

NESS DISTRICT SALMON FISHERY BOARD

Board Meeting

Time: 14:00

Date: 30th June 2016

(Rescheduled as quorum could not be met on original date of the 16th June 2016)

Location: The Bothy, Ness Castle Lodges

Present:

Andrew Duncan: Ness Castle, Mandate (AD) *Acting Chair*

Alexander Patience: Netsman, Co-option (AP)

Annie Girvan: River Moriston, Mandate (AG)

Angus McGruer: Co-option (AM)

Graham Mackenzie: Co-option (AM)

Neil Cameron: Ness & Beaully Fisheries Trust (N&BT), Co-option (NC)

Ryan Rutherford: Ness Side, Mandate (RR)

Bob Morgan: River Gary, Mandate (BM)

In Attendance

April Conroy: Board Secretary

Chris Conroy: Chief Executive/Clerk (CC)

John MacColl: Head Water Bailiff (JM)

Apologies:

Michael Martin: Dochfour, Mandate (MM)

Alastair Stephen: SSE, observer (ASt)

Ben Leyshon: Scottish Natural Heritage, observer (BL)

Cllr Ken Gowans: Highland Council, Mandate (KG)

Kenneth Knott: Forestry Commission, observer (KK)

Eric Craig: Inverness Angling Club, Co-option (EC)

Nick Barker: N&BFT, observer (NB)

1. APOLOGIES

AD welcomed all and noted apologies.

2. APPROVAL

AD invited comments on the minutes from the previous meeting. None were raised. The minutes were approved.

3. ACTION LOG

CC reviewed the actions, with the following comments raised:

9.01 - CC noted there was an action to look at options for replacing the Toyota Hilux; however the van has now begun to experience mechanical failures and requires more urgent replacement. AD asked the board for approval to expend £8,000 net capital on a replacement van. Approval was granted. CC and JM were granted authority to select and procure a replacement within this budget.

Action 11.01 – CC and JM to select and procure a replacement van within an £8,000 budget.

10.2 - CC reported that the aerial habitat survey had been completed and that we are awaiting the results. AD noted thanks to the SSE for granting funding from within the Garry project budget for this activity.

AD invited further comments on actions.

10.4 - BM raised the EnviroCentre hydrological report for Whin Park Lade. CC gave an update regarding the latest developments in terms of CAR licence application and screening improvements.

4. HEALTH & SAFETY REPORT

Health and Safety report noted. CC highlighted recent conflict resolution and handcuff training and the documented policy that has been produced regarding the issue and carriage of personal protective equipment. BM asked whether the insurance policy has been reviewed. CC and AD confirmed that the insurance policy provider has been consulted and the policy updated.

5. GOOD GOVERNANCE

Good Governance paper noted as read. No comments received.

6. FINANCE REPORT AND 2016/17 ASSESSMENT

AD reported the results for the financial year end and sought Board approval. Income was very close to the budget (less than £50 variance). AD reported that we remain behind on the planned overspend allocated to the Upper Garry Restoration Project, which relates to a current underspend on genetic analysis and fish husbandry. The timing of this expenditure remains delayed. AD highlighted the current profit and loss.

The board has decided for the year 2015/16 to award a bonus of £2,000 to Chris Conroy and a bonus of £500 to John McColl with thanks for performance during the year. Salaries will also be reviewed for both and a commitment is confirmed to the agricultural uplift for JM.

AD recommended the board retain a levy of £1.55. NC recommended waiting for further clarify on the future of the Board and timescales regarding Wild Fisheries Reform. AG also noted uncertainty. After discussion, AD asked whether all were in favour of retaining £1.55 levy. All agreed.

Action 11.02 – CC to issue 2016/17 assessment notices at a levy of £1.55 in the pound

7. DIRECTOR/CLERK'S REPORT

CC noted that the official Marine Scotland Science Fishery Statistics reveal 13 fewer multi sea winter salmon reported for the season than was the case with returns received by the Ness DSFB. This decreases the total annual Ness district catch from a provisional figure of 1,223 to a final figure of 1,210 fish. No comments were raised.

2016 Season to date reviewed. Some discussion was had about variations in fishing pressure and skill of the guests. There was a general feeling that a good number of healthy fish have entered the system so far this season.

CC noted an interest in making better use of catch returns. This would include collecting more information associated with the capture of individual fish, e.g. name of the pool where the fish was caught, river levels at the time of capture, condition of the fish (sea liced, fresh or coloured) and the presence of any predator marks. The latter would be particularly useful in informing predator licence applications. This approach would require support of the guiles, and therefore it may be worthy of an initial trial on a limited area of the system, for example the River Ness. AG said this data had been recorded in the past. RR confirmed that this data was being recorded in their book.

AP noted the first Inshore Fisheries Group Meeting and that the issue of predation was raised with SNH at this meeting and Ben Leyshon in particular. CC was asked to consult BL for feedback.

The Upper Garry Salmon Restoration Project was reported. This year's smolts are being held at the Drimsallie Hatchery in Lochaber, with the survival rates to date being very high. These fish will be brought on to maturing in freshwater. All agreed that it is going very well.

