

NORTHERN DISTRICT SALMON FISHERY BOARD

ANNUAL REPORT – 2021

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the report is to summarise the work undertaken by the Northern District Salmon Fishery Board (NDSFB) during 2020/2021 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 2020/21

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. There have been three changes in Board membership within the last year

Meetings

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

22nd September 2020: Annual Meeting of Qualified Proprietors and Board Meeting

5th May 2021: Northern District Salmon Fishery Board Meeting

The Annual Public Meeting scheduled to take place on 5th May 2021 was postponed due to Covid-19 restrictions. Minutes of the Board meeting are however available on the NDSFB website.

Dates of Forthcoming Meetings:

22nd September 2021: Annual Meeting of Qualified Proprietors

22nd September 2021: Northern District Salmon Fishery Board

Both meetings will be held with some attendees in person whilst others will attend via video conferencing. Minutes of the meetings will be made available on the NDFSFB website.

Annual Report and Accounts

The draft accounts for Year Ending 31st December 2020 will be considered by the Board at the Annual Meeting of Qualified Proprietors on 22nd September 2021, 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 2021 season by the Northern DSFB Bailiffs. 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:

Ackron Wind Farm: The full planning application for this 12 wind turbine wind farm was submitted to The Highland Council in December 2020. Alan Youngson has reviewed the application and we have advised the planning department that whilst the Board has no comment to make at present, it looks forward to reviewing the results of the habitat surveys.

Bettyhill Wind Farm Extension: A scoping application for a further 11 wind turbines at Bettyhill was submitted to The Highland Council in March 2021. Alan Youngson has reviewed the scoping application and has advised that the application does not impact on the Board's statutory remit.

Kirkton Wind Farm: A scoping application for a 12 turbine wind farm at Kirkton, Melvich was submitted in April 2021. Alan Youngson has reviewed the scoping application and has advised that the application may impact on 2 tributary streams to the River Halladale. The Board has duly commented on the 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 some sightings in the Northern Board area of Pacific pink salmon, as has been the case throughout Scotland. Bailiffs and Ghillies continue to monitor their presence.

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 has been involved, amongst others, with the following projects supported by the FCRT.

Salmon Pressure Mapping: The Trust revised the Salmon Pressures Map for the Northern District on behalf of the Board. The map shows the distributions of potential limitations on salmon populations for all of the Scotland due to factors such as disease, predation and habitat degradation. The Northern Board area is not significantly affected by any of the various pressures considered.

Water Temperature Monitoring: Water temperature loggers were installed in the Rivers Naver and Halladale catchments in 2020. These have now completed a year of data capture and the data sent to Marine Scotland for analysis.

SmartRivers Project: The formal spring benchmark sampling by the Salmon and Trout Conservation UK took place on the Halladale in May 2021 with a group of volunteers involved at one of the sites to observe and have a small question & answer session.

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. 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 catchments of the Rivers Naver, Borgie and Halladale for the purpose of juvenile salmon stock assessment.

The National Electrofishing Programme for Scotland (NEPS) is in the process of being undertaken and it is planned to have all 30 sites surveyed by the end of September 2021. The Board wishes to record its thanks to Morven Mackenzie who has co-ordinated the NEPS Programme this year on behalf of the Board.

LOOK AHEAD TO 2021/22

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
