

NESS DISTRICT SALMON FISHERY BOARD Board Meeting Minutes

Time: 14:00

Date: 14th June 2018

Location: Press and Journal Suite, Inverness Caledonian Thistle Football Club

Present:

Neil Cameron: Ness & Beaulieu Fisheries Trust (NBFT), Co-option (NC) Acting Chairman

Alexander Patience: Netsman, Co Option (AP)

Angus MacGruer: River Oich, Mandate (AM)

Bob Morgan: River Gary, Mandate/Alternate (BM)

David Sutherland: Ness Castle Lodges, Proprietor (DS)

Eric Craig: Angling Club, Co Option (EC)

Ryan Rutherford: Ness Castle, Mandate (RR)

Graham Mackenzie: Co-Option (GM)

Neil Cameron: Ness & Beaulieu Fisheries Trust (NBFT), Co-option (NC)

In Attendance:

Alastair Stephen: SSE (ASt)

April Conroy: Board Secretary (AC)

Chris Conroy: Chief Executive/Clerk (CC)

Iain McMinn: SSE (IM)

John MacColl: Head Bailiff (JM)

Nick Barker: NBFT, (NB)

Observing:

Hugh MacIntosh, Aldourie Estate

Apologies:

Andrew Steel: SEPA (AS)

Ben Leyshon: Scottish Natural Heritage (BL)

Gordon Armstrong: Ness Castle, Mandate (GA)

Janet Campbell: Highland Council, Mandate (JC)

Melanie Smith: UHI Rivers and Lochs Institute (MS)

Michael Martin: Dochfour, Mandate (MM) Chairman

1. APOLOGIES

Neil Cameron (NC) introduced the meeting and noted apologies as above.

NC noted apologies from Helen Gray had stepped down as Factor for the River Moriston and that the Stephen Gray was currently holding this responsibility.

Nick Barker was thanked for his contributions in service to the Ness and Beaulieu Fisheries Trust and the Board all wished him well in his new position.

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM PREVIOUS MEETING

NC invited comments on the minutes. No comments were raised on the minutes from the *Ordinary Board Meeting (15th March 2018)*. These minutes were proposed for approval by GM and seconded by RR.

3. ACTIONS LOG

The Actions log was reviewed:

- **16.03 Dec-17 - Convene the Financial Working Group prior to the next board meeting:**
Action remains Open. David Sutherland asked to join the Group. NC and CC agreed. AST asked for this to go ahead soon as the current agreements with other Boards are under review and that they are looking to bring more consistency and alignment.
- **16.04 Sep-17 - Take forward the preparation of a solicitor's letter for fishery assessment debtors:**
Action Closed. See Financial Report.
- **18.01 Mar-18 - Obtain separate quotes for Health and Safety Audit from Greens of Haddington:**
The discussion with the Ness Board has been ongoing. The current decision is to progress a written report only.
- **18.02 Mar-18 - Follow-up with NB regarding promoting school visits and educational projects within the Merkinch area of Inverness:**
The action is to be taken forward by CD. DS also noted relationship with Inverness Royal Academy.
- **18.03 Mar-18 - Arrange a meeting with HIE to explore potential funding.**
DS and CC to take forward.
- **18.04 Mar-18 - Approach the Scottish Government regarding the feasibility of a 'season shift' on the River Ness to protect late spawning fish:**
No response from the Scottish Government to date.

4. HEALTH AND SAFETY REPORT

CC reported that there have been no reportable incidents in this period. CC noted that given that the team are much shorter staffed than before, it is particularly important that both he and JM personally keep watch on health and safety issues.

CC reported that water bailiffs from the Spey DSFB joined the Ness DSFB team on our latest Niton Ltd conflict resolution and handcuff training course. Their feedback was extremely positive and they intend to participate again next year.

5. GOOD GOVERNANCE

CC introduced the Good Governance Paper and commented in particular on the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) section. CC summarised the implications under the rules of the (GDPR) and the steps that have been taken.

NC invited comments on the paper. None were raised.

6. FINANCE REPORT

CC noted the finance paper.

Management Accounts - CC explained the primary discrepancies, including delays in the Upper Garry Project expenditure. Discussion was had about the importance of a prompt conclusion to the current genetic work being undertaken by the UHI Rivers and Lochs Institute. ASt agreed to seek updates on the following items at his next meeting with UHI Inverness College:

- The primary cause of the delay in the reporting of the Upper Garry Salmon Restoration Project genetic profiling work for the 2017 broodfish;
- Progress and outcomes from the ASIG Project, to which the Ness DSFB contributed £7,500 over three years; and
- Any outcomes or results from analysis carried out on the Pacific pink salmon carcasses provided by the Ness DSFB to the UHI Rivers and Lochs Institute in 2017.

