

**MINUTES of the MEETING of the NORTHERN DISTRICT SALMON FISHERY BOARD held on  
WEDNESDAY 8<sup>th</sup> MAY 2024 at 2.15PM**

**At THE BETTYHILL HOTEL**

**Present:** Mr M T Ward (Halladale & Chair of Meeting)  
The Rt. Hon Lord Iliffe (Naver)  
Mr A Nicholson (Mallart)  
Mr S Green (Naver)  
Mr P Gray (Naver)  
Mr D Buchan (Naver)  
Mr J Stewart (Borgie)  
Mrs L Lyle (Naver) (via videoconferencing)  
Mr V Hackel (Strathy) (via videoconferencing)

**In Attendance:** The Hon Mrs S Lopes (Naver)  
Mrs A Nicholson (Mallart)  
Miss L Richardson (Kinloch)  
Mr A Muat (Bettyhill Angling Club)  
Mr A Youngson (Scientific Advisor)  
Mrs A MacAuslan (Clerk)  
Mr A Coyne (Naver)

**1. APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from Mr R Sweeting and Mr A Stone.

**2. CO-OPTION OF REPRESENTATIVES OF SALMON ANGLERS & TENANT NETSMEN**

The Clerk reported that she had received no nominations for co-opted members and confirmed that there would continue to be no co-opted members on the Board at this stage.

**3. ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN**

The Clerk confirmed that she had received notification from Mr M T Ward of his intention to stand down as Chair of the Board after 9 years. Lord Iliffe proposed The Hon Mrs Sarah Lopes as the new Chair of the Board and this was unanimously approved. The Clerk therefore confirmed The Hon Mrs S Lopes as Chair of the Board until May 2027. All Board members noted their thanks to Mr M T Ward for his tenure as Chair and wished the new incumbent well in her new role.

**4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No adjustments were required to the existing members' declarations of interest. The Clerk undertook to issue declarations of interest forms to the two new members of the Board for completion.

**5. MINUTES OF LAST MEETING**

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 27<sup>th</sup> September 2023 were approved as an accurate record.

## 6. MATTERS ARISING

6.1 **Outstanding Assessments:** The Clerk confirmed that the outstanding assessments from Loch Choire had been settled in full and it was hoped that future assessments would be paid in a timely manner.

6.2 **SEPA & Nature Scot Representation:** The Clerk confirmed that she had contacted both Nature Scot and SEPA inviting them to attend future Board meetings. Emma Summers of SEPA responded saying that she was not able to attend this meeting but would be interested in being involved in any aspects involving SEPA. The Clerk had received no response to the email sent to the generic North Nature Scot email. Lana Richardson suggested contacting Billy Lobhan and undertook to share his contact details.

## 7. NORTH COAST PATROLS & ENFORCEMENT

The Clerk advised that she had spoken with David Hodge who is happy to undertake the sea patrols again this year, on the same basis as last season. Paul Byrne and Brian Byrne, bailiffs on the Halladale, have both completed their sea survival course and ENG1 medical and will therefore accompany D Hodge on a few of the sea patrols this season. The Clerk advised that the majority of the patrols will be focused around periods of low water when the fish may be backed up at sea, and during the Glasgow Trades fortnight.

The Clerk also advised that both the Halladale and the Naver are undertaking drone patrols of the cliffs/coastal area to reinforce the sea patrols. L Richardson is unsure when the Kinloch boat will be back in the water as it is undergoing some repairs. She advised however that H Montgomery has all the necessary qualifications should a second crew member be required.

## 8. FINANCE

8.1 **2023 Year End Statement of Income & Expenditure:** The Clerk referred to the year-end income and expenditure spreadsheet circulated with the agenda. The funding received for NEPS and the Fisheries Management Plans (FMPs) is noted separately. There is still some NEPS funding left in the account once all the expenditure has been paid, and this will be paid to A Youngson/FCRT who has kindly agreed to provide a summary report of the full NEPS report once available.

8.2 **Draft Budget for Year ending 31<sup>st</sup> December 2024:** The Clerk referred to the draft 2024 budget circulated prior to the meeting. The Clerk proposed an assessment rate of 21p per £RV for 2024 and this was approved by the Board. The Clerk undertook to issue the assessments with this confirmed value.

S Green asked if the rateable value for fisheries was included in the cumulative rateable value used to calculate the Small Business Bonus Scheme relief. It was thought that fisheries were excluded from this calculation.

