

**MINUTES of the MEETING of the NORTHERN DISTRICT SALMON FISHERY BOARD held on
WEDNESDAY 5th MAY at 2.00PM via VIDEOCONFERENCING**

Present: Mr Toby Ward (Chairman)
Lord Iliffe (Naver)
Mr S Green (Naver)
Mr P Gray (Naver)
Mr D Buchan (Naver)
Mrs L Lyle (Naver)
Mr D Hurst-Brown (Halladale)
Mr T MacDonell (Kinloch)
Mr A Nicholson (Mallart)
Mr V Hackel (Strathy)
Mr James Gray (Naver)
Mrs Marie Philpot (Naver)

In Attendance: Mr A Youngson (Scientific Advisor)
Mrs A MacAuslan (Clerk)

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Mr J Stewart and Mr A Muat.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

3. MINUTES OF LAST MEETING

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 22nd September 2020 were approved as an accurate record.

4. MATTERS ARISING

4.1 *Election of Board Members:* Following previous correspondence by current Board members the following two candidates were formally appointed as Upper Proprietor Board members:

Mr Peter Gray (River Naver)

Mr Thomas MacDonell (River Kinloch)

The Chairman welcomed these two new members to the Board and the Clerk undertook to email out declarations of interest forms to these newly appointed members. The Clerk will also update the NDSFB website.

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

5. NORTH COAST PATROLS & ENFORCEMENT

5.1 *Boat Patrols 2021:* The Clerk reported that D Hodge has confirmed he will carry out boat patrols on the Guiding Star at 2020 prices. A total of 10 patrols have been

budgeted for 2021. The first sea patrol was carried out on 23rd April with W Grant on board as Bailiff. The Clerk has requested that patrols are staggered on different days and at different times of the day to cover as many scenarios as possible. The Chairman requested that future patrols also include patrolling East of Portskerra as far as Sandside bay to ensure the full coastline of the NDSFB region is covered.

- 5.2 **Bailiff Warrant Card Holders:** The briefing paper notes the current warrant card holders within the NDSFB region. It was agreed that W Grant should retain his warrant card for use on sea patrols, however it was agreed that there was no further requirement for R Wright to continue to hold his warrant card. The Clerk undertook to contact R Wright and ask for its return.

T MacDonell reported that Ian Smart would be willing to sit his IFM Bailiff exams if required. He also reported that Wildland has a boat available for additional sea patrols if required. The vessel will be back in the water by the end of the month.

6. FINANCIAL REPORT

- 6.1 **2020 Year End Statement of Income & Expenditure:** The Clerk referred to the summary in the briefing paper regarding the 2020 Year-end figures. There were no comments regarding this.
- 6.2 **Draft Budget for Year ending 31st December 2021:** The Clerk referred to the draft 2021 budget circulated prior to the meeting. The Clerk confirmed that she had recently received the invoice for the SFCC subscription which has been reduced by 50% for 2021 and she will therefore update the budget accordingly. There were no other comments regarding the 2021 budget.
- 6.3 **Assessment Income Rate for 2021:** The briefing paper suggested an assessment poundage of 20p per £RV. After discussion, it was agreed to reduce this rate to 19p per £RV. The Clerk undertook to amend the budget and issue assessment invoices.

7. FLOW COUNTRY RIVERS TRUST/SCIENTIFIC UPDATE

A Youngson updated the meeting with items relating to both the FCRT and scientific matters. The FCRT website has been revamped however the videos of rivers are to be updated as they were taken in 2018 when water levels were very low.

Training for the SMART rivers project will take place on 06.05.21 with a further session planned for Autumn 2021. 12 volunteers have signed up for the training from both the Northern and Caithness DSFB areas.

A Youngson has reviewed the established electrofishing programmes for the Naver and Halladale. These rivers, along with the Borgie, should now have more streamlined programmes which will be more cost effective and will monitor the rivers' interests more closely. It is likely that Rivers and Boards will need this quantitative data in the future if appealing river gradings etc. A Youngson advised that he is happy to work with any other rivers in the NDSFB region to discuss similar electrofishing programmes.

The temperature loggers which are installed on both the Naver and Halladale rivers seem to have survived the winter conditions and have been downloaded ready to continue to receive data.

A Youngson has updated the Salmon Pressures Map on behalf of the NDSFB. He advised that the NDSFB is not significantly affected by any of the pressures identified.

T MacDonell reported that Wildland has adopted a 200 year vision for regeneration of the land under their ownership and that they are looking to undertake a long term survey of the River Kinloch. This would include monitoring the productivity of the river through electrofishing surveys. The Board were in favour of this work and it was agreed that T MacDonell and A Youngson should discuss further out with the meeting.

