directly. This was agreed by the Board and the Clerk undertook to revise the valuation rate for 2016 and 2017 based on this decision.

Mr S Green asked whether there was a facility for the Board to claim back this lost assessment from the Scottish Government and the Clerk undertook to contact the Scottish Government and put forward this proposal.

7.2 Draft Budget for Year Ending 31st December 2016

The Clerk presented the draft budget for the year ending 31st December 2016 which had last been revised on 23rd August 2016. The Clerk advised that following the decision to remove the coastal netting stations from the assessment income, the expected surplus at year end would reduce to £1,828.

The Hon G Lopes proposed to the Board that the Clerk's fees should be increased from £2,500 p.a. due to the increased amount of work involved in the Wild Fisheries

Reform. The Board agreed to increase the Clerk's fees to £3,000 p.a. and the Clerk undertook to amend the budget accordingly.

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

The Clerk presented the draft budget for the year ending 31st December 2017. The draft budget circulated to the Board prior the meeting included the assessment income from coastal netting stations and would therefore need to be revised.

The Clerk had prepared a sliding scale of assessment income based on variable pence per RV pound. The Board agreed to set a 30p per RV pound assessment rate for 2017; this would leave the Board with a projected deficit of £4,815 for the year. This rate was agreed subject to review once the expected new rateable values come into force in April 2017.

Mr S Green asked whether there was any expenditure or items which should be purchased from the Board's capital accounts which would benefit the Board before the proposed formation of an FMO. The Chair reported that the Board had received a request to contribute towards the cost of upgrading the Portskerra slipway as the Board was a regular user of the slipway when the patrol boat is in operation. The community has raised just over £15,000 to date but is still £3,100 short of the cheapest quote. The Board agreed to provide a £1,000 contribution towards the upgrade on the proviso that the upgrade goes ahead. The Clerk undertook to contact those involved to inform them of this decision.

The Clerk also agreed to update the draft budget for 2017 to reflect the revised assessment rate.

8. **Wild Fisheries Reform Update**

The Chairman welcomed John Thurso to the meeting and thanked him for coming along to provide the Board with a summary update of the Wild Fisheries Reform. John Thurso confirmed that following discussions with the 3 Far North Boards (The Northern, Caithness and Helmsdale Boards) a draft template was prepared which proposed the formation of a Flow Country FMO. John Thurso confirmed that this paper was very much a template and he did not feel the need to do any further work with it until such time as the 3 Boards were required to submit a formal application. He reported that all 3 Boards are currently quite similar in terms of topography, geography and fisheries management with a lot of co-operation already taking place between the Boards; the ethos of the new FMO would therefore be 'to preserve the best, and improve the rest'.

As part of the WFR process, it was agreed that Alan Youngson be commissioned to produce a draft Fisheries Management Plan to show how co-operation in the proposed FMO might work. This draft plan has been produced and was circulated to all Board members over the summer. The Board agreed that this plan provided invaluable information and thanked Alan Youngson for his work on this. John Thurso proposed that the 3 Boards should seek to work together informally to implement the thrust of the plan notwithstanding the legislative need may be some years away.

This proposal was agreed by the Board and the Board took the opportunity to thank both Alan and John for their work on this to date.

John Thurso suggested that it may be beneficial to pull together a small steering group with Alan to agree how this can be taken forward and report back progress to the Boards at future meetings.

It was confirmed that the WFR legislation is not in next year's Scottish Government sessional programme however it has been confirmed that it will be addressed within this current parliament (by 2021).

There was no further update on the plan to progress with pilot FMO areas however feedback from the extraordinary RAFTS/ASFB meeting held in September, intimated that the Flow Country FMO may be seen as a favourable candidate for piloting this when available.

9. **Planning Consultations/Applications Update**

This item was discussed under the Annual Report agenda item in the Annual Meeting of Qualified Proprietors, and no further comments were raised.

10. **Any Other Business**

No further items were raised and the Chairman therefore thanked everyone for attending.

11. **Date of Next Meeting**

It was proposed to hold the next Annual Public Meeting and Board meeting on Tuesday 9th May 2017, subject to discussion with the Northern Deer Management Group. It has since been confirmed that the NDMG are proposing to meet on Monday 8th May 2017, therefore the following dates and times are confirmed:

- NDSFB Annual Public Meeting: Tuesday 9th May 2017 at 2.00pm

- NDSFB Board Meeting: Tuesday 9th May 2017 at 2.30pm (or following conclusion of the Annual Public Meeting)

Both meetings will be held at the Bettyhill Hotel.

LIST OF ACTIONS ARISING FROM MEETING

Pay Coastal Patrol 2016 season invoice	Clerk
Revise valuation rates for assessment purposes for 2016 and 2017 following decision to temporarily exclude coasting netting stations from valuation rates	Clerk
Contact the Scottish Government to push for compensation due to loss of income from temporary removal of coastal netting stations from paying assessments.	Chairman/Clerk
Amend budgets to take into account increase in Clerk's fees	Clerk
Contact Portskerra slipway upgrade committee regarding Board's contribution to upgrade	Clerk
Update the 2017 draft budget to reflect the revised assessment rate for 2017.	Clerk
Arrange venue for the next meeting	Clerk