

NESS DISTRICT SALMON FISHERY BOARD Annual Public Meeting Minutes

Time: 19:30

Date: 17th January 2019

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

1. ATTENDANCE

The public meeting was attended by 26 individuals including local anglers from across the district, representatives from Inverness Angling Club, Dochfour Estate, University of Highlands and Islands, River Cassley, River Oich, Loop Tackle Design, Ness Castle Fishery and the Ness and Beaully Fisheries Trust.

2. PRESENTATIONS

1. *Introduction*

Michael Martin – Chairman, Ness District Salmon Fishery Board (NDSFB)

Michael gave a brief welcome and introduction to the 2018 Annual Report and Accounts for the year ended 15th May 2018.

2. *"2018 - 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. *"Building a Strong Global Community and Pooling Expertise"*

Gordon Sim – Chief Executive Officer for Loop Tackle Design

Gordon spoke about the world class fisheries management applied to Loop's own river systems in Labrador (Canada), the companies wish to act as a 'global conduit for best practice' and his own passion for salmon fishing.

3. QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

Questions were invited after the presentations. Topics discussed included:

- ***Do we think the Scottish Government will stop or buy-out netting nationally?***

CC said he could not say for sure what the Government would do in the future. It is likely that coastal nets (i.e. bag nets) would remain closed at least in the short-term, due to their perceived status as 'mixed stock fisheries'. A total Government buyout of both coastal and inshore nets (i.e. net and coble fisheries) was unlikely anytime soon. MM clarified that net and coble fisheries tend to operate within rivers. It is unusual that in the Ness district this kind of fishing takes place further out into the Estuary.

The Ness has a very unique and complex fishery. MM added that the Ness Board has a collaborative and constructive relationships with local netsmen.

- ***Is there any work being done to calculate the population size of dolphins and seals - it seems that we are seeing more?***

CC commented that an annual seal count is completed by the Scottish Government. He believed that the general trend is for a decreasing number of common (harbour) seals, but an increasing number of grey seals. CC said that he believed the dolphin population in the Moray Firth could be best described as stable rather than increasing. He reported that work is being carried out to quantify the impact of dolphins on salmon populations.

Given that dolphins are a protected species, there is little that can be done to address any issues. Therefore, perhaps the best 'line to take' going forward is to recognise that salmon are an important food source for dolphins. If the salmon population declines, then this may have a knock-on impact on the status of the dolphin population. In this way the dolphin could potentially be used as a driver for salmon conservation.

Gordon Sim (GS) commented that in Canada, research has been carried out that showed certain seals (not all seals) become accustomed and attuned to salmon. These individuals are having the most impact. Culling in those circumstances could be carried out, with the evidence gathered first. He also added that on some Canadian rivers there are seal colonies which stretch for many miles along the mouths of rivers, yet the salmon populations in those rivers continue to exist.

- ***Are 'repeat spawning' salmon common in Labrador?***

GS reported that they can be relatively common. Science conducted by LOOP on the Hunt River in Labrador has shown that kelts that leave the river in June can return in late August/early September of the same year having reconditioned relatively close-by. CC reported that repeat spawning on the Ness tended to recondition at sea for an entire year.

4. AOCB

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

5. CLOSE

MM thanked the guest speaker Gordon Sim – Chief Executive Officer for Loop Tackle Design, together with Chris Conroy. Finally, he thanked everyone for coming and wished them a successful fishing season.

THE MEETING CLOSED AT 21.45