

**MINUTES of the MEETING of the NORTHERN DISTRICT SALMON FISHERY BOARD held on
WEDNESDAY 24th SEPTEMBER 2025 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 S Green (Naver)
Mr P Gray (Naver)
Mr D Buchan (Naver)
Mr R Sweeting (Halladale)
Mr J Stewart (Borgie)
Ms L Richardson (Kinloch)
Mrs L Lyle (Naver) (via videoconferencing)

In Attendance: Mr A Muat (Bettyhill Angling Club)
Mr A Stock (Naver)
Mr J Hole (Naver)
Mr D Hurst-Brown (Halladale) (via videoconferencing)
Mrs A MacAuslan (Clerk)

1. APOLOGIES

No apologies were received. The Chair welcomed James Hole to the meeting who is taking on the management of Syre and North Loch Naver estates from S Green.

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 7th May 2025 were approved as an accurate record.

4. MATTERS ARISING

4.1 Board Vacancies: The Clerk advised that she had received resignations from Tim Kirkwood of the Kinloch and Sebastian Green of the Naver. Both members held Upper Proprietor membership of the Board. It was confirmed that there remains one Lower Proprietor vacancy on the Board. The Clerk advised that after this Board meeting, the Clerk would contact all Proprietors and ask for nominations to be proposed for the 2 Upper Proprietor vacancies and 1 Lower Proprietor vacancy. Proprietors would have a 2-week period to submit nominations. Following the nomination period, if there are the same or fewer number of nominations as vacancies, no election will be required. If there are more nominations than vacancies, the Upper Proprietors will be required to vote amongst themselves to elect to the 2 Upper Proprietor vacancies, and the Lower Proprietor will be required to vote for the Lower Proprietor vacancy.

J Stewart stated that he felt that all rivers within the Board area should be represented by a Board member, and A Nicholson stated that he felt the Board should be inclusive and look to amend the constitution to allow additional Board members should more nominations than vacancies be received.

- 4.2 **Proposed Amendment to Salmon Fishing Season Dates – River Halladale:** The Clerk referred to a paper by the River Halladale which had been circulated previously with the agenda, and asked R Sweeting to summarise the main points of the paper. The River Halladale is looking to amend their season dates from 12th January - 30th September to 11th February – 15th October. The rationale behind the amendment is due to the changing weather patterns, and run times occurring later in the season. R Sweeting reported that they have been catching sea liced fish in the river this week and predictions are that the later runs will continue. The Halladale has never traditionally been an early river. After discussion, a vote was taken on whether to support the proposal. The votes were counted as 7 Board members voting for the proposal, and 3 Board members either abstaining or voting against. The proposal was therefore approved and it was agreed that R Sweeting would compile a further paper for submission to the Scottish Ministers. Once the Clerk receives this further paper, she will circulate this round Board members for comment and/or approval, before submitting it to the Scottish Ministers for consideration.

5. **ENFORCEMENT**

R Sweeting updated the Board on poaching incidents at Strathy Point over the summer and it was agreed that the Clerk would circulate the reports relating to these incidents.

It was noted that the use of drones had proved very effective in relation to the poaching incidents and R Sweeting reported that the Halladale had since upgraded their drone. The River Naver is also considering an upgrade to their drone and it was agreed that A Stock would trial the Halladale drone.

The Clerk advised that the Board has applied to the Marine Fund Scotland (via FMS) for the procurement of a thermal drone however it is not yet known if this application will be successful.

The amount and management of the enforcement budget was discussed. It was proposed that the Board could hold a central fund that those rivers who have drones could apply to for ongoing costs incurred through having a drone, e.g. specialist drone insurance, drone licence fees, training. It was proposed that salary/manpower costs associated with drone usage could not routinely be funded by the Board as the use of drones was part of the Bailiff's salaried duties of enforcement.

Discussion took place with regards the mechanism for accessing nets etc. found at sea. The Halladale own a couple of kayaks that were used over the summer. R Sweeting also advised of someone who owns a boat locally who may be amenable to being called upon if a boat was required to retrieve a net etc.

6. **FINANCE**

6.1 **2025 Year to Date Income & Expenditure:** The Clerk referred to the Year-to-Date Income and Expenditure spreadsheet that had been circulated with the minutes. The Clerk reported that whilst A Youngson is no longer officially acting as the Scientific Advisor to the Board, he has continued to assist with a number of issues, and she therefore proposed that his budgeted honorarium of £1,575.00 was paid. This was agreed and the Clerk undertook to arrange payment. There were no further questions or comments.

6.2 **Draft Budget for Year ending 31st December 2026:** The Clerk referred to the draft 2026 budget circulated prior to the meeting. The Clerk indicated that the draft budget for scientific consultancy was an estimate at present but was based on contracting advice as and when required. There were no further questions or comments.

7. **SCIENTIFIC UPDATE/ FLOW COUNTRY RIVERS TRUST**

As identified above, the Clerk noted that whilst A Youngson was no longer officially acting as the Scientific Advisor to the Board, he continues to help out on various issues. R Sweeting advised that Jason McIlvenny from the Environmental Research Institute (ERI) was working closely with A Youngson and has now been appointed as the scientific consultant for the FCRT.

S Lopes confirmed that the FCRT were due to meet on 3rd October 2025 after which an update on projects would be available. The Trust has also now appointed a new administrator to replace Eleanor Constable.

8. **FISHERIES MANAGEMENT SCOTLAND**

The Clerk advised that she had attended an online meeting of one of the FMS Regional members meetings. L Lyle advised that there has been a lot of discussion recently across Scotland regarding the future model for collecting levies to finance DSFBs as it is felt in some areas that the current model is unsustainable.

9. **PLANNING CONSULTATIONS/APPLICATIONS UPDATE**

The Clerk advised that the planning applications which the Board have been active with since the previous Board meeting included the West of Orkney windfarm being consented, and a response submitted by the Board in relation to the proposed Havbredey Offshore Windfarm.

It was felt that there needed to be a co-ordinated and centralised approach to offshore wind farms in relation to salmon and sea trout as the migratory pattern of salmon from a number of Scottish rivers could potentially be impacted. The Clerk advised that A Wells of FMS had convened a group of a number of Boards to discuss a standardised response to offshore applications, and their in-shore components. A Youngson is involved in this group and the Clerk undertook to contact A Wells for an update.

10. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

10.1 **Seal Sightings:** The Clerk reported that she had not had a chance to contact each river and ask for a summary of seal sightings since the last meeting. The Clerk however advised that there is a seal sighting app available for reporting of all seal

sightings and it was agreed that the Clerk would circulate the link for this app and that all rivers should be encouraged to report/record sightings on the app.

11. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The dates of the 2026 meetings were confirmed as **Wednesday 6th May 2026 at 2.00pm** (to include the Annual Meeting of Qualified Proprietors and Annual Public Meeting), and **Wednesday 23rd September 2026 at 2.00pm**. Both meetings will be held at The Bettyhill Hotel.

LIST OF ACTIONS ARISING FROM MEETING ON 24.09.25

1.	Email out to Proprietors regarding election to Board vacancies	Clerk
2.	Prepare application to Scottish Ministers for season amendment on River Halladale, and circulate for comment/approval	R Sweeting/Clerk
3.	Circulate reports on poaching incidents	Clerk
4.	Arrange trial of Halladale drone	A Stock/R Sweeting
5.	Arrange payment of honorarium to A Youngson	Clerk
6.	Contact A Wells for update on offshore windfarm group	Clerk
7.	Circulate link to seal sighting app	Clerk
8.	Confirm venue for 2026 meetings	Clerk