



NESS DISTRICT SALMON FISHERY BOARD Board Meeting Minutes

Time: 14:00

Date: 15th March 2018

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

Present:

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

Alexander Patience: Netsman, Co Option (AP)

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

David Sutherland Ness Castle Lodges, Proprietor (DS)

Graham Mackenzie: Co-Option (GM)

Helen Gray: River Moriston, Mandate (HG)

Janet Campbell: Highland Council, Mandate (JC)

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

In Attendance:

April Conroy: Board Secretary (AC)

Chris Conroy: Chief Executive/Clerk (CC)

John MacColl: Head Bailiff (JM)

Nick Barker: NBFT, (NB)

Observing:

Hugh MacIntosh, Aldourie Estate

Apologies:

Alastair Stephen: SSE (ASt)

Andrew Steel: SEPA (AS)

Angus MacGruer: River Oich, Mandate (AM)

Ben Leyshon: Scottish Natural Heritage (BL)

Eric Craig: Angling Club, Co Option (EC)

Frank Spencer-Nairn (FS-N)

Gordon Armstrong: Ness Castle, Mandate (GA)

Iain McMinn: SSE (IM)

Kenneth Knott: Forestry Commission (KK)

Melanie Smith: UHI Rivers and Lochs Institute (MS)

Michael Martin: Dochfour, Mandate (MM) Chairman

Ryan Rutherford: Ness Castle, Mandate (RR)

1. APOLOGIES

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

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM PREVIOUS MEETING

NC invited comments on each set of minutes:



a. Annual Meeting of Qualified Proprietors (14th December 2017)

No comments were raised. These minutes were proposed for approval by GM and seconded by HG.

b. Ordinary Board Meeting (14th December 2017)

No comments were raised. These minutes were proposed for approval by NB and seconded by GM.

c. Annual Public Meeting (18th January 2018)

No comments were raised. These minutes were proposed for approval by HG and seconded by GM.

CC noted that the minutes will be published on the website and submitted to the Scottish Government as required.

3. ACTIONS LOG

16.03 Convene the Financial Working Group prior to the next Board Meeting. **This is being taken forward by MM who is currently out of the country.**

16.04 Take forward the preparation of a solicitor's letter for fishery assessment debtors. **CC reported that a draft of the letter has just now been received.**

17.01 Present the Greens of Haddington H&S proposal for a full external review of the Ness DSFB and NBFT health and safety policy and procedures at the next NBFT meeting
CC reported that at the last NDSFB Meeting it was decided that a desk-based review of the current Health and Safety manuals was sufficient. However, at the NBFT meeting trustees did not agree, it was felt that the full visit should be carried out. The cost for a full review would be £1,250 excl VAT plus T&S, to split between the Board and the Trust. This included a review of premise and equipment.

Action 18.01 - CC was asked to obtain separate quotes from Greens of Haddington.

17.02 Check whether any other DSFB has received a formal complaint and what was the nature.
CC reported FMS are aware of two formal complaints in the last year or so. These have focussed on procedures relating to publication of minutes, adherence to the DSFB voluntary code of practice, website and annual report content and local management plan matters.

17.03 Contact MS from UHI to discuss the costs associated with the Garry Project genetics work.
CC reported that MM met with MS to discuss in early January 2018.

17.05 and 17.06 Circulate links to 'Historical Changes in Tweed Salmon Runs' and salmon trying to ascend an Achimedes screw on the River Weir. **CC noted that the links requested had been circulated.**

17.07 Arrange a visit to Inchmore Hatchery. **CC Reported that he had contacted Marine Harvest and a visit would be arranged once construction is complete.**

NC invited comments and questions. GM asked whether those designing the Archimedes screw trap. CC reported that he has raised issues the potential with them and that no response has been received.

4. HEALTH AND SAFETY REPORT

CC reported that there were no reportable incidents in this period. The attached report includes a H&S Risk assessment for Rotary Screw Trap Operation as this will commence shortly.

CC reported that we have attended very useful training with SSE Hydro and that this should mean that Chris and John will be able to gain access to keys to gain access to the SSE sites.