GM reported on a youth angling initiative with the Ness DSFB, Inverness Angling Club, Grahams tackle shop in Inverness, Ness and Beauly Fisheries Trust, The Bridge, Police Scotland and Abriachan Forest Trust. This aimed to create opportunities for disadvantaged youth to go fishing. He reported that following enquires by Grahams tackle shop, 'Pure Fishing' have agreed to donate fishing gear including 6 sets of fresh water fishing, 6 sets of fly fishing rods and 6 sets of sea fishing gear. This first phase will be complete before the next board meeting. This year will be a small scale trail, followed by wider events in future years.

AP reported that some netsman have received an interim compensation payment from the Scottish Government in terms of the prohibition of salmon net fishing as an interim arrangement. The full extent of these payments is not completely clear at this stage.

CC reported that improved fish passage is proposed for the Holm Burn.

The status of the patrol boat was reviewed. CC reported significant delays in terms of fitting out at Caley Marine and issue of a 'fit for purpose' certification. AG confirmed that the insurance would be up for renewal within the next couple of weeks. AD and CC commented that the insurance would require review given that the usage would now include commercial use and that the cost of this insurance would sit with the Board.

BM asked about sediment management of the Allt Breineag. CC explained that this proposal related to removal of sediment as part of routine maintenance at a small scale hydro scheme. He explained that the works had now been postponed.

BM asked about the adaptive management of barriers on rivers. CC explained that this was an extremely worthwhile project proposal that would involve tracking smolts from the River Garry, through Loch Oich, down to Loch Ness at Fort Augustus. It would investigate whether fish are lost to the Caledonian Canal and, if so, the time taken for them to reach Loch Ness. Unfortunately, funding was not currently available to proceed with the project.

8. HEAD BAILIFF'S REPORT

JM reviewed the Head Bailiff's report. JM confirmed that One case against a person caught fishing illegally on the River Oich in April has been reported to Procurator Fiscal this year. CC added that another caught fishing illegally on the River Moriston in June has now also been reported.

9. NBFT SENIOR BIOLOGIST REPORT

CC noted that NB was on leave celebrating his marriage. CC invited questions on the report, none were raised.

NC reported that a funding review for the trust would be carried out at the next NBFT Board Meeting.

10. WILD FISHERIES REFORM UPDATE

CC and AD provided an overview of the current status of Wild Fisheries reform.

NC identified the importance of ring-fencing the funding that is allocated to specific areas and ensure that this remains within the areas that it is due to benefit (e.g. the Upper Garry Restoration Project). Discussion took place regarding the remit of FMOs expanding to include all fish species and the extra costs that this would entail.

AD asked the Board whether there is a consensus on supporting a pilot FMO based on the Ness, Beaully and Lochaber. After much discussion, all agree this was the most sensible decision given current information.

AD tabled a suggestion – for consideration – merging the Ness and Beaully Boards and the trust as an interim measure.

CC noted that the Ness DSFB have extended an invitation to Roseanna Cunningham (Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform) to visit the Ness district and to learn more about our local initiatives.

11. CONSERVATION LIMITS

CC outlined the process that has led to the current national approach. CC explained that the Board have provided data from the local area and expressed a clear interest for the local data to be taken into account as part of the re-assessment process.

CC explained that an online map has now been made available to local Fishery Trusts so that they can update the wetted areas. Marine Scotland Science (MSS) was clear that, at this stage, it should only consider the removal of lochs and no other areas of slow water or bedrock.

CC highlighted a recent technical group meeting concerning the potential use of fish counter data. He reported that in the first instance MSS were concentrating on information from the SSE counters on the Awe, Beaully and Moriston. CC was hopeful that this might replace the use of rod catches on the Moriston, although MSS were non-comittal on this point.

NC asked about Conservation Planning. CC explained that there is a draft template available and he provided a description of the contents. He is awaiting the final draft before completion.

12. AOCB

AD put forward a proposal that the NDSFB make an offer to the Inverness Angling Club to provide £2,500 of funding each year, for two years, to the club if they were to put in place an improved catch return process, recording greater detail, and a disciplinary process for tackling any non-compliance.

The goal would be both to financially support the club and to improve the data captured. RR and JM asked whether the current catch returns process employed across the rest of the river could be used. RR highlighted how this can be done via FishPal. AD highlighted processes in place on other rivers. BM highlighted that this process should include information about the fishing conditions and the condition of the individual fish as previously suggested by CC.

CC suggested that a pilot be carried out on all the beats of the River Ness, rather than just the Angling Club. This might ask all proprietors on the Ness provide a catch return on a weekly basis, including the Inverness Angling Club. AD asked that GM take the proposal to the Inverness Angling Club for review at their AGM.

The board agreed that as a good-will gesture they would like to offer £2500 of support the Inverness Angling Club in the coming year (2017) and possibly a further year (2018).

Action 11.03 – GM and CC to take the proposal that the NDSFB make an offer to the Inverness Angling Club to provide £2,500 of funding each year for two years (with associated caveats) to the Inverness Angling Club for review at their AGM.

The next meeting will take place on the 15th September 2016. This will be the Triennial Elections at which a new Board will be elected. AD noted that he will be retiring from the Board. AD wished to note personal thanks to Bob Olivant and Alistair Stevens from SSE and thanked all of those around the table and those not present. GM noted great thanks to AD. AG also noted that she would be retiring next year.

THE MEETING CLOSED AT 17:58