## 9. SCIENTIFIC UPDATE/ FLOW COUNTRY RIVERS TRUST

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

**West of Orkney Windfarm:** A Youngson advised that the Board had submitted a response to the scoping opinion in 2022. The latest documentation scopes out salmon and deems there is not a risk to salmon from the development. It was agreed that the Northern Board would submit a response to this and A Youngson advised that individual Proprietors may wish to make representation in addition to the Board. The Clerk undertook to circulate the Board response and the link to the Energy Consents Unit website once available.

**Smolt Tracking:** A Youngson reported that results from the Moray Firth Tracking Project indicate that smolts from the Wick River track eastwards towards Fraserburgh/Peterhead rather than tracking north as assumed. The AST tracking project on the west coast indicates that Irish and West coast English salmon do head north. A Youngson is keen to get a team to come north and tag smolts from the far north rivers to see where these smolt track to. It was agreed that the Clerk would contact SCOTMER to request funding to allow for far north smolt tracking to take place in 2025.

S Lopes asked if it would be possible to get the satellite tags that have been used elsewhere however A Youngson reported that acoustic tags would be most suitable for the project. It was hoped that up to 100 smolts from a few Far North rivers could be tagged if of sufficient size

**Saprolegnia Project:** A Youngson advised that the Naver, Halladale and Kinloch are all undertaking sampling on a fortnightly basis as part of the 3 year Saprolegnia project being run by Aberdeen University. The Halladale is also taking monthly sampling to detect eDNA.

## 10. **FISHERIES MANAGEMENT SCOTLAND**

A Youngson advised that the Fisheries Management Plan (FMP) for the Northern Board has now been published.

The NEPS report for 2023 has been delayed but A Youngson will produce a summary report outlining the results of the Northern rivers, once available.

The Clerk advised that she had proposed that potential NEPS sites are issued early to allow for investigation re suitability and over-sampling to take place in the quieter winter months. This received support from the FMS Board and A Wells will take this forward with the NEPS team.

## 11. **PLANNING CONSULTATIONS/APPLICATIONS UPDATE**

The Clerk advised that the planning applications which the Board have been active with since the previous Board meeting were outlined in the annual report which was discussed at the earlier meetings.

The Clerk also advised that R Sweeting had queried whether DSFBs are consulted as part of Peatland Restoration work. It was not though that DSFBs were statutory consultees for this work but the Clerk undertook to find out further information.

## 12. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

- 12.1 **Electro-fishing Applications:** The Clerk advised that approval from the Board would be required for electro-fishing surveys to take place on all the Northern rivers this season, either as part of their own established electrofishing surveys, or as part of

windfarm construction. The Board approved all applications subject to consulting with Nature Scot where applicable.

- 12.2 **Introduction of Broodstock:** The Clerk advised that the Borgie would like to apply to catch small numbers of salmon broodstock for their hatchery as a precautionary measure should the need arise to re-stock some tributaries due to ongoing forestry work. Consent was given by the Board to this application, if required, subject to consulting with Nature Scot where applicable in respect of the application impacting upon an SAC.
- 12.3 **Seal Counts:** The Clerk reported R Sweeting's observations of seals on the Halladale since the start of the year as being 16 grey seals and 7 common seals. These are just those counted upstream of the Halladale bridge and it had been noted that a large proportion of fish caught this season were seal marked. The Naver reported 2 resident common seals seen on regular occasions and one grey seal sighted in early March. The common seals have come upstream of the Naver bridge sporadically. Both the Naver and the Kinloch stated that due to the shallow nature of their estuaries, the issue of seals in river was not of huge concern. The Clerk confirmed that FMS are encouraging all Boards and rivers to continue to apply for seal licenses however only one license has been granted in Scotland.
- 12.4 **World Heritage Site:** It was reported that a decision on the Flow Country World Heritage Site application was expected in late summer/Autumn.
13. **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**  
The next meeting of the Northern DSFB will take place on **Wednesday 25<sup>th</sup> September 2024** at the Bettyhill Hotel, commencing at **2.00pm**.

#### LIST OF ACTIONS ARISING FROM MEETING ON 08.05.24

1.	Issue Declaration of Interest Forms to new Board Members	Clerk
2.	Contact Billy Lobhan of Nature Scot	Clerk
3.	Issue 2024 Assessments	Clerk
4.	Submit Response to West of Orkney Windfarm scoping documents	Clerk/A Youngson/ Proprietors
5.	Contact SCOTMER re funding for smolt tracking in 2025	Clerk/A Youngson
6.	Find out re DSFB consultation to Peatland Restoration projects	Clerk
7.	Confirm venue for September 2024 meeting	Clerk

ATM/NDSFB  
May 2024