

Subject: Ness District Salmon Fishery Board
Date: 16 June 2022
Location: An Lochran, Inverness Campus & by Video Conference via Zoom
Present: Neil Cameron, Mandate, Ness Castle Lodges (NC)
Thomas MacDonell, Wildlands Ltd, Dochfour (TM)
Graham Mackenzie, Co-optee Ness District Anglers (GM)
Angus MacGruer: River Oich Proprietor (AM)
Chris Bruce, Co-optee Inverness Angling Club (CB)

In attendance: David Sutherland, Ness Castle Lodges (DS)
Bob Morgan, River Garry
Dr Victoria Pritchard (UHI Rivers & Lochs Institute)
Brian Shaw, Board Director (BS)
John MacColl, Head Bailiff (JM)
Chris Daphne, Fisheries Biologist (CD)
Alastair Campbell, Clerk (AC)



MINUTES

ITEM	ACTION OWNER
1.0 Apologies and introduction	
1.1 NC outlined a number of changes that had recently taken place. As previously notified, Brian Shaw had taken over as the Board's Director and Alastair Campbell of Bidwells (AC) had taken over as Clerk to the Board. Alastair Stephen (SSE) and Janet Campbell (Highland Council) had resigned from the Board following retirement of both. SSE were no longer sending a representative to Board meetings, but instead had offered two liaison meetings per annum. These would be attended on behalf of the Board by BS; NC & AM. Chris Bruce of Inverness Angling Club had recently been co-opted as representative of local anglers in place of Harry Fraser.	
1.2 Apologies were recorded from Steven Gray, Andrew Steel (SEPA), Melanie Smith and Scott MacKenzie.	
2.0 Approval of minutes from previous meeting	
2.1 The minutes of the NDSFB Board meeting of 17 March 2022 were approved. Action - A final copy of the minutes to be published on the Board's website.	AC/BS
3.0 Actions log	
3.1 28.01 – Sept '21 - <i>The CEO/Clerk to add the issue of smolts becoming trapped in the Caledonian Canal to future action logs.</i> Still in discussion with Scottish Canals. Additional data from the 2022 smolt trapping now available.	
3.2 28.08 – Sept '21 - <i>Board to make a decision regarding the employment of a new fisheries assistant as soon as possible.</i> Rose Agus had completed her funded trainee contract and is now engaged by the Board on a 1-year contract.	

- 3.3 30.01 – March 22 – *BS to provide formal notification of new address to SSE.* Done. Funding expected to be received imminently.
- 3.4 30.04 – March 22 - *BS to investigate a potential replacement van with possible delivery after September.* New vehicle now purchased.
- 3.5 30.08 – March 22 - *JM to liaise with CB and Angling Club members (sawbill scaring).* Outstanding. **JM**
- 3.6 30.11 – March 22 – *New accountants. AC to forward a written proposal once received.* A9 Accountancy in process of being appointed.
- 3.7 30.12 – March 22. *Press Officer - NC to follow up with Bill McAllister.* Done.
- 3.8 30.13 – March 22 *Future of NBFT - NC/BS to discuss with Beaully DSFB and revert to the Board with a proposal.* NC reported Jock Miller had resigned as Chair of Beaully DSFB, but suggested he might be asked to continue as Chair of NBFT. G Mackenzie noted it had previously been suggested he (GM) re-join the Trust Board; this still to be formalised. **NC**

4.0 Health and Safety report

- 4.1 There had been no incidents to report.

5.0 Good Governance

- 5.1 An updated summary of the Board's duties and powers had been prepared and circulated prior to the meeting.

6.0 Finance report

- 6.1 A finance report with quarterly management accounts and summary balance sheet up to 15 May 2022 had been circulated prior to the meeting. BS noted that the management accounts up to that date showed a healthy operating profit of over £62,000. This was largely due to savings made on staff and fuel costs arising from vacancies, together with an increase in contract income.
- 6.2 It was noted that the previously predicted cash-flow deficit in 2022 / 2023 was likely to be resolved due to potential Scottish Government funding (administered through FMS) for National Adult Scale Sampling and for updating the Board's Fishery Management Plan.
- 6.3 BS had written to all proprietors with outstanding assessments. Five payments had been received in response. Debt now stood at just under £16,000 for current year and a further £7,000 long-term.

Actions:

For current debts, Clerk to write a formal letter.

AC

For older longstanding debts an individual approach should be made where possible and thereafter formal legal demand should be drafted by a lawyer and issued to the relevant proprietors.

NC/BS

A review to be undertaken of the dates on which levy demands are issued to proprietors.

