

NESS DISTRICT SALMON FISHERY BOARD Board Meeting Minutes

Time: 14:00

Date: 15th June 2017

Location: Telford Boardroom, Inverness Caledonian Thistle Football Club

Present:

Michael Martin: Dochfour, Mandate (MM) Chairman
Alexander Patience: Netsman, Co Option (AP)
Angus MacGruer: River Oich, Mandate (AM)
Annie Girvan: River Moriston, Mandate (AG)
David Haas: Highland Council, Mandate (DH)
Eric Craig: Angling Club, Co-Option (EC)
Graham Mackenzie: Co-Option (GM)
Neil Cameron: Ness & Beaully Fisheries Trust (NBFT), Co-option (NC)
Ryan Rutherford: Ness Side, Mandate (RR)

In Attendance:

Alastair Stephen: SSE (ASt)
Chris Conroy: Chief Executive/Clerk (CC)
April Conroy: Board Secretary (AC)
John MacColl: Head Bailiff (JM)
Melanie Smith: UHI Rivers and Lochs Institute (MS)
Helen Gray: River Moriston (HG)

Apologies:

Andrew Steel: SEPA (AS)
Bob Morgan: River Gary, Mandate/Alternate (BM)
Ben Leyshon: Scottish Natural Heritage (BL)
David Sutherland: Ness Castle, Proprietor (DS)
Kenneth Knott: Forestry Commission (KK)
Nick Barker: NBFT (NB)

1. APOLOGIES

Michael Martin (MM) introduced the meeting and noted apologies as above.

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM PREVIOUS MEETING

NDSFB Board Meeting (March 2016) meeting minutes were reviewed with no comments raised. The meeting minutes were approved unanimously.

3. ACTIONS LOG

- 13.07 Purchase and issue the length/weight measuring tapes: **Complete, measuring tapes now being distributed. Proposal to giveaway a bottle of whiskey to the first photographed use of the tape measures - Whiskey donated by Ness Side Fishery**

- 14.01 All voting board members to complete a new declaration of financial interest form at the earliest opportunity: **Due, CC apologised for not yet distributing forms to new members and encouraged existing members to submit their forms.**
- 14.02 Elect a 'Finance Sub-Committee' to consider options for addressing current financial situation: **MM reported that this committee would not be formed until later and would be led by Andrew Duncan.**
- 14.03 Arrange for a solicitors letter with a seven day notice to be prepared and sent to two proprietors whom have continued not to pay: **Carried forward.**
- 14.04 Agree to Public Relations contract price increase with McAllister Media: **Complete**
- 14.05 Clarify cost and produce a formal agreement between Mr Valente and Ness DSFB (relating to the provision of drone services) for approval at the next meeting: **Complete, draft agreement produced for consideration by the Ness DSFB.**

4. HEALTH AND SAFETY REPORT

Two minor incidents reported and logged. Related risks have been considered. The paper was briefly reviewed by CC including an update on some recent training and Continuous Professional Development. MM reminded CC, JM and the team to please continue to be safety aware and vigilant to risks.

5. GOOD GOVERNANCE

CC reported that all good governance requirements are currently fulfilled. CC confirmed that the Register of Interest still needs to be updated by all voting members and CC confirmed that there are currently no complaints. DH confirmed that following the recent local elections, a new Councillor will represent The Highland Council on the Ness DSFB. The position is due to be filled on Monday (19th June).

6. FINANCE REPORT

CC noted the finance paper and invited questions and comments.

ASt asked for the latest update on the Genetics work. CC reported that there are now milestones agreed for the work that is due and that it is important these are met. MS reported that they are recruiting for a new position in order to carry out this work and that she is confident the work will move forward as required.

CC highlighted a number of issues with the Toyota Hilux due to its age, suggested it should be replaced in the near future. MM suggested that this be discussed by the Finance Sub-Committee.

7. DIRECTOR / CLERK REPORT

CC provided a review of the Director/Clerk report.

He reported that Marine Scotland Science (MSS) has published its final salmon and sea trout fishery statistics for the 2016 season. Overall this has resulted in an increase in the provisional total annual salmon rod catch from 1,054 fish to 1,056 fish.

