

NORTHERN DISTRICT SALMON FISHERY BOARD

ANNUAL REPORT – 2019

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the report is to summarise the work undertaken by the Northern District Salmon Fishery Board (NDSFB) during 2018/2019 and plans for the forthcoming year, with particular regard to the board's statutory functions and responsibilities.

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 2018/19

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 following meetings were held during the period of this annual report:

25th September 2018: Annual Meeting of Qualified Proprietors
25th September 2018: Northern District Salmon Fishery Board Meeting
8th May 2019: Annual Public Meeting
8th May 2019: Northern District Salmon Fishery Board Meeting

Dates of Forthcoming Meetings:

24th September 2019: Annual Meeting of Qualified Proprietors
24th September 2019: Northern District Salmon Fishery Board
Both meetings will be held at the Bettyhill Hotel.

All meetings are notified to the public by posting on the NDSFB website with the Annual Public Meeting also advertised in the Northern Times; The Scottish Government also receives a copy of these 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 coastline of the Northern Board area has been actively patrolled during the 2019 season by the Northern DSFB Bailiffs. The majority of patrols have been carried out on D Hodge's vessel, the Guiding Star, with vessels from River Naver Fisheries, Kinloch/Wildland and the Strath Halladale Partnership also out throughout the season patrolling the coastline.

The patrol is a collaborative venture to deter illegal netting at sea which intercepts fish on the way to their natal rivers. Sea patrols were conducted across the full extent of the District's coastline.

The NDSFB wishes to record its thanks to all the Bailiffs of the Northern Board as well as Mr D Hodge for their help and support in this venture.

RENEWABLE ENERGY

Alan Youngson has continued to support the Board in reviewing the 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. During the annual review period, the following proposals/developments have been active:

Decisions Reached:

Drumhollistan Windfarm: on 21st June 2019, the Scottish Government refused the application for the construction and operation of a 17 turbine wind farm at Drumhollistan.

New and Ongoing Applications/Constructions:

Strathy Wood Windfarm: In August 2019 further environmental information was submitted to the Highland Council as part of the Strathy Wood Windfarm planning application. None of the new information provided relates to fish or fisheries and therefore no additional response was submitted from the Board.

Strathy South Windfarm: In May 2019, SSE submitted an amendment to the approved planning application for 39 turbines. The amendment is for an increase in blade tip height from 135m to 200m. The Board responded to this amendment by asking for consideration to be given to the impact of development on trout and salmon when the EIA is prepared.

Ackron Windfarm: In April 2019 a scoping study was submitted for the construction of 14 turbines at Ackron which may impact on the Halladale catchment. The Board responded asking to be kept informed when the EIA report is published.

HABITAT ISSUES

A large wildfire burnt a huge swathe of moorland between the Rivers Halladale and Strathy in May 2019. The Environmental Research Institute in Thurso is undertaking a research project with input from the FCRT to assess the impact of this wildfire on the habitat including the rivers.

There have been no sitings to date this season in the Northern Board area of Pacific pink salmon, however Bailiffs and Ghillies continue to remain vigilant to this. Sitings of fish displaying a red belly and red vent syndrome were made in some of the Northern rivers this season, as they were elsewhere throughout Scotland.

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 2018/2019 the Trust has produced the following interesting and informative report:

- Marine Scotland National Electrofishing Programme for Scotland: Report on 2018 salmon survey populations in the Northern rivers

The Board has agreed funding of £1,200 to support training by the Smart Rivers project to sample and identify invertebrates in the Northern rivers. This training will initially take place on the Halladale and can then be extended to other rivers in the Board area.

The Board continues to be 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 Marine Scotland and SNH, to electro-fishing work being conducted within both the River Naver catchment and the River Halladale catchment for the purpose of juvenile salmon stock assessment.

In addition, consent was granted by Marine Scotland to carry out electro-fishing at the 30 sites identified through the National Electro-fishing Programme (see below).

SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT/MARINE SCOTLAND MATTERS

National Electro-fishing Programme: In May 2019 Marine Scotland announced their intention to continue with the National Electro-fishing Programme for Scotland for the second year. 30 sites (a mixture of single pass and multi-pass sites) were identified within the Northern Board region broken down by the following catchment areas:

Halladale: 8 sites

Strathy: 2 sites

Naver: 14 sites

Borgie: 6 sites

Kinloch: 0 sites

The electrofishing is being undertaken by the Naver and Halladale Bailiffs as well as by A Youngson and the Board wishes to record its thanks to all those involved in participating with this programme. The results will be updated on the Fishobs database and genetic/scale and water sampling was also carried out as part of the programme. It is hoped that the FCRT will prepare a further report on the results of these surveys once available.

FMS Regional Meeting: Fisheries Management Scotland announced at their 2018 AGM their intention to hold Regional meetings in 2019. The first of these meetings is scheduled to take place on 11th September 2019 at Kildonan Hall, Sutherland.

LOOK AHEAD TO 2019/20

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.

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, particularly in relation to the National electrofishing programme.

Chairman
Northern District Salmon Fishery Board
