

**MINUTES of the MEETING of the NORTHERN DISTRICT SALMON FISHERY BOARD held on
WEDNESDAY 25th SEPTEMBER 2024 at 2.00PM**

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 R Sweeting (Halladale)
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: Miss L Richardson (Kinloch)
The Hon G Lopes (Naver)
Mr A Youngson (Scientific Advisor)
Mrs A MacAuslan (Clerk)
Mr A Coyne (Naver)

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Mr T Kirkwood and Mr A Muat.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No adjustments were required to the existing members' declarations of interest. The Clerk has received a completed declaration of interest form from S Lopes, but is still awaiting receipt of T Kirkwood's form. L Richardson to chase. It was suggested that Alan MacDonnell of Tongue Angling Club be invited to attend future meetings.

3. MINUTES OF LAST MEETING

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 8th May 2024 were approved as an accurate record.

4. MATTERS ARISING

A MacAuslan asked L Richardson to re-send contact details for Billy Lobhan of Nature Scot. A MacAuslan will offer him an open invite to attend future meetings.

S Lopes proposed that we invite representatives from both the Caithness and Helmsdale DSFBs to a future meeting to discuss common issues.

5. NORTH COAST PATROLS & ENFORCEMENT

The Clerk advised five sea patrols were undertaken in 2024 using D Hodge's boat, the Guiding Star, and with W Grant as the Bailiff on board. The patrols spanned the period of 11th May 2024 to 5th September 2024.

A MacAuslan reported that she had spoken with D Hodge regarding the 2025 season. D Hodge has advised that he would require to be guaranteed a minimum of 6-7 patrols a season to justify the additional costs of insurance and certification. He also advised that he would only take W Grant as a crew member. Following discussion, it was agreed that whilst drones etc. all help with coastal enforcement, the Board wish to continue with sea patrols. It was agreed to ask if D Hodge would be willing to take an additional crew member on some of the patrols.

J Stewart advised that D Hodge has suggested that he may be able to extend the range of the sea patrols if he launches the boat at a slip in Eribol and sails back to Portskerra. J Stewart has offered to return the trailer by road to Portskerra and L Richardson confirmed that Wildland would contribute to costs incurred by patrolling round the Hope etc.

All communications regarding sea patrols should be coordinated through the Clerk and the Clerk should inform all bailiffs of when the patrols are being conducted. It was agreed that the Clerk would contact D Hodge to discuss the 2025 proposals.

L Richardson reported that Wildland is unsure yet as to whether they will have their own boat in 2025. They are however in the process of purchasing a thermal drone. A MacAuslan reported that there may also be the possibility of funding via FMS for a thermal drone for use by the NDSFB.

6. FINANCE

6.1 **2024 Year to Date Income & Expenditure:** The Clerk referred to the year-to-date income and expenditure spreadsheet circulated with the agenda. All assessment income has been received. The Clerk advised that FMS have issued an invoice for contribution to Year 2 costs for the saprolegnia project. This expenditure was approved and the Clerk undertook to pay the invoice.

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 advised that the budget for scientific consultancy may need to be increased from 2025 onwards as we buy in more scientific support. It was agreed that the budget and assessment income would be agreed at the May 2025 meeting once further details are finalised.

A Nicholson asked what level of reserves we would look to hold in the bank account. The Clerk advised that a balance of around £7.5k at the start of the year would be a comfortable position.

7. SCIENTIFIC UPDATE/ FLOW COUNTRY RIVERS TRUST

Green Finance/FMS: Leah Reinfranck will be visiting the FCRT on 03.10.24 to discuss funding opportunities for restoration proposals. It was agreed that A MacAuslan would attend on behalf of the Northern DSFB.

West of Orkney Windfarm: A Youngson advised that the CDSFB and NDSFB wrote a joint letter to MD-LOT indicating that there had been no consultation with the Boards in relation to the planning application. It was further noted that whilst Nature Scot responded to the planning application, they did not comment on the section on diadromous fish. MD-LOT have responded stating they will ensure the Board is included in future consultation.