CC indicated that the current season to date is showing a reduction compared to the previous period. In terms of the national picture in Scotland, the total reported rod catch (retained and released) of wild salmon and grilse for 2016 was 55,109 fish. This is an increase over the return for 2015 (54,969 fish), but only 80 per cent of the previous 5-year average. Reported catch and effort for the fixed engine and net and coble fisheries were the lowest recorded by either fishery since records began in 1952.

CC reported that a Fisheries Impact Assessment (FIA) for the proposed Scottish Canals works at Ness Weir has been completed, together with a Habitats Regulations Assessment (covering any potential impacts on the River Moriston SAC). This requires the provision of a temporary fish pass adjacent to the SSE sluice gates. It also states that no in-river works be carried out before 1st July to protect smolts. CC noted concern over the creation of an access track made with unwashed stone across the crest of the service weir very recently. This had been reported to SEPA.

ASt asked whether a detailed plan of the proposed fish pass has been provided. SSE has given permission, with caveats, including the need to approve the plan – which has not been provided. CC agreed to share the Impact Assessment, which was all that had been provided to date.

CC highlighted that he had been invited to a workshop regarding the Ness Weir Refurbishment Works on the 22nd June 2017. MM expressed concern, as the Dochfour Mandate, that their prime fishing spot is directly downstream and this is the height of the fishing season.

DH confirmed that a Management Plan is being prepared for Whin Park Lade which will clarify the tasks and responsibilities to ensure the flow is maintained.

CC described current proposals for scour protection works on the Holm Mills Weir as part of the West Link Bridge Construction works. GMcK asked whether the Smolt Pass would be blocked. CC confirmed that it would due to the requirement for the creation of a dry working area. He also confirmed that water would be 'overpumped' in to the Whin Park Lade to maintain flows. GMcK identified that this would need to be closely monitored.

MM asked DH about the general condition of the Holm Weir and whether any further repair works were planned. DH confirmed that THC is considering options for improving the weir and that there is an absolute commitment to maintain it.

At this point MM thanked AG for her long-standing contribution to the Board and all wished Annie very well in her retirement. AG handed over the position of River Moriston Mandate to her replacement Sarah Gray (SG) from Glenmoriston Estate. All welcomed SG to the Ness DSFB.

DH and AG left the meeting at this point.

CC described planned works to improve fish passage at the Holm Burn Weir. This involved construction of a new improved fish pass as part refurbishment works by THC. RR confirmed that further bank repair works will be completed at the mouth of the burn and that the silt pond would also be dredged.

CC provided some background on how the local Salmon Netting Project proposal came about and the disappointing lack of support to take it forward at this time. Initial indications from Marine Scotland were that financial support would be available. On the 28th April 2017 Marine Scotland informed us that they were unable find the funds to support the research this financial year. AP confirmed that the Salmon Association has a meeting with the Scottish Government next week and that this would be on the Agenda. CC proposed an initial meeting with UHI to explore collaborative research opportunities with local salmon netmen. MS agreed.

Action 15:01 - CC to arrange an initial meeting with UHI to explore collaborative research opportunities with local salmon netmen.

CC drew attention to the Unmanned Aerial System/Drone Service Agreement proposal and recommended its approval. MM invited comments. CC indicated that the priority would be to gather comparable visual data from a number of index spawning locations across the Ness district. CC clarified that the agreement would be for an initial 2 year period.

MM indicated that some individual proprietors may be willing to subsidise the priority of work on their beats, for example by using the drone to create promotional material. CC indicated that there would need to be some flexibility and an element of trust with this agreement. GMcK and RR both gave their vote of confidence, expressing an expectation that the proposed vendor would be motivated to fulfil the agreement.

MM asked whether there was agreement around the table and the census was to support the proposal.

Action 15:02 - CC to formalise the Unmanned Aerial System/Drone Service Agreement with Marcus Valente.

CC reported progress on the Upper Garry Salmon Restoration Project programme. He confirmed that both the 2016 and 2017 brood stock are doing extremely well at Drimsallie Hatchery. The UHI Rivers and Lochs Institute now have an agreed scope of works and plan of action. As long as key milestones are met in terms of genetic analysis, the works will progress to the stripping of the 2016 brood fish during this autumn/winter period.

