

**MINUTES of the MEETING of the NORTHERN DISTRICT SALMON FISHERY BOARD held on
TUESDAY 24th SEPTEMBER 2019 at 2.10PM at the BETTYHILL HOTEL**

Present: Mr Toby Ward (Chairman)
The Hon G Lopes (Naver)
Mrs S Lopes (Naver)
Lord Iliffe (Naver)
Mr S Green (Naver)
Mr P Gray (Naver)
Mr D Buchan (Naver)
Mr A Nicholson (Mallart)
Mr J Mackay (Armadale)
Mr V Hackel (Strathy) - via Skype

In Attendance: Mr A Youngson (Scientific Advisor)
Mr A Muat (Bettyhill Angling Club)
Mr R Wright (Bailiff, River Naver)
Mr W Grant (Bailiff, River Halladale)
Mrs A MacAuslan (Clerk)

1. APOLOGIES

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

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

3. MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 8th MAY 2019

The minutes of the meeting held on 8th May 2019 were approved as a correct record.

4. MATTERS ARISING

No further matters arising were raised other than those already tabled on the agenda.

5. NORTH COAST SEA PATROLS

- 5.1 **Summary of 2019 Coastal Patrols:** The Chairman reported that this was the second year that the Board had contracted D Hodge and the Guiding Star to carry out sea patrols. 9 patrols had been carried out on Guiding Star and one carried out on the River Naver Fisheries vessel, Patrolla, on behalf of the Board when D Hodge was on leave.

It was agreed that the process of communication between D Hodge and the Bailiffs was working well and patrols had been carried out on a variety of days, hours and water levels. It was also agreed that the new berthing arrangements at Portskerra made it easier to launch and retrieve the boat.

The Clerk confirmed that D Hodge had been paid for his contribution to the patrols and it was agreed to settle payment with the other parties involved, as per the spreadsheet circulated with the agenda.

- 5.2 **Proposal for 2020 Coastal Patrol:** The Chairman reported that he had spoken with D Hodge who would be happy to continue to undertake coastal patrols in 2020 on the same arrangement as 2019. The Clerk undertook to draft a contract to D Hodge for the 2020 season and issue this to him.

It was proposed that it may be beneficial to start the patrols earlier in the season and continue later in the season next year, however this would be weather and conditions dependent.

6. FINANCIAL REPORT

- 6.1 **2019 Year to Date Income & Expenditure:** The Clerk referred to the 2019 income and expenditure statement which had been circulated with the agenda. The Clerk projected a year end bank balance of approximately £6,500 although this may be higher if no spend is attributed to the £1,000 contingency fund for 2019. The Clerk reported that £6,300 was received from the Scottish Government in July 2019 as the first tranche of 2019 NEPS funding. It was agreed that this should be allocated to those undertaking the electrofishing accordingly, and the Clerk undertook to action this.

- 6.2 **Draft Budget for Year ending 31st December 2020:** The Clerk referred to the draft 2020 budget circulated prior to the meeting. The Clerk advised that the draft budget shows a proposed assessment poundage of 16p per £RV to provide a projected year end surplus of £1,301. It was agreed that if the 2019 contingency fund was not used, the 2020 assessment poundage should be reduced to 15p per £RV giving a projected year end deficit of £37.

Mr Mackay reported that fuel costs are likely to increase in 2020 affecting the overall cost of the Coastal patrols, however it was agreed that the contingency fund included in the draft 2020 budget could be used to cover these additional costs if required.

7. FLOW COUNTRY RIVERS TRUST / SCIENTIFIC UPDATE

- 7.1 **Scientific Sub Group:** A Youngson advised that the Scientific Sub-Group had met in early June 2019 to discuss the NEPS programme prior to its commencement which had proved very useful. The purpose of the sub-group moving forward is to get the best information for the Board from all the work being carried out locally. It was agreed to arrange a further sub group meeting in a couple of months time.

- 7.2 **NEPS 2019 Programme:** A Youngson reported that the NEPS programme is an attempt to produce a regional baseline on juvenile density, whilst the Flow Country Rivers Trust is trying to use this regional data and extract the useful information at a local level.

It was confirmed that the 2019 NEPS electrofishing had been completed for the rivers Naver, Halladale and Strathy whilst the Borgie sites should be completed by the end of September 2019.

The 2018 NEPS published report indicated that the Northern rivers fared very well with their juvenile densities much higher than other Scottish rivers. A Youngson reported that since 2000 we have seen an increase in the number of fish in the North; this is adversely true of rivers in the South but it is the message of the rivers further South that is being heard.