Action 19.01 - ASt to raise questions regarding Garry genetics, ASIG and pink salmon with UHI Inverness College and also organise an Upper Garry Restoration Programme Meeting.

Action 19.02 - ASt to organise an Upper Garry Salmon Restoration Programme Meeting.

Fisheries Assessments - CC provided an update on the outstanding assessments reported in the Finance Report. CC reminded the Board that copies of the voting Board Members passport or driving license need to be provided to Andrew Duncan. CC asked that they are scanned and provided to CC or direct to Andrew.

NC invited questions or comments. None were raised.

7. DIRECTOR / CLERK REPORT

CC introduced the Director's report. CC commented that this has been the busiest spring period to date and he thanked the team for all their hard work.

Upper Garry Restoration Project - CC spoke of the stocking exercise that took place in the River Kingie and Allt Choire a Bhalachain. ASt spoke of the remoteness of the site. BM confirmed that past work there was carried out by Helicopter. CC commented on the future logistics of how to safely transport the eggs when the numbers increase. One option is for the team to go up the night before and stay in a Bothy and have the eggs brought in by helicopter the next morning. Volunteers could also be asked to assist with the stocking activity. NB commented that it would normally be advisable to go up and check the conditions before stocking and also checking for existing salmon 'redds' (or nests). CC



commented on how the snowy weather this year would not have permitted this, but all agreed in principle it would be advisable.

BM asked what would you do if you got up there with the eggs and found existing redds. CC suggested that they would have to identify them visibly and avoid them.

Smolt Trapping - The water levels were much lower this year due to an outage at Garry Dam. This has resulting in minor damage and wear to the trap that will need to be repaired. ASt suggested that the trap could be repaired at the same time as another SSE trap which is being sent to a fabricator in Edderton. The short notice given for the outage and timing (during both the peak smolt run and spring catch period) was discussed.

Action 19.03 - ASt to ensure there is follow-up between SSE Generation Control Room and Transmission in order to avoid future issues regarding outages

Discussion was had about whether to stop brood stock collection (smolt trapping) for the Upper Garry Salmon Restoration stocking programme this year as per the original programme. CC suggested that the programme be continued for a further two to three years. Adult returns resulting from this first year of stocking may not arrive back to the river for six years. He noted implications in terms of consenting and the holding of brood stock and the need for a project review. ASt suggested that Marine Scotland Science could use this an opportunity to learn from the outcomes of a stocking programme of this nature, in practice.

Action 19.04 – CC to complete a review of review of the Upper Garry Salmon Restoration Project supportive breeding programme to inform any future extension.

Pink Salmon - CC noted that unverified Pacific pink salmon sightings have been reported on the Aberdeenshire Dee.

Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee Visit - CC reported that he travelled to Drimsallie Hatchery to speak to a group of MSPs from the Scottish Parliament's Rural Economy and Connectivity (REC) committee about the Upper Garry Salmon Restoration Project. They were on a visit to see salmon farming and wild fishery operations on the west coast. This formed part of the ongoing inquiry into the aquaculture industry in Scotland.

Missing Salmon Project - CC reported back on a recent Atlantic Salmon Trust dinner at which local Fishery Board River Directors were asked to identify potential local elements to the Missing Salmon Project. These would focus on the freshwater element of the smolt migration and 'bolt on' to the wider project which will concentrate on marine survival.

Garry screens project - ASt provided an update on the current live fish trials, including a visit from the Home Office who commented on the exemplary handling of the fish being released. Some of the fish are not travelling through the tunnel as quickly as expected, however there is very little damage from travelling through the turbine and down the tunnel. The next test will establish the impact of any damage from going through the screens.

Salmon Dolphin Interactions Project - AP reported that the Scientists due to be on the boat require the boat to be coded. Furthermore, the availability of the surveyor to code the board means that it will not be done in time. AP proposes an alternative, to conduct the sampling as it was last time with the scientist remaining on-shore to overcome the issue. NC asked whether this method would be as

effective. AP mentioned that there is some possibility that the boat could possibly be coded the first week of July. CC encouraged AP to take up the alternative plans with Simon Dryden (Marine Scotland) who will be providing a grant for the project, but that he and the Ness DSFB would support the proposal.

