

**MINUTES of the MEETING of the NORTHERN DISTRICT SALMON FISHERY BOARD held on
WEDNESDAY 27th SEPTEMBER 2023 at 2.00PM**

At THE BETTYHILL HOTEL

Present: The Rt. Hon. Lord Iliffe (Naver & Chair for Meeting)
Mr S Green (Naver)
Mr P Gray (Naver)
Mr D Buchan (Naver)
Mr R Sweeting (Halladale)
Mr T MacDonnell (Kinloch)
Mrs L Lyle (Naver) (via videoconferencing)
Mr V Hackel (Strathy) (via videoconferencing)

In Attendance: The Hon Mrs S Lopes (Naver)
Mr A Youngson (Scientific Advisor)
Mr A Muat (Bettyhill Angling Club)
Mr A Coyne (Naver)
Mrs A MacAuslan (Clerk)

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Mr M T Ward, Mr A Stone, Mr J Stewart, and Mr A Nicholson.

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 3rd May 2023 were approved as an accurate record.

4. MATTERS ARISING

- 4.1 ***Outstanding Assessments:*** The outstanding Loch Choire assessment invoices for 2021, 2022 and 2023 were discussed. R Sweeting had contacted J King, the Keeper at Loch Choire, however no payment is forthcoming and it was therefore confirmed that the Clerk would contact R Younger of Fish Legal to gain advice on the procedure for initiating a small claims court proceeding, and would progress with this.

5. NORTH COAST PATROLS & ENFORCEMENT

- 5.1 ***Sea Patrols 2023 Season:*** The Clerk advised that 8 sea patrols had been carried out in the season, all being conducted by D Hodge and W Grant. Whilst the cost per patrol had increased quite significantly, the total cost was still within budget due to the reduced number of patrols.

- 5.2 **Arrangements for 2024:** The Clerk reported that she had spoken with Mr M T Ward prior to the meeting who has proposed that D Hodge be asked to undertake the sea patrols again in 2024 with W Grant as the second crew member. Mr M T Ward proposed that 8 patrols are undertaken in 2024 at 2023 prices; furthermore, it was proposed that both P Byrne and B Byrne of the Halladale undertake the necessary qualifications to accompany D Hodge on a couple of patrols next year. This proposal was agreed by the Board and it was agreed that the Clerk would contact D Hodge to discuss and try and confirm arrangements before the winter. The Clerk would also liaise with P & B Byrne to arrange the necessary training.

6. FINANCE

- 6.1 **2023 Year to Date Income & Expenditure:** The Clerk referred to the year-to-date income and expenditure spreadsheet circulated with the agenda. The SFCC subscription costs were reduced as the cost of the SFCC subscription taken out by the FCRT would now be shared with the Caithness DSFB. The Clerk confirmed that the NEPS funding for 2023 was not included in the I&E and was shown separately.
- 6.2 **Draft Budget for Year ending 31st December 2024:** The Clerk referred to the draft 2024 budget circulated prior to the meeting. The Clerk confirmed that the draft budget would require amendment to reflect the 2024 sea patrol arrangements as above; the cost of the FMS subscription would also need amending as it is proposed that FMS subscription costs rise by 5% in 2024. The Clerk has proposed an assessment poundage of 21p per £RV, compared with 20p in 2023. This will be finalised at the May 2024 meeting and will be dependent, amongst other things, on whether the assessments from Loch Choire can be recovered.

7. SCIENTIFIC UPDATE/ FLOW COUNTRY RIVERS TRUST

A Youngson provided a summary update of items he has been involved in over the past few months.

The electrofishing programmes on the Halladale, Naver and Borgie now have 3 years of data which should be sufficient to pull together analysis and a useful report. A Youngson to link in with R Sweeting and A Coyne over the winter to discuss further. The FCRT undertook electrofishing on the Kinloch again this year so there is now 2 years' worth of data available for this river.

It was noted that the go ahead to undertake NEPS this year was only confirmed at very short notice which caused difficulties in timings and co-ordination. A Coyne suggested that the NEPS team circulate the potential sites to all areas in January each year so that Boards could look at these sites in the quieter months and would be prepared if NEPs did get the go ahead later in the year. If NEPs did not run, there would not have been too much time and effort wasted. The Clerk undertook to put this proposal to FMS/Marine Directorate.