JM and CC are due to attend handcuff training with Niton Ltd on the 17th and 18th April 2018, alongside bailiffs from the Spey. This has enabled cost savings on the training as well raising the profile of our approach to enforcement.

5. GOOD GOVERNANCE

CC reported that all governance requirements were currently met.

CC noted that the names on the General Voting procedures contained names that had been superseded and that this had been updated, as attached. CC asked for approval. Unanimous approval was given.

6. FINANCE REPORT

CC noted the finance paper. NC invited questions and comments.

CC introduced the Draft Budget for 2018/19 and thanked Andrew Duncan who has provided assistance in the preparation of the budget. CC reiterated that the current budget is seen as unsustainable and that a root and branch review is required in order to identify potential cost savings.

A number of items of expenditure have come to a natural conclusion. This includes our contribution to the Rivers and Lochs Institute AS3IG project and also that made to Inverness Angling Club. Further to this, the finance committee believes that our current financial position cannot sustain the employment of the two seasonal water bailiffs or the financial contribution to our netsmen. We are seeking alternative means of funding these items. This includes development of a salmon tagging study in the Moray Firth SAC. It is hoped that this will result in an alternative source of funding for netsmen, however the board must accept that this could result in a return to commercial netting.

The items highlighted above, together with adjustment of expenditure in other areas to better reflect the current situation, will result in a saving of £43,000 in the next financial year. We hope that this will protect the core functions of the board and enable us to continue protecting and enhancing the Ness district fishery.

NC described the financial imperative and invited contributions from the Board in terms of resolving the shortfall.

DS commented that the proprietors from the Ness could be gathered, in order to invite further activities and sources of funding. DS noted that the governance requirements and resulting work required of the Board have now increased substantially without any additional funding sources being made available. DS noted that the Salmon Farming industry should also be approached. CC noted that there is a positive relationship within the area. CC noted a current NBFT project on genetic introgression funded by Marine Harvest and that this partnership working could be extended, as long as there is a demonstrable direct benefit to wild fisheries protection.

DS has offered to host a dinner in order to gather other proprietors, in order to seek support for further fund-raising endeavours in the future.

NC commented on the parallel problem that the NBFT also requires a minimum number of commercial contracts in order to sustain itself and that this may not be feasible.

DS asked about which areas within Scotland are comparable in terms of size and income. CC noted that whilst the total area of the Ness district would compare to the Dee, our high value fisheries are few in number which limits income from fishery assessment.

NC referred to the Scottish Government's current financial incentive to encourage fishery board mergers. CC summarised that up to £50k could be applied for, should two boards merge, however a merger would mean a levelling of levy. The levelling of the levy would outweigh the potential income and result in a significant shortfall in future years.

BM sought clarification on the Scottish Government's recently announced £500K support for wild fisheries. CC reported that this includes funding for local fishery trusts to deliver a national electrofishing programme on order 2 and above rivers. On the Ness, most of our spawning is on the main river which is order 1.

BM commented that this enables the government to meet their European statutory requirements. Furthermore, the overall perception of the Ness may look worse, albeit this is based on increased surveying in areas that are not of relative value to the Ness.

Discussion centred on the potential income from a fishing licence across Scotland and how this compares to other countries across the world. CC confirmed that the Cabinet Secretary Roseanna Cunningham has stated that a rod licence will not be considered. NC commented that Scotland must be the only western country in the world without a rod licence.

JC asked whether the goal to get more people out fishing or more about the sources of funding. For example, promoting fishing in a package with hotels. GM reported where this was tried in the past.

CC reported that there has been a lot of work to go into creating a positive following on social media and positive perception of the wild Salmon. This now includes 10,000+ followers on Facebook, plus additional followers on Twitter and Instagram. JC endorsed the view that this plays an important role for Inverness.

DS noted that an extension to the season would potentially be of benefit, especially where this is aligned to the conservation aims.



DS also noted the importance of school visits. NB reported the work planned for this year, but how this is limited by available time and funding. CC reminded the board of the current limited number of staff and the multiple roles that each person is performing.