The potential impact on salmon from the offshore windfarm may include:

- Noise and vibration
- Electric & Magnetic Fields (EMFs) from cabling
- Piling
- Shadow Flicker

Smolt Tracking: A Youngson reported that gaps in the smolt tracking projects means that there is no data for smolts migrating from rivers on the North coast. Lord Thurso has been in discussion with both the Chair of Crown Estate Scotland and the Director of the West of Orkney Windfarm to encourage smolt tracking to take place. Since then, Matt Newton from the Marine Directorate has contacted A Youngson and it is hoped that in 2025 we will have smolts being tracked from rivers across the North Coast, using acoustic tags and with listening stations situated in the Pentland Firth at the proposed WOO windfarm site.

S Lopes asked whether it was worth also considering kelt tagging and this was considered a possibility.

The Board members gave their support to the tracking work going ahead if it could be externally funded.

Scientific Consultancy Support: A Youngson has advised that he will be stepping back from supporting the Board on a regular basis with regards to scientific issues. He is happy to continue until alternative arrangements are agreed and the Clerk and A Youngson will liaise to ensure that these are in place. The Chair thanked Alan for all his help and support over the years.

8. **FISHERIES MANAGEMENT SCOTLAND**

The Clerk advised that funding has been secured through FMS for the purchase of signage relating to biosecurity. Individual rivers had submitted their requests for signage and disinfectants and the Clerk will liaise with the rivers once further information is available.

The Clerk also advised that at a recent FMS Board meeting, it had been agreed that a motion would be put to the FMS AGM in November 2024 to recommend that all rivers in Scotland adopt 100% catch and release for salmon on a voluntary basis. There will be a further, separate motion put forward that all rivers in Scotland should adopt 100% catch and release for sea trout on a voluntary basis. S Green asked that Board members be informed of the outcome at the AGM and the Clerk undertook to do this.

The Clerk also informed the Board that she will be stepping down from the FMS Board in November 2024 following her 3-year term of office.

11. **PLANNING CONSULTATIONS/APPLICATIONS UPDATE**

The Clerk advised that in addition to the West of Orkney Wind farm application, the Board responded to the following planning applications since the last meeting:

- Baledigle Wind Farm: Proposal to erect up to 13 turbines, which could have a shadow flicker effect on parts of the Halladale catchment.
- Achrugan Wind Farm: Proposal to erect up to 14 turbines within the River Strathy catchment area.

Peatland Restoration at Nam Breac South: The Clerk had previously circulated a letter from the Board drafted by A Youngson to The Highland Council and Nature

Scot regarding this application. The Board had not been consulted regarding the application despite intended works extending to the bankside and being scheduled for the salmon spawning season. R Sweeting advised that since the letter has been sent, Nature Scot and RSPB have proposed an onsite meeting with representatives from the Northern Board. The Clerk advised that she was happy to assist if required and R Sweeting to keep the Clerk informed.

12. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

12.1 ***Introduction of Broodstock:*** The Chair noted that Board approval had been granted via email prior to the meeting for an application by the Halladale to resume a hatchery and stocking programme.

12.2 The Chair noted that A Coyne will be leaving the River Naver at the end of the year and thanked both him and A Youngson again for their support to the Board.

13. **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The dates of the 2025 meetings were confirmed as **Wednesday 7th May 2025** at **2.00pm** and **Wednesday 24th September 2025** at **2.00pm**. Both meetings will be held at The Bettyhill Hotel.

LIST OF ACTIONS ARISING FROM MEETING ON 25.09.24

1.	Contact T Kirkwood re completed Declaration of Interest Form	L Richardson
2.	Invite Alan MacDonnell to future meetings	Clerk
3.	Re-send B Lobhan's contact details and invite to future meetings	L Richardson/Clerk
4.	Contact D Hodge re 2025 Sea Patrols	Clerk
5.	Pay Year 2 of Saprolegnia Project Invoice from FMS	Clerk
6.	Inform Board members of FMS AGM Proposal on catch & release	Clerk
7.	Confirm venue for 2025 meetings	Clerk

ATM/NDSFB

Sept 2024