

NORTHERN DISTRICT SALMON FISHERY BOARD

ANNUAL REPORT – 2023

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the report is to summarise the work undertaken by the Northern District Salmon Fishery Board (NDSFB) during 2023 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 2023

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. The Board is due to hold its triennial elections on 8th May 2024 and a list of current Board members (Upper & Lower Proprietors) is published on the NDSFB website.

Meetings

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

3rd May 2023: Annual Meeting of Qualified Proprietors, Annual Public Meeting and Northern DSFB Board Meeting

27th September 2023: Northern District Salmon Fishery Board Meeting

Dates of Forthcoming Meetings:

8th May 2024: Annual Meeting of Qualified Proprietors, Annual Public Meeting and Northern DSFB Board Meeting

25th September 2024: Northern District Salmon Fishery Board Meeting

Both meetings will be held at the Bettyhill Hotel and minutes of the meetings will be made available on the NDSFB website.

Annual Report and Accounts

The draft accounts for Year Ending 31st December 2023 will be considered by the Board at the Annual Meeting of Qualified Proprietors on 8th May 2024, 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 2023 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:

Pentland Floating Offshore Wind Farm: The Scottish Government granted consent in July 2023 for the construction and operation of the floating wind farm approximately 7.5km from the coast of Dounreay.

West of Orkney Wind Farm: A Youngson and the Clerk continue to be involved in discussions with the developers regarding this proposed offshore wind farm. The developers have applied for consent for Marine Licences in September 2023.

Forsinain Forest Wind Farm: A scoping opinion was submitted in December 2023 for the construction and operation of 17 turbines with a total generating capacity in excess of 50MW. The Board responded to the scoping opinion with concerns raised about the visual impact of moving turbine blades and their potential effect on fish receptors.

Melvich Energy Hub: The Board submitted a response to the planning application for this hub in April 2023. After consultation with A Youngson, the Board advised that there was no direct interest in relation to the Board's statutory responsibilities.

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.

Water temperature monitors continue to be deployed and downloaded throughout the Naver and Halladale catchment areas.

Pacific Pink Salmon were expected to be evident in Scottish rivers throughout 2023. Sightings of this species was far lower than previous years however eDNA sampling undertaken in the River Naver did find evidence of pink salmon in the main stem of the river.

The Northern DSFB worked in conjunction with the Flow Country Rivers Trust to produce Phase 1 of our Fisheries Management Plan (FMP). Work is now ongoing to complete Phase 2 of this plan and the final version will soon be accessible to view publicly.

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.

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, Kinloch and Halladale for the purpose of juvenile salmon stock assessment.

The National Electrofishing Programme for Scotland (NEPS) took place again year with 30 sites across the Board region sampled. The Board would like to record its thanks to all those involved in this project. In addition, the Rivers Borgie, Naver, Kinloch & Halladale undertook their own electrofishing surveys throughout the summer as part of their established programmes.

LOOK AHEAD TO 2024

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
