

**MINUTES of the MEETING of the NORTHERN DISTRICT SALMON FISHERY BOARD held on
WEDNESDAY 7th MAY 2025 at 2.15PM**

At THE BETTYHILL HOTEL

Present: The Hon Mrs S Lopes (Naver & 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 R Sweeting (Halladale)
Mrs L Lyle (Naver) (via videoconferencing)
Mr V Hackel (Strathy) (via videoconferencing)

In Attendance: Mrs A Nicholson (Mallart)
Mr A Muat (Bettyhill Angling Club)
Mr A Stock (Naver)
Mrs A MacAuslan (Clerk)

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Mr J Stewart, Mr A Stone and Ms L Richardson.

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 25th September 2024 were approved as an accurate record.

4. MATTERS ARISING

The Clerk advised that all matters arising from the previous meeting were either completed or covered in the agenda. The Clerk had contacted both B Lobban and A MacDonnell via email with an open invitation to attend future meetings, however had not yet received responses from either of them.

5. ENFORCEMENT

The Clerk reported that since the previous Board meeting in September 2024, D Hodge had advised that he will no longer undertake sea patrols on behalf of the Northern DSFB. It had been agreed, via email communication, that the focus would shift to using drone technology to cover the coastal areas.

The Clerk had also contacted North Coast Watersports who advertise that they have a 5m rib for hire with a skipper, based in Skerry, but can be transported on a trailer to another launch area. NCW have advised that they are looking to sell the rib to Wildland. It was agreed to discuss potential options for hiring this rib with L Richardson once she is back at work.

The Clerk also advised that it may be difficult finding a boat and skipper who would be able to cover the entire coastal stretch of the Northern DSFB, and that there may need to be consideration given to splitting up the coast, with different vessels used in different areas.

The Clerk agreed to update the Board on any more concrete options once she has had an opportunity to discuss with Wildland.

The Clerk advised that there are now a total of nine bailiffs within the Northern DSFB region with a valid warrant card, and these cover all rivers within the Northern DSFB catchment.

A discussion regarding the use of drones was had. Both the Halladale and the Naver have drones which are used to cover the coastal areas. It was thought that the Kinloch have now purchased a thermal drone and it was proposed that it may be worthwhile the Board securing a further thermal drone for use by the Halladale and the Naver drone operators. The Clerk undertook to follow up with FMS if there is likely to be an application to fund enforcement equipment in this coming year. It was also suggested that R Sweeting and A Stock liaise with L Richardson regarding trialling Wildland's thermal drone.

6. FINANCE

6.1 **2024 Year End Statement of Income & Expenditure:** The Clerk referred to the year-end income and expenditure spreadsheet circulated with the agenda. Expenditure was down against budget, predominantly due to a reduced number of sea patrols. Insurance premiums were higher than expected but this is not unique to the Board. The Clerk confirmed that the insurance for 2025 had been agreed and continued to provide cover for Bailiffs on sea patrols and for people working in or near water whilst undertaking electrofishing contracted by the Board.

6.2 **Draft Budget for Year ending 31st December 2025:** The Clerk referred to the draft 2025 budget circulated prior to the meeting. The Clerk had proposed an assessment rate of 17p per £RV for 2025 which would mean that the finances would break even by the end of the year. It was noted however that there was some uncertainty relating to the 2025 budget in relation to both enforcement and scientific consultancy fees since A Youngson had intimated his intention to step down from this role. It was therefore agreed to raise the assessment to 21p per £RV to provide a greater safety cushion if required. The Clerk undertook to issue the assessments with this confirmed value.

7. SCIENTIFIC UPDATE/ FLOW COUNTRY RIVERS TRUST

S Lopes confirmed that the FCRT were due to meet on 8th May 2025 after which an update on projects would be available.