<BREAK>

8. HEAD BAILIFF'S REPORT

JM reported that the two summer bailiff positions were now active.

JM requested copies of keys allowing access to SSE sites. ASt indicated that would not be straight-forward and he asked for a list to the areas where access is required. JM described the locations and the incidents that have taken place recently. ASt indicated that two days of AP4 training may be required in order clear the access and that the aim would be to distil this training to the elements required, reducing training time down from two days.

MM invited questions and comments. AMcG commented that the catches for the River Oich seemed low. JMcc clarified some elements not included. CC commented that overall spring catches do seem to be lower than last year.

GMcK asked who called JM out to the Beauly. JM confirmed it was a Beauly Bailiff. MM asked whether reciprocal support is given. JM and CC confirmed it has in the past. GMcK question the equitable cost contributions for covers. MM suggested that this is a matter for the Financial Committee to discuss.

MM clarified whether the warrants are valid outside of the Ness. JM confirmed the warrants are relevant on adjoining catchments only.

9. NBFT SENIOR BIOLOGIST REPORT

CC introduced the NBFT report and invited comments. CC commented on the projected workflow this summer especially given the contract work planned.

CC noted £14k of funding secured by NB from the Landfill Fund for treating Invasive Non-Native Plant Species. CC commented on how essential this work is given the rate at which these invasive species can come back even if treatment is stopped for a short period.

AMcG asked why there were no electrofishing sites on the Oich listed in the Report. CC agreed to check this with NB.

Action 15:03 - CC to ask NB why there are no River Oich sites in this year's electrofishing survey programme.

10. CONSERVATION REGULATIONS UPDATE

CC explained that Marine Scotland Science (MSS) have now introduced a 'latitudinal effect' in terms of population estimates for northern rivers. MSS believed that exploitation rates are higher in northern rivers than those in southern rivers (i.e. a greater proportion of the total salmon population are caught by rod and line). They intend to adjust population estimates in light of this information. This could result in a reduction in the total estimated salmon runs on the Ness and Beauly, which could in turn have a knock on effect on the conservation status.

Subsequent discussion was had about the exploitation rate within the catchment, with the general consensus that it is likely to be lower than most northern rivers. This is due to the fact that the salmon run straight through the River Ness into Loch Ness.

CC confirmed that the Ness DSFB would be formally consulted by MSS before the results are made publically available.

CC provided an update on the Acoustic Tagging programme including describing where the receivers will be positioned. ASt asked who would test the 400m range that is claimed, as this can be variable based on past experience. ASt urged a range test to be incorporated. CC/MM agreed to raise this.

Action 15:04 - CC to raise the issue of range testing the Armadale Tagging Project Acoustic receivers with MSS.

11. WILD FISHERIES REFORM UPDATE

CC summarised the paper and reported updates from a recent Fisheries Management Scotland board meeting.

CC noted concerns about key elements, including the proposal to include statutory responsibilities without providing any additional funding. CC clarified that the NDSFB would fully support the production of Fisheries Management Plans, however he believe that this should not be a statutory requirement.

A lengthy discussion and debate took place. CC was charged with taking some of the questions and comments from the Board to the next FMS meeting.

Action 15:05 - CC was asked to invite Dr Alan Wells to the next board meeting to discuss Fisheries Management Scotland's priorities going forward.

12. AOCB

AP reported that he and fellow salmon netsman Graeme Sutherland would agree to an extension of the existing conservation agreement. This would mean that their stations would not be operated between May 2017 and May 2018. MM asked the Board whether they would support such an agreement under the existing terms, this proposal received unanimous support. MM thanked AP and Graeme Sutherland for their agreement. CC confirmed that he is looking ahead to future research opportunities and AP asked that this be considered in good time as approvals can take time.

Action 15:06 - CC to formalise agreements with netsmen Alexander Patience and Graeme Sutherland covering the period from May 2017 to May 2018.

CC noted that his personal small tender (inflatable boat) has been used for work purposes and that a repair was required. CC requested permission cover the costs of the repairs and service of outboard motor. RR identified a possible supplier of the repairs services. MM granted approval.

The meeting closed at 16:28