

NORTHERN DISTRICT SALMON FISHERY BOARD

ANNUAL REPORT – 2017

This is the tenth 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 2016/7

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 27th September 2016. The next meeting will be held at the Bettyhill Hotel on the 26th September 2017.

The last Annual Public Meeting was held on the 9th May 2017.

Board meetings took place on the 27th September 2016, the 9th May 2017 and the next one will take place at the Bettyhill Hotel on the 26th September 2017.

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 2017; 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 continued to be 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 throughout 2017. The NDSFB wishes to record its thanks to all the Water Bailiffs of the Northern Board as well as the local Constabulary for their help and support in this venture.

It was agreed at the Board Meeting in May 2017 that a sub-committee would be formed to explore alternative and/or additional methods of protection and enforcement of the Board's

coastlines. The recommendations of the sub-committee are due to be fed back at the Board meeting in September 2017.

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; this number was later reduced to 39 turbines. Following a public inquiry in 2015, the Reporter submitted his final report to the Scottish Ministers in February 2016 however 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. No further update is currently available.

Drum Holistan Wind farm

In November 2016 an application was submitted to the Scottish Ministers under S.36 of the Electricity Act for the erection of 17 wind turbines on the Sandside estate between Reay and Melvich. Whilst just outside the Board's boundary, the Gibigill Burn which feeds the River Halladale is mentioned in the ES and may be potentially impacted. The application was not approved by the Highland Council at a meeting in June 2017. The application has now been referred to the DPEA. A reporter has been appointed and the application will be considered by a site visit and local enquiry.

Pentland Firth Offshore Renewables

The Board continues to take an interest in the offshore renewable projects in the Pentland Firth. These include:

Meygen Tidal Project: Phase 1a saw the installation of four 1.5MW turbines start in September 2016 and construction of a further 4 turbines is due to start soon with confirmation of further investment.

Brims Tidal Array Project: The Brims Tidal Array project proposes the installation of up to 200 fully submerged tidal turbines at a site off the southern tip of Hoy, Orkney. Alan Youngson prepared a briefing paper for both the Caithness and Northern Boards on this proposal and this was submitted as comment on 12th September 2016. Open Hydro then came back with their response to our comments on 16th Dec 16. This was reviewed by Alan Youngson and the Board confirmed they were happy with this response.

Katanes Floating Energy Ltd: A screening proposal is being pulled together for the deployment of up to 5 floating wind and wave energy devices in waters off the coast of Dounreay (immediately to the west of the consented Dounreay Tri project). Information on this proposal has just been received and will be forwarded to Alan Youngson for review.

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 Approved Since Last Annual Report

The following applications within the Northern DSFB's area have received approval since the 2016 Annual report:

Creag Riabhach Wind farm: Approval was granted by the Scottish Government on 17th October 2016 for the erection of 22 turbines.

Dounreay Tri Floating Offshore Wind farm: Planning consent was granted on 17th March 2017 for the construction of 2 wind turbines on a single floating platform 9km NW of Dounreay.

Projects in Screening/Scoping Phase

In addition to the above 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.

Armada Wind farm: In December 2016 a scoping report was produced with scoping details of up to 16 wind turbines on land near Armadale. The scoping report has been shared with Alan Youngson who has advised that at this stage no formal response is required as the salmon interests of the two burns entering Armadale bay are already included in the developer's report.

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.

The emergence of Pacific Pink Salmon in Scottish Waters is being monitored closely by the Board. At the time of writing, there has been two instances of dead Pacific salmon in the River Naver (one cock and one hen fish retrieved from the Association water). In addition 12 redds from apparent spawning activity by Pacific salmon have been discovered in the Naver. The ghillies and bailiffs continue to monitor the situation.

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. During 2016/2017 the Trust has produced the following interesting and informative reports:

- Wick Smolt Tracking Project, 2016 (produced in collaboration with the Environmental Research Institute (ERI))
- Fishermen's Knowledge: Salmon in the Pentland Firth (produced with financial support from the Fishmongers Company)

James Fleming has recently stood down as Chair of the Flow Country Rivers Trust and the Northern Board would like to take this opportunity to thank him for all his help and commitment in setting up the Trust and moving it forward.

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 Wind farm.

SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT/MARINE SCOTLAND MATTERS

Wild Fisheries Reform: In February 2017 the Scottish Government ruled out proposals to introduce rod licences, a new wild fisheries levy and the criminalisation of freshwater fishing without written permission. In addition, proposals to overhaul the structure and remit of District Salmon Fishery Boards were also ruled out. The Board however continues to look to work closely with its neighbouring DSFBs (in particular the Caithness and Helmsdale Boards) to share knowledge and information wherever possible.

Armadale Tagging Project: In May 2017 it was announced that a research project would be undertaken at the Armadale Coastal netting station. This would involve the tagging of up to 750 adult salmon with receiver stations located in as many Scottish rivers as possible to track the movement of these salmon. The project started at the beginning of July 2017 however conditions were unfavourable for tagging large amounts of salmon and the tagging ended at the end of August 2017 with less than 100 salmon tagged. The Board awaits the results of this project and feedback from the lessons learned.

LOOK AHEAD TO 2017/8

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 liaising with Fisheries Management Scotland and other organisations as required.

Chairman
Northern District Salmon Fishery Board