GM asked NB about the level of interest from Schools. NB reported that Chris Daphne has spent time promoting the opportunity with a number of schools, including Merkinch Primary. NB reported that there is an aspiration to make a larger funding application, in particular to extend activities into tuition on fishing, but that more evidence needs to be collected on the 'need' from schools. This year the focus is on gathering this evidence in order to support future applications.

Action 18.02: JC agreed to follow-up with NB regarding promoting this opportunity within her area.

DS also noted that he would happy to broker a meeting with the HIE Chairman.

18.03 Action: DS to arrange a meeting with HIE to explore potential funding.

AP spoke of recent correspondence between the netsmen and Aberdeen University Cetacean (whale and dolphin) unit in terms of a study into dolphin/salmon interacts in the Moray Firth.

AP asked whether it would be possible for the Highland Council to in some way charge the visitors that gather to watch the Dolphins, who are gathering to eat the Salmon, and for the fees gathered to in part be returned to the Fishery.

DS asked about whether the boats that take visitors to see the fish are licenced or levied and where does that go.

CC pointed out that in terms of fisheries development, Inverness Angling club has the largest number of Junior anglers of any club in Scotland. GM reported that the turnover is high, sitting at c60%. NC reported that his own grandson did struggle to go fishing on his own. NC noted that the perception of young people on the river, amongst the older generation has improved.

NC noted that there were a number of useful points raised and that these would be followed up. In particular the loss of the two seasonal bailiffs and the impact on the current staff.

NC asked whether the current budget would be accepted by the Board. Unanimous agreement was granted.

CC noted that the deadline for assessments passed on 28 February. The total monies owed sits at over £13,000. Given the current financial situation, the outstanding monies will be chased more than in previous years. Additional late payment fees will be charged.

NC reminded people of how the rates are calculated and that recent low catches does not reduce the levy.

7. DIRECTOR / CLERK REPORT

CC introduced the Director's report.



Provisional catches - A provisional total of 925 salmon were reported to the Ness District Salmon Fishery Board in 2017, a decrease of 12 per cent on the 1,056-fish recorded in the previous year and below both the five and ten-year averages (987 fish and 989 fish respectively). This was a disappointing result, particularly given early indications of stabilisation over the previous few years. Grilse catches on the other hand saw an increase on the previous year.

2018 Catches to Date – The 2018 salmon season started well with a 17.5-pound ‘spring’ salmon captured from the River Moriston by Gordon Armstrong on the opening day (15th January 2018). This was the first fish recorded in Scotland.

Drone Surveys - Following our sponsorship of Marcus Valente’s UAV pilot licence training, he has successfully completed the course. There are now two years of comparative ‘redd’ survey data available at key sites.

Spawning observations – Using underwater cameras, the River Ness salmon are spawning much later than any river in Scotland. Anglers have done well to take note, and to raise awareness, of the need to protect the reds in spring. There is a call to now consider the option to ‘shift’ in the statutory rod fishing season on the River Ness (below Dochfour Weir), involving a later start and an equally later finish.

NC noted agreement that the fish do spawn much later in the River Ness than other parts of the Ness system. CC clarified that this change would not be imposed on the upper system.

BM asked for clarification on the issue and why a season shift is being considered. CC explained that under the present situation it is possible that early season anglers could catch salmon that are actively spawning. GM confirmed there have been incidences of fish being caught that are fully laden with eggs and these eggs have spilt out on the bank during handling.

BM would this mean that the river now had to adopt an ‘adaptive’ spawning season. CC disagreed that the season should not be varied year to year, but that a new baseline should be established by evidence captured.

CC reminded the Board that the primary purpose of the statutory closed season is to protect spawning salmon. The information collected over the last two years suggests that the current closed season may not be fit for purpose. The next step is to understand what evidence is required in order to seek legislative change.

All agreed that the Board Support CC in asking the Scottish Government what would be required in order to seek to change the season.

18.04 Action: CC to approach the Scottish Government regarding the feasibility of a ‘season shift’ on the River Ness to protect late spawning fish.

Upper Garry Salmon Restoration Project - NC asked about the first 23,500 eggs produced from Garry broodfish at Drimsallie and how many adults might be expected from that number. NB commented that it might be around 23.