NC/BS

7.0 Valuation Roll – Revaluation 2023

7.1 The Board had recently received correspondence from the Assessor's office seeking confirmation if the Board would require a revaluation of the fishery entries on the valuation roll with effect from 2023.

7.2 There were mixed views amongst those present on whether a 5-yearly revaluation would be beneficial.

Action - BS & the Clerk were asked to prepare a summary for the Board on the potential pros and cons of a revaluation.

BS/AC

8.0 River Ness habitat restoration study

8.1 BS summarise the report that had been received shortly from CBEC and which had been circulated prior to the meeting. In summary: -

- The report highlighted a uniformity of habitat with more diversity required, in particular a lack of suitable parr habitat
- BS had requested visualisations / illustrations of proposed alterations to the river and will forward these to the Board when received
- Unfortunately the consultant brief had not included provision for presentation of results to the Board
- Many of the identified actions require significant funding, but it is better to align objectives with relevant landowners / SEPA in advance and then be ready to proceed when funding sources become available
- Projects identified are a good opportunity for engagement with the angling community, including Inverness AC.

9.0 Smolt Tracking 2021 Report & 2022 update

9.1 A summary of River Garry smolt tracking results from 2021 and summary of 2022 tagging was circulated prior to the meeting. BS gave a verbal update to the meeting of initial results from the 2022 tracking, but as the data belongs to AST, this will be made available at a later date. However, BS confirmed the 2022 survival rate from the 125 tagged fish was the highest in the 3 years of the study, with 24% reaching the Inverness harbour. A full report should be available for the next Board meeting.

9.2 BS is keen to continue the study longer term, beyond the initial 3-year AST study. Potential may exist for further study through the proposed Red John hydro development.

9.3 In response to a question on potential trapping and trucking smolts from the Garry to Dochfour, to avoid losses, BS stated this would likely be a) costly and b) counterproductive to survival as the smolts require time in the river to adapt before moving to sea.

10.0 Director's report / Activity report

10.1 BS spoke to the Report that had been circulated to the Board prior to the meeting. The following items were highlighted: -

- The netting station proprietors have indicated that, in the absence of compensation package, they intend to fish for four weeks up to 26 August, with a pledge to limit catches to 100 fish per station. An indication of interest in selling the netting rights had been made and the proprietors had been asked to come back to the Board with a proposed figure for discussion.

- BS requested authority to purchase a Gro-Pro underwater camera. This was approved, estimated cost £500. GM offered to donate an unused camera to the Board.
- A proposal to relocate beaver from the Tay catchment to both the Beaully and Spey catchments is currently being considered by Scottish Government and its agencies (FLS & Nature Scot). The timescale for this is unclear, but this could have longer term implications for the Ness catchment if populations later spread.

11.0 Bailiff's report

- 11.1 A written bailiff's report had been circulated prior to the meeting.
- 11.2 Of two previous cases referred to the Police / Procurator Fiscal (2020 / 2021), one had recently been dropped and one resulted in a Fiscal warning being issued. JM expressed disappointment at this outcome.
- 11.3 IFM training. An update on training and exam dates is still awaited.
Action – JM to continue to follow up.

JM

12.0 Health & Safety Training Plan

- 12.1 A proposed training plan had been circulated prior to the Board meeting. This was approved.
Action – a proposal on aerial drone cost and use to be prepared for the next Board meeting.

BS

13.0 Juvenile Stocks Monitoring

- 13.1 As previously noted, there is no NEPS programme for 2022. The report on previous NEPS studies is still awaited from Marine Scotland Science.
- 13.2 BS had circulated a paper proposing to build on original juvenile stock surveys by AURIS in the early 1990s. This would involve timed surveys on the main stem rivers (Ness, Moriston, Garry), taking around 23 days. This proposal was approved by the Board.

14.0 Other matters

- 14.1 Prior notice of the triennial election of a new Board in September 2022 was given.
Action – Clerk & BS to liaise over issue of statutory notice requirements in good time.
- 14.2 Consideration to be given to whether the Board should become more involved in promoting angling on the Ness system.
Action – A paper to be presented to the next meeting on benefits / disadvantages.
- 14.3 NC proposed the formation of a remuneration committee from amongst Board members to discuss and agree on staff packages in future. The Board agreed this proposal in principle.
Action – Nominees required for September meeting (subject to outcome of triennial election).

BS/AC

BS

NC

15.0 Any other competent business

- 15.1 It was confirmed that the Annual Meeting of Qualified Proprietors and the next Board meeting will be held on the afternoon of 15 September 2022.

ALL

15.2 There being no further business, the meeting was closed.

DRAFT