

NESS DISTRICT SALMON FISHERY BOARD Annual Public Meeting Minutes

Time: 19:30

Date: 22nd January 2015

Location: Kingsmills Suite, Inverness Caledonian Thistle Football Club, Inverness

1. ATTENDANCE

The public meeting was attended by 29 individuals including local anglers, representatives from Inverness Angling Club, Loch Ness anglers, Scottish National Heritage, Scottish Environmental Protection Agency, Moray Firth Trout Initiative (MFTI), Beaully District Salmon Fishery Board (DSFB), Spey DSFB, Spey Foundation, Burton Property Trust, the University of the Highlands and Islands (Rivers and Lochs Institute), Drynie Estate and Ness Castle Estate in addition to the Ness DSFB and Ness & Beaully Fishery Trust.

2. PRESENTATIONS

There were three presentations given, each of which will be published on the NDSFB website (www.ness.dsfb.org.uk). The presentations were as follows:

1. Introduction

Andrew Duncan (AD) – Vice Chairman, Ness District Salmon Fishery Board (NDSFB)

In the absence of Michael Martin, Chairman of the NDSFB) Andrew Duncan gave a brief welcome and introduction to the 2014 Annual Report and Accounts for the year ended 15th May 2014.

2. “2014 – A Year in Review”

Chris Conroy (CC) – Director, NDSFB

Chris provided an overview of the activities of the Board over the previous year, including the latest provisional rod catches for 2014, together with those planned for the forthcoming year.

3. “Ness and Beaully Fisheries Trust: Report on 2014 Activities”

Nick Barker (NB) – Senior Biologist, Ness and Beaully Fisheries Trust

Nick provided an overview of the activities of the Trust over the last year, in particular the results of their fish monitoring programmes.

4. “The River Carron Research Project: Supporting Management with Leading Edge Science”

Professor Eric Verspoor (EV) - Director Rivers and Lochs Institute, Inverness

Our guest speaker, Eric Verspoor, focused on the use of science to investigate the merits of different types of stock intervention and the problems of using catch statistics alone to establish the status of a river stock.

3. QUESTION & ANSWERS SESSION

Questions were invited after the presentations. Topics discussed included:

- ***Was angler effort factored into the River Carron Project and how do you quantify effort?***
EV explained that the exploitation rate may influence catches, however this is very complex relationship and not currently considered in the project.
- ***The River Carron it is about a fifth of the width of the Ness and therefore it is easier to cover whilst fishing. Would it not therefore be easier to catch fish in the Carron system, making it difficult to compare the two systems?***
EV explained that the Ness system is very complex and unique in Scotland in terms of the number of large lochs. You are likely to capture a larger proportion of fish entering the Carron system. Also, having one loch in its system, the Carron may have only two genetically distinct populations (one above the loch and one below), whereas the Ness system may have as many as 20 genetically distinct salmon populations.
- ***In terms of statistics, is there data about what has been caught off-shore by trawlers and as by-catch?***
EV answered yes and that some of it will come out soon. Some Icelanders are catching Salmon in their mackerel nets. This is a 'double edged sword' as mackerel compete for the same food sources as the salmon at sea, so a reduction in the mackerel numbers could be of benefit salmon. However, if the salmon are being taken as a bycatch in the mackerel nets then this is a negative. Interestingly, there is some evidence that suggests that salmon being caught off of Iceland originate from Britain and Ireland, not Iceland.
- ***What is happening to the salmon that are taken as by catch?***
EV explained that some may be going into the food system or ground up and made into pellets.
- ***What about 'redd wash out on the Carron', have you looked at the SEPA data?***
EV explained they have some data from SEPA and you might think this would be a simple calculation, but it is more complex than measuring the water height. We are just opening the door on this area.
- ***If a redd is washed out, does that make mean every egg is a write off? Or would some retain viability?***
EV explained that the developmental stage of the egg can influence its viability; therefore the timing of a spate can have a dramatic influence. CC added that there seems to be a trend for larger multi sea winter salmon on the Ness at the moment. These fish will dig deeper redds, making them more robust during spates. The eggs are also bigger and healthier, which could lead to higher survival rates. EV continued that the best spawning habitat can become the worst spawning habitat when the conditions change, such as under low flows. It is complicated.
- ***Have you seen any correlation from the smolt trap data?***
EV explained that this will be the first year of data collection. The results will not be in the forthcoming report. He explained that they would be in a better position to answer this in 6 months' time.



- ***Are sea lice burdens on trout the same as salmon?***

Low numbers of sea trout caught in recent years, but yes, 'normal' levels of sea lice as is the case with the salmon. Finnock caught on other rivers on the west coast are regularly found with extremely high loadings of 70-160 sea lice on each fish.

3. AOCB

CC noted that, in response to our request for matters for consideration at this meeting, a member of the public had expressed concern about the potential impact of the sewage outfall at Alturlie. This related to the impact of water quality on salmon migrations in the area. CC reported that he had raised the issue with SEPA, the regulatory body responsible for monitoring water quality. They had acknowledged the question and would be responding in due course.

4. CLOSE

Andrew thanked Eric and Nick. Andrew thanked the Ness DSFB staff including Chris Conroy, John MacColl, Billy Orrock and April Conroy.

Andrew thanked everyone for coming and wished everyone a successful fishing season.

THE MEETING CLOSED AT 21.54