CC noted a recent outage in generation at Garry Dam and the impacts on water flow and fishing conditions in the Garry and Oich. CC has written to SSE Transmission regarding the potential impacts on both fishing and smolt escapement, as well as the very disappointing lack of consultation. CC has

asked for 'above compensation' flow and raised the expectation with SSE Transmission that they may receive compensation claims from effected fisheries.

8. HEAD BAILIFF'S REPORT

JM introduced his report. The smolt pass will have to be opened at Dochfour.

JM noted that Billy would be unavailable to assist with the bird count and so volunteers will be needed around the 26th April onwards.

CC explained how aviation predation prevention is carried out. At this stage in the season, predominantly bird scaring is being used. He reminded everyone that the quota on the licence is based on the number of birds counted, and therefore if volunteers cannot be found to carry out the bird count at the correct time, it is likely that the quota would reduce.

BM asked about otters eating smolts.

9. NBFT SENIOR BIOLOGIST REPORT

NB introduced his report.

Pearl Mussels -NB gave background on the Pearl Mussel project.

Beavers - NB noted a recent consultation regarding the potential reintroduction of Beavers.

Scottish Water consultations - Some discussion took place around plans for a new water main which will cross the River Oich, Caledonian Canal and River Tarff in Fort Augustus. NB reported that the consultation to date has been very good and that the crossing will utilise directional drilling. This should minimise/avoid disturbance to fisheries.

10. CONSERVATION REGULATIONS UPDATE AND WILD FISHERIES REFORM

CC introduced the paper. CC reiterated that the Scottish Government plans have been scaled back due to lack of funding. Ms Cunningham has stated that a new Bill is expected, that a rod licence has been ruled out, and that the fisheries sector has an opportunity to develop novel ideas.

CC reported 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.

11. PROPOSED RESEARCH PROJECTS

CC provided some background on the potential projects.

Pilot salmon tagging project to study salmon-dolphin interactions in the Moray Firth SAC - The distribution and behaviour of bottlenose dolphins within the Moray Firth is believed to be closely related to the movements of returning adult salmon. However, there remains much uncertainty over the nature of this interaction and the extent to which protected dolphins may depend upon salmon, or the impact that they may be having on protected salmon stocks. Advances in fish tracking and



fisheries acoustics now provide opportunities to collect data on prey distribution and behaviour that can be used in combination with ongoing studies of dolphin behaviour and distribution to better understand these interactions.

CC explained that AP would assist with the tagging. The temperature receivers in the tags would indicate whether a salmon had been eaten or not, as the receiver would read the body temperature of the dolphin. CC gave credit to AP for all of the work that has gone into the support for this potential project and highlighted it would be an excellent initiative for the Ness district.

AP noted that Dougie MacDougal has had established that water quality testing associated with Alturlie Sewage Treatment Works should have been carried out at sea under the Water Framework Directive, but that it has not been tested in recent years.

NC noted that this would be timely, given that there is a new discharge planned. Water quality as a baseline and ongoing sampling is very important.

Scotland River Temperature Monitoring Network (SRTMN) - The Ness DSFB/NBFT have been formally invited to join Marine Scotland Science's (MSS's) Scotland River Temperature Monitoring Network (SRTMN). Water temperature is important for the growth, production and survival of freshwater fish and there is concern over rising temperatures under climate change.

BM asked about the use of the word 'corrected'. CC confirmed that this just means the temperature is calibrated to ensure it remains an accurate reading.

Assessing the impact of the Caledonian Canal at Abercalder and Laggan on the downstream migration of Atlantic salmon smolts - CC confirmed this is about identifying and quantifying any losses of salmon smolts into the Caledonian Canal system.

CC explained that the funding required is currently too large for the Board to fund, however the project could attract funding and it would help to inform future fisheries management actions.

12.AOCB

NC invited any other business.

CC noted an email from Scottish Salmon Fishing Surgery who have requested to be added to the Ness DSFB links page in return for them featuring links to the Board. No issues were raised.

No other questions or comments were raised.

The meeting closed at **16.48**