The Clerk advised that the first tranche of NEPS funding had been received with the second and final tranche expected late December/January. She proposed that any left over NEPS funding is shared between the Halladale and the Naver in recognition of the huge amount of preparatory work undertaken by R Sweeting and A Coyne in advance of sampling the sites. This was agreed and The Clerk undertook to refine the

NEPS funding budget. The Clerk also asked whether A Youngson would be willing and able to produce a summary report of the NEPS analysis for the Northern Board once the full report was published. This was agreed in principle and The Clerk undertook to allocate funding within the NEPS budget to reflect this. In addition, it was proposed that R Sweeting and A Coyne could look at the DPU site data and produce a report from this.

T MacDonnell noted that monitoring of fish through electrofishing was only one method of identifying any issues in relation to fish stocks and that we may need to look at other methods to be used in conjunction, for example fish counters. It was agreed that T MacDonnell and A Youngson would discuss further out with the meeting.

T McDonnell also proposed that with salmon stocks declining perhaps as a Board we should be increasing our focus on brown trout fisheries as businesses. It was noted that this was already happening in some places and that the current role of the Board was to focus on salmon.

There was a discussion about whether the Board should be focusing on the wider watershed/catchment scale. To this extent it was proposed that representatives from SEPA and Nature Scot be invited to attend future Board meetings and it was agreed that the Clerk would extend an invitation to these agencies.

D Buchan enquired of A Youngson if he had received any response regarding the water abstraction from the Vagastie. A Youngson confirmed that he hadn't.

8. FISHERIES MANAGEMENT SCOTLAND

A MacAuslan advised that SEPA had taken water samples from two sites in the Naver recently to test for eDNA of Pink Salmon; the results are expected soon.

The Northern DSFB had agreed to help fund a 3-year PhD research student to study saprolegnia and red skin disease. This research has started and will continue for the next 3 years.

FMS have confirmed that funding will be available to undertake Phase 2 of the Fisheries Management Plans. Once further information is available around this the Clerk will liaise with A Youngson and E Constable of the FCRT to take this forward.

The Clerk had previously circulated an email from FMS regarding acoustic deterrent devices (ADDs) to deter seals. There had been initial interest to consider placing one in the Halladale and one in the Naver. Further information on the types of ADDs which were being proposed however meant that they would unlikely be suitable for the Northern DSFB rivers, and the Clerk did not progress this any further.

The Clerk has submitted information on the current electrofishing equipment owned by the various rivers in the Northern DSFB. There is potential funding to purchase additional EF equipment which could sit centrally within the Board and used where required. The Clerk will update the Board when there is any further information on this.

9. **PLANNING CONSULTATIONS/APPLICATIONS UPDATE**

The Clerk advised that the planning applications which the Board have been active with since the previous Board meeting were as follows:

West of Orkney Windfarm: The EIA has been submitted by the Developers and there is currently no further update on this.

Pentland Offshore Floating Windfarm: The Scottish Government granted consent in June 2023 for 7 floating turbines to be located off the coast of Dounreay.

Melvich Wind Energy Hub: The consultation period for The Highland Council to respond to this application has been extended to 01.11.23. The NDSFB submitted a response in April 2023.

Forsinain Forest Wind Farm: A scoping report was received by The Clerk regarding this application for 17 turbines on 26th September 2023. This has been passed to A Youngson to advise on whether the Board need to make representation.

10. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

- 10.1 **Seal Counts:** A Nicholson had presented his apologies but had asked whether it was possible to record the number of seal sightings in Northern rivers and report this regularly at Board meetings. The Halladale and the Naver rivers both confirmed that they record this information and would be happy to share this with the Board.

11. **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The 2024 Board meeting dates were confirmed as Wednesday 8th May 2024 at 2.00pm and Wednesday 25th September 2024 at 2.00pm. Both meetings will be held at the Bettyhill Hotel and the Clerk confirmed that the meeting on 8th May 2024 will include both the Annual Meeting of Qualified Proprietors and the Annual Public Meeting. The triennial elections will also be held on this date.

LIST OF ACTIONS ARISING FROM MEETING ON 27.09.23

1.	Contact Fish Legal and progress with small claims court	Clerk
2.	Contact D Hodge with 2024 sea patrol proposal	Clerk
3.	Arrange sea survival training and ENG1 medicals for P & B Byrne	Clerk
4.	Amend 2024 draft budget	Clerk
5.	Propose amendments to NEPS scheduling with FMS/MD	Clerk
6.	Refine the 2023 NEPS funding budget	Clerk
7.	Further discuss the possibility of installing a fish counter on the Kinloch	T MacDonnell/ A Youngson
8.	Invite SEPA & Nature Scot representatives to future meetings	Clerk
9.	Report seal sightings at future Board Meetings	R Sweeting/A Coyne
10.	Confirm venue for 2024 meetings	Clerk

ATM/NDSFB
Sept 2023