W Grant reported that there was an issue with the siting of some of the survey sites which resulted in a lot of time spent trying to access them and change the sites as required. A Youngson suggested that the Scientific sub-group draft a constructive letter to Marine Scotland about the challenges faced in the North reaching some of the sampling sites. This, along with any response, can be feedback to the wider Board.

7.3 **Flow Country Rivers Trust:** A Youngson reported that the FCRT had produced a water conductivity/calcium concentration map of the Caithness rivers and suggested that this map could be extended Westwards to include the Northern Board rivers. Reuben Sweeting, ghillie on the Halladale, has recently been appointed to the FCRT and he has been asked to lead on this piece of work.

The training for the SMART Rivers Project is due to start in Spring 2020 with room for 10 volunteers on the training programme. The initial study will look at the Halladale invertebrates with R Sweeting organising this.

7.4 **Environmental Research Institute:** A Youngson confirmed that the ERI studentship has started. The aim of the studentship is to tie together the fish, invertebrate and environmental data in the context of peatland restoration. DSFBs and the Trust may input to this studentship as required.

7.5 **National Temperature Monitoring Programme:** A Youngson reported that there are 12 temperature loggers in the River Thurso which record water temperature every 15 minutes and are downloaded by A Youngson twice a year. Eight rivers in total are involved in this national monitoring programme. Marine Scotland model the data and use it to predict water temperatures in all rivers. The modelling indicates that rivers in the Northern Board area are the most susceptible to the effects of climate change.

The results predicting warmer temperatures in other rivers have already led to projects to help offset this such as planting trees in some areas and A Youngson suggested that this may be something that the Board may wish to be involved in. He further suggested that the Board may be able to become involved in installing temperature loggers in one of the rivers in the North to test the modelling predictions. It was thought that 10-12 loggers would be required for a river such as the Naver at a cost of £200 per logger, however this may be funded by Marine Scotland as part of the programme. It was agreed that the Board should write to Marine Scotland and suggest that the programme be extended to one of the Northern Board rivers.

8. FISHERIES MANAGEMENT SCOTLAND

8.1 **National Electro-fishing Programme for Scotland:** Discussed in agenda item above.

8.2 **Regional FMS Meeting:** It was reported that the recent Regional FMS Meeting held at Kildonan Hall was well attended and very useful. The disease experienced on some rivers this season was discussed although it was felt that there was very little useful information coming out of the Fish Health Inspectorate's analysis of fish sampled. There was little information on whether the disease is likely to resurface or whether there were any measures rivers could take to minimise future impact. Mr Lopes asked whether it was possible for the Board to comment on planning applications relating to nearby fish farms. The Clerk confirmed that she had contacted the Clerk to the North West Board who is happy to forward on any future planning applications for the Board to consider. A Youngson advised that applications for fish farms in Orkney should also be considered and the Clerk advised that FMS are in discussion with the Orkney Council to act as consultees for planning applications as there is no DSFB established in Orkney. Mr Lopes asked if the Board had been involved in the Pearls in Peril project which was undertaken on the River Naver. It was confirmed that this had been initiated through the River Naver Fisheries however the Board were happy to assist with any issues as required.

9. **PLANNING CONSULTATIONS/APPLICATIONS UPDATE**

The Clerk referred to the planning consultations/applications detailed in the annual report. The Clerk has also received recent communication regarding the proposed space port at Tongue and the potential impact of this on the strathmelness burn which is within the Northern Board area. A Youngson will review the EIA for this proposal as required.

10. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

10.1 **Armadale Tagging Project:** Mr Mackay informed the Board that he is now in arbitration with the Scottish Government in relation to payment for the tagging project in 2017. The hearing stage has been pushed back due to sickness absence however his solicitor is confident that he has a strong case.

11. **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The dates for meetings to be held in 2020 were confirmed as follows:

Tuesday 5th May 2020 at 2.00pm : Annual Public Meeting and Northern DSFB Meeting.

Tuesday 22nd September 2020 at 2.00pm: Annual Meeting of Qualified Proprietors and Northern DSFB Meeting.

Both meetings will take place at the Bettyhill Hotel.

LIST OF ACTIONS ARISING FROM MEETING

Arrange payment of sea patrols and bailiff support to relevant parties	Clerk
Write to Mr D Hodge with proposal for 2020 season sea patrols	Clerk
Organise the first tranche payment of National Electrofishing Programme funding to relevant parties	Clerk
Arrange meeting of Scientific Sub-Group in November 2019	A Youngson/Clerk
Write to Marine Scotland regarding the challenges faced with some of the NEPS sampling sites	Clerk/A Youngson
Write to Marine Scotland regarding possible involvement in the National Temperature Monitoring Programme	Clerk/A Youngson
Confirm Venue for Next Meeting Date	Clerk

ATM/NDSFB
September 2019