T MacDonell also asked about changing the closed season of fishings on the Kyle of Tongue as the Bailiffs are finding that many people are fishing late on in September and early October. A Youngson advised that rivers have a dispensation to extend the season from the national closed season of 24th August. The Clerk undertook to circulate the relevant sections of the 2003 Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries (Consolidation) (Scotland) Act to T MacDonell.

8. FISHERIES MANAGEMENT SCOTLAND

8.1 ***National Electrofishing Programme for Scotland (NEPS):*** The Clerk advised that there has been no decision as yet regarding the NEPS programme for 2021. The briefing paper contains a proposal of how the NEPS programme will operate this year should it go ahead. D Buchan asked for a breakdown of how the funding will be distributed amongst the items identified. The Clerk undertook to produce this as and when details of the funding are confirmed. The Board approved the proposal for undertaking NEPS, subject to agreement of the funding breakdown once available.

8.2 ***Seal Licensing:*** A Youngson advised that the seal license policy has been updated and it is likely that only Grade 3 rivers or those with an effective catch & release policy will be considered for a new license.

9. PLANNING CONSULTATIONS/APPLICATIONS UPDATE

The Clerk referred to the planning consultations/applications detailed in the briefing paper. There was discussion surrounding the number of on-shore wind turbine applications which have been submitted recently throughout the area; the local media are referring to these existing and potential turbines as a 'ring of steel'.

10. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

10.1 ***Electro-fishing Applications:*** The Clerk advised that she has received applications from the Rivers Naver, Borgie and Halladale to undertake electro-fishing surveys over the summer. These applications were approved by the Board subject to consulting with SNH where applicable. T MacDonell asked whether an application from the River Kinloch could also be considered. The Board approved this request.

- 10.2 **Introduction of Broodstock:** The Clerk advised that she had received an application from the River Borgie to catch small numbers of salmon broodstock for their hatchery. D Buchan asked what the rationale was for this application and the Clerk advised that it was a precautionary application should the need arise to re-stock some tributaries of the Borgie due to ongoing forestry work. Consent was duly given by the Board to this application, subject to consulting with SNH where applicable in respect of the application impacting upon an SAC.
- 10.3 **Flow Country Unesco World Heritage Site Bid:** The Clerk advised that she had recently had a discussion with a project officer involved in the bid to gain Unesco World Heritage Site status for the Flow Country. The Clerk has agreed to act as the contact person for circulating any further information on this to Board members. T MacDonell advised that he is on the Executive Committee of the bid. There was discussion as to whether this bid would have any direct impact on the Proprietors' interests. T MacDonell advised that WHS status is an accolade not a designation therefore it should not have much of an impact, and any potential impact was thought to be beneficial.
- 10.4 **Fish Counters:** The Clerk advised that MS has been in contact recently to discuss the possibility of fish counters being installed in one or more rivers in the Far North. It was reported that the nearest fish counter was on the Helmsdale and A Youngson advised that assurances on how the data was going to be used should be sought before any rivers agreed to the installation of one.
- 10.5 **Participation in Meetings:** The Chairman proposed that both Reuben Sweeting and Andrew Coyne should be invited to attend future Board meetings, and this was approved by members of the meeting.
- 10.6 **Building Fire Resilience in the Flow Country Peatlands:** The Chairman advised that a report has recently been published around dealing with future wildfires, based on experiences of the large wildfire at Strathy in 2019. The Clerk undertook to circulate the report for information.
11. **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**
The Annual Meeting of Qualified Proprietors and Northern DSFB Meeting will take place on **Wednesday 22nd September 2021** at **2.00pm**. It is hoped that the Board will be able to meet in person in the Bettyhill Hotel. The Clerk advised that the delayed Annual Public Meeting may also be held on this date and that the triennial elections will also be held.

LIST OF ACTIONS ARISING FROM MEETING ON 05.05.21

Send Declarations of Interest Forms to new Board Members	Clerk
Update NDSFB Website with New Board Members	Clerk
Contact D Hodge to request that future sea patrols include East of Portskerra	Clerk
Contact R Wright re Bailiff Warrant Card	Clerk
Update 2021 Budget	Clerk
Issue 2021 Assessment Invoices	Clerk
Discuss the Survey Plans for the River Kinloch	T MacDonell / A Youngson
Forward relevant section of Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries (Consolidation) (Scotland) Act 2003	Clerk
Prepare and circulate Breakdown of NEPS Funding Proposal	Clerk
Invite R Sweeting and A Coyne to attend Future Meetings	Clerk
Circulate Building Fire Resilience Report	Clerk
Confirm Venue for Next Meeting Date	Clerk

ATM/NDSFB
May 2021