The Clerk advised that an application to erect a floating windfarm off the North West coast of Scotland had been received by Havbredey Ltd. The Clerk summarised a response that A Youngson has drafted on behalf of the Board in relation to this application. The response notes that there continues to be no smolt tagging data for northern rivers and with this lack of data, a precautionary approach must be taken.

The Clerk undertook to circulate the draft to the Board and it was noted that any responses required to be submitted by 17th May 2025.

8. **FISHERIES MANAGEMENT SCOTLAND**

The Clerk advised that signs are now available to highlight to anglers the need for a precautionary measure in relation to biosecurity and invasive species.

The Kinloch, Naver and Halladale all participated in the saprolegnia PhD research by submitting fortnightly water samples. Additionally, the Halladale continues to take monthly eDNA sampling.

The Chair enquired what measures rivers were taking to help prevent the spread of infection. R Sweeting advised that the Halladale has footbaths at all accommodation and at the river, along with garden sprayers for spraying equipment. The disinfection used is either Virkon (which requires to be rinsed off) or Virkon Aquatic which is the more expensive option but is not harmful to the aquatic environment. Footbath contents are changed every week. In addition, the Halladale provide their own rubberised landing nets so that tenants do not need to use their own.

R Sweeting agreed to provide the Clerk with a link to the footbaths and the information provided to Halladale tenants, and the Clerk will circulate this information round the Board.

It was also agreed that pdf copies of the biosecurity signs are circulated to Board members and it was suggested that the shop at Bettyhill be asked to place one in their window for anglers to the Bettyhill club water and estuary.

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 outlined in the annual report which was discussed at the earlier meetings.

In addition, the planning application for the proposed Havbredey Offshore Windfarm was also discussed earlier.

10. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

- 10.1 ***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/monitoring. The Board approved all applications subject to consulting with Nature Scot where applicable.

- 10.2 ***Introduction of Broodstock:*** The Clerk advised that both the Halladale and the Borgie would like to apply to catch small numbers of salmon broodstock for their hatcheries as a precautionary measure should the need arise to re-stock due to ongoing forestry and peatland work. Consent was given by the Board to these application, subject to consulting with Nature Scot where applicable in respect of the application impacting upon an SAC.

- 10.3 ***Revaluation of Rateable Values:*** The Clerk advised that all salmon fishings are due to be revalued from April 2026 and that the District Assessor will send out further information on this in the summer.

- 10.4 ***Proposed Season Date Amendment:*** R Sweeting advised that the River Halladale were exploring an option to amend their season dates from 2026, from the existing season of 12th January – 30th September to 1st March – mid October. This is due to a continued change in the seasons and run times. It is proposed that the amendment will apply to only the Lower Halladale and that lets would stop on the first Saturday of October. The Clerk advised that the process for applying for a season date amendment required Board approval, after which (if approved), the Board would submit an application to Scottish Ministers and the application would be advertised locally for a period of time before any decision is made.
- It was agreed that the Halladale would draft a paper outlining the main points and the Clerk would circulate this round the Board for comment.

11. **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting of the Northern DSFB will take place on **Wednesday 24th September 2025** at the Bettyhill Hotel, commencing at **2.00pm**.

LIST OF ACTIONS ARISING FROM MEETING ON 07.05.25

1.	Discuss potential boat patrol options with Wildland	Clerk/L Richardson
2.	Contact FMS re potential enforcement equipment grant funding	Clerk
3.	Arrange trial run of thermal drone with Wildland	R Sweeting/A Stock
4.	Issue 2025 assessment invoices	Clerk
5.	Circulate draft response to Havbredey Ltd and submit to MD-LOT	Clerk
6.	Circulate disinfection information and link to footbaths	R Sweeting/Clerk
7.	Circulate pdf copies of biosecurity signs	Clerk
8.	Draft season data amendment for Halladale and arrange circulation round Board members	R Sweeting/Clerk
9.	Confirm venue for September 2025 meeting	Clerk

ATM/NDSFB
May 2025