

## **NESS DISTRICT SALMON FISHERY BOARD**

### **Annual Public Meeting Minutes**

**Time:** 19:30

**Date:** 18<sup>th</sup> January 2018

**Location:** Press & Journal Suite, Inverness Caledonian Thistle Football Club

## **1. ATTENDANCE**

The public meeting was attended by 27 individuals including local anglers from across the district, representatives from Inverness Angling Club, Glenmoriston Estate, Mackenzie Fly Fishing, Scottish Natural Heritage, Ness Castle Fishery, UHI Inverness College, The Scottish Ghillie, Grahams of Inverness, Ness Castle Fishery and the Ness and Beaully Fisheries Trust.

## **2. PRESENTATIONS**

### **1. Introduction**

*Neil Cameron – Acting Chairman, Ness District Salmon Fishery Board (NDSFB)*

In the absence of Michael Martin (Chairman of the NDSFB), Neil Cameron gave a brief welcome and introduction to the 2017 Annual Report and Accounts for the year ended 15th May 2017. He thanked each of the sponsors CBEC Ecoengineering, Ness Castle Lodges and Strutt and Parker, without whom the high-quality print productions would not have been possible.

### **2. “2017 - A Year in Review”**

*Chris Conroy – Director, NDSFB*

Chris gave a presentation providing an overview of the key activities carried out by the Board over the last year, together with those planned for the forthcoming year.

### **3. “Gone Fishing”**

*Marina Gibson – Well known angling personality and Atlantic Salmon Trust Ambassador*

Guest speaker Marina Gibson talked about her role as an Atlantic Salmon Trust Ambassador and about her role in promoting women’s fishing and her own passion for fishing.

## **3. QUESTIONS & ANSWERS**

Questions were invited after the presentations. Topics discussed included:

- ***You have talked about the decline in salmon, but what about the impacts of mergansers and dolphins?***

Chris Conroy (CC) responded first by outlining the detailed work that is carried out each year to count birds, the role of bird scaring and of bird control. He explained that the Ness DSFB has to work under the current legal framework.

Specific issues were raised about dolphins intercepting salmon in the mouth of the River Ness. One of the attendees described how the dolphins use the old Black Bridge footings (which they believe create a barrier to salmon at low tide) to trap the fish. Concern was expressed that the Ness DSFB was not doing anything to address the issue.

CC responded that he was not aware that the bridge footings created a barrier and this would be worth exploring further. He went on to explain that the Ness DSFB is aware of the potential impacts of dolphins on salmon stocks, however they are a protected species and the Moray Firth is designated as a special area of conservation (SAC) for them, which means that any management action would be limited.

CC explained that in the past the Ness DSFB had investigated the use of 'scaring devices' to deter both dolphins and seals from the mouth of the river. These were not permitted as they may affect the status of the dolphin populations. Furthermore, they are very expensive and not guaranteed to work. CC went on to report that the board is currently working with partner organisations to develop a project to look more closely at salmon/dolphin interactions.

Ben Leyshon (BL) from SNH reported that Dolphins are highly protected and that the Moray Firth in particular was a SAC. He spoke of the limitations and restriction on the use of sonic deterrents, but how structural changes (if deemed to be an issue) might allow the fish to disperse and become less of a target.

- ***Was the Scottish Government's tagging project this year cost effective?***

Chris Conroy (CC) reported that the SG had unfortunately not managed to capture and tag the target number of fish. This seemed to be due to a general lack of grilse last year. Two acoustic receivers had been deployed in each of the Rivers Ness and Beaully. The results of the study are not expected until the end of March/early April, so it is too early to say whether its objectives were met and whether it was cost effective or not.

- ***Do you think that pink salmon are a threat to native salmon and what management action could be taken?***

Chris Conroy (CC) reported that the spawning periods of Atlantic and Pacific pink salmon do not overlap, which means that there is no competition for spawning habitat. Juvenile pink salmon become smolts and migrate to the sea soon after hatching, which means that there is no competition for juvenile habitat. There is a risk that the pink salmon could carry disease, however those carcasses examined to date across the UK have not revealed any problems.

The pink salmon eggs monitored in the Ness in 2017 did hatch and almost develop to the fry/smolt stage. These fish were subject to regular handling which is likely to have reduced survival. We believe that a proportion of the eggs in wild 'redds' (or nest) in the River Ness will have gone on to successfully smolt. In Norway, pink salmon smolts have already been captured in the lower reaches of rivers on their migration to sea. CC pointed out a lack of knowledge regarding where these fish are feeding at sea and whether they compete for food with our own Atlantic salmon - marine survival is already very low, could the presence of pinks in the feeding grounds add another pressure?

In terms of management actions, the Ness DSFB decided to concentrate of gathering as much information regarding the status of pink salmon (i.e. whether they would spawn, spawning success and viability of juveniles). Other rivers such as the Dee have taken measures to disturb as many pink



salmon redds as possible. However, they report that it can take as long as six hours to destroy an individual redd. We took the decision that this was not a viable approach as it would be impossible to destroy all redds and even if this was achieved in one river, the pinks could easily recolonise again from other areas.

- ***Where you were electro-fishing, near the Rugby Pitch, the West Link Bridge contractor was spilling bags into the River Ness. Will this not impact on the spawning?***

In response to CC's comments that communication with the West Link Bridge Contractors had been excellent, one attendee reported that the contractors had been spilling bags into the River Ness. Another attendee reported seeing the large bags floating down river towards the Club Water. CC clarified the timing of this incident and confirmed that the Ness DSFB had been aware and that the contractor did report the incident to SEPA.

#### **4. AOCB**

AOCB was invited. CC report that no requests of matters for consideration at this meeting had been received. No further items were raised.

#### **5. CLOSE**

NC thanked our guest speaker Marina Gibson, together with Chris Conroy. Finally, he thanked everyone for coming and wished them a successful fishing season.

THE MEETING CLOSED AT 21.45