

NORTHERN DISTRICT SALMON FISHERY BOARD

ANNUAL REPORT – 2020

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the report is to summarise the work undertaken by the Northern District Salmon Fishery Board (NDSFB) during 2019/2020 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 2019/20

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:

24th September 2019: Annual Meeting of Qualified Proprietors

24th September 2019: Northern District Salmon Fishery Board Meeting

The Annual Public Meeting and Northern DSFB Board Meeting scheduled to take place on 5th May 2020 were postponed due to the Covid-19 pandemic. A briefing paper was circulated to Board members in lieu of these meetings and this paper is available on the NDSFB website.

Dates of Forthcoming Meetings:

22nd September 2020: Annual Meeting of Qualified Proprietors

22nd September 2020: Northern District Salmon Fishery Board

Both meetings will be held via video conferencing due to continuing Covid-19 restrictions. Whilst the meetings will not therefore allow for members of the public to attend, minutes of the meetings will be made available on the NDSFB website.

Annual Report and Accounts

The draft accounts for Year Ending 31st December 2019 will be considered by the Board at the Annual Meeting of Qualified Proprietors on 22nd September 2020, along with the draft Annual Report. Once approved these documents will be posted on the NDSFB website and copies 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 2020 season by the Northern DSFB Bailiffs, once restrictions were eased slightly. These patrols have been carried out on D Hodge's vessel, the Guiding Star, with NDSFB Bailiffs on board.

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:

Ongoing Applications/Constructions:

Strathy Wood: The Highland Council did not support the application of a 13 turbine wind farm at Strathy Wood at a meeting in June 2020. An objection will now be lodged with the Scottish Government regarding this decision.

Drumhollistan Wind farm 2: A further application for the construction of 7 wind turbines with a maximum blade height of 125m was submitted to The Highland Council in February 2020. The original application to construct 17 wind turbines at Drumhollistan was rejected in June 2019.

Akron Wind farm: A scoping application to construct 14 wind turbines at Ackron which may impact on the Halladale catchment was submitted in April 2019. The developers are currently in the process of collating ecology and fish habitat survey data to inform the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA).

Armadale Wind farm: A scoping application for the erection of up to 23 turbines with a maximum height of 180m and a total generating capacity of >50MW was submitted in November 2019. Electrofishing of the Armadale burn is being undertaken by contractors to ascertain the presence or otherwise of salmonids.

Strathy South Wind farm: A variation to the consented application to construct and erect 39 wind turbines was submitted on 1st September 2020. This variation proposes to amend the tip height from 135m to a maximum height of 200m. The Board have responded stating that this variation does not affect the Board's interests beyond those noted in relation to the original application.

HABITAT ISSUES

Red Skin Disease (RSD) has again been present among adult fish in some rivers of the Northern Board region. The scale of the secondary problems following on from the primary disease are highly variable among rivers and over time.

There have been no sightings to date this season in the Northern Board area of Pacific pink salmon, however Bailiffs and Ghillies continue to remain vigilant to this.

FLOW COUNTRY RIVERS TRUST/SCIENTIFIC ADVICE

The Flow Country Rivers Trust continues to promote research and education in the conservation of freshwater fish within the Flow Country. The Board is kept informed of the Trust's progress through annual reports, newsletters and regular verbal updates at NDSFB Board Meetings.

We continue to be indebted to Alan Youngson for his help and advice to Board members in relation to scientific matters. Alan is in the process of producing a local summary report of the outcomes of the 2019 National Electrofishing Programme for Scotland (NEPS) results.

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.

The National Electrofishing Programme for Scotland (NEPS) was not undertaken this year due to Covid-19 restrictions. It is hoped however that this programme will resume in 2021.

SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT/MARINE SCOTLAND MATTERS

Both the Halladale and the River Naver have installed temperature loggers throughout their catchment areas to monitor the water temperature as part of Marine Scotland's National Temperature Monitoring Network for Scotland.

One of the aims of the project is to check the accuracy of temperature values extrapolated to rivers like Halladale and Naver using data from rivers elsewhere that are covered by MSS' established National Temperature Monitoring Network for Scotland. The first lot of data will be downloaded from the loggers towards the end of 2020.

LOOK AHEAD TO 2020/21

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.

Chairman
Northern District Salmon Fishery Board