Fisheries Management Plans – CC reported that Fisheries Management Scotland have been developing a Fisheries Management Plan template which meets the needs of the sector, whilst attempting to meet the Scottish Government’s aspirations. They have been working on a framework for such a template, which also incorporates a web-based tool to highlight pressures within the catchment. This is now at a stage for wider discussion, prior to further refinement, and will soon be shared more widely. CC suggested that the requirements all seem very reasonable.

Ness Season Change – CC reported that he has contacted the Scottish Government to arrange a meeting to discuss the feasibility of a ‘season shift’ on the River Ness to protect late spawning fish. He has yet to receive a response.

Armada Tracking Project – CC provided links to the results of last years ‘Armada Tracking Project’ and encouraged the board members to view the reports.

Aigas Smolt Rescue - ASt reported that this was the worst Smolt rescue that he had seen and thanked the Ness DSFB and NBFT for their response. He would be preparing a significant incident report and will look in detail at the potential causes. The early thoughts are that this is more likely to have happened due to very specific conditions. He pointed to a solution that has been developed on a river in Canada and reported that SSE will be looking at this and other potential prevention proposals.

Ness Weir Fish pass - There are currently fewer fish being caught above Ness Weir. There are a variety of potential causes of this, including the low flows, however one potential cause could be changes to the Ness Weir Fish pass resulting from recent Scottish Canals refurbishment works. The Ness DSFB should consider whether the works have had a negative impact on fish passage.

Action 19.05 – *CC to work with SEPA to assess whether refurbishment works at Ness Weir have altered the structure of the pass and affected fish passage (a long-term action).*

8. HEAD BAILIFF’S REPORT

JMc provided an overview of the Head Bailiff Report. JMc reported that there is a real safety concern for some of the individuals that are fishing behind the screens at the Moriston tailrace.

Action 19.06 – *JM and IM to go and look at the site and consider potentially security/health and safety measure that could be put in place.*

A discussion took place regarding funding from SSE towards Ness DSFB activities. NC suggested that the Ness DSFB might consider seeking funding for a dedicated ‘upper system’ water bailiff. CC recommended that any potential extra water bailiff resource might be better used across the system.

CC reported an incident of intimidation against one of the Ness DSFB water bailiffs. He provided details of the events and the management actions that had been put in place. All were satisfied that no further actions were required.

NC invited questions and comments. None were raised.

9. NBFT SENIOR BIOLOGIST REPORT

NB introduced his report.

Scottish Invasive Species Initiative - NB reported the progress that had been made to date with a lot of man power put into spraying non-native plants (giant hogweed). NB made a plea for further volunteers for both spraying and for the Mink Project work.

CD reported that he has begun working with the Developing the Young Workforce (DWYD) and that this has opened the door to potential work with the High Schools and Academies within the Inverness Area.

CC discussed the Salmon in the Classroom project in the Clyde that is seen as being very successful. ASt reported that the project was very time consuming, but that it was very well structured and that the outcomes were made repeatable.

Action 19.07 – CC to investigate potential fisheries development funds.

NC thanked Nick Barker for 10 years of service to the NBFT and wished him the very best of luck in his new position.

10. CONSERVATION REGULATIONS UPDATE AND WILD FISHERIES REFORM

CC introduced the paper and invited questions or comments.

ASt asked about the 'opt in'. CC explained that FMS have initiated discussions with Scottish Government officials about an alternative approach to conservation limits, with a view to moving the decision-making process closer to local management.

Marine Scotland Science would continue to assess salmon rivers on an annual basis. However, rather than each river being assigned a grade, the main output of the model would be the percentage chance that the egg requirement for each river has been reached (a current output of the model). This information would be supplied to the relevant DSFB to help inform decisions on the local conservation code.

Where the model predicts that stocks are well below the conservation limit, and assuming that there is broad agreement that the assessment reflects the local view of the state of salmon stocks, a DSFB may wish to continue with a statutory conservation limit approach. It may be possible for DSFBs to 'opt-in' to an annual statutory instrument on that basis.

11.AOCB

NC asked CC, AC, NB, CD and JM to leave the room for private discussion to go ahead. NC reported private HR conditions to be recorded outside of the Board minutes.

CC noted that there is a proposal for a rafting company launching at Holm Mill and running down to Inverness City Centre. GMc reported that Inverness Angling are working on an agreement. CC asked that GMc share the agreement for information as the rafting operations may spread to other reaches of the River Ness.



CC noted that he has followed up on the Highland Council Torvean Hydro Scheme. They have made some changes to the plans. CC has arranged a teleconference with 'Wood' to learn more.

ASt asked for a date in the diary regarding the Finance meeting.

NC invited any other business. No other questions or comments were raised.

The meeting closed at **16.45**