

Subject: Ness District Salmon Fishery Board
Date: 15 December 2022
Location: An Lochran, Inverness Campus & by Video Conference via Zoom
Present: Neil Cameron, Mandate, Ness Castle Lodges (NC)
Graham Mackenzie, Co-optee Ness District Anglers (GM)
Angus MacGruer: River Oich Proprietor (AM); C Balance,
Mandate Highland Council; M Riddell, Co-optee, Loch Ness
Anglers; Paul Ryder, Mandate, Ness-side (PR);
In attendance: P Williamson, River Garry Proprietor; H Williamson, R
Garry; David Sutherland, Proprietor Ness Castle Lodges
(DS)
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 Apologies were recorded from: Steven Gray and Chris Bruce	
1.2 It was with considerable sadness the Board noted the death in September of Bob Morgan who had been a valued Board member for a long number of years and whose vast knowledge, particularly of the River Garry, would be greatly missed.	
2.0 Approval of minutes from previous meeting	
2.1 The minutes of the NDSFB Board meeting of 15 September 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 30.10 – <i>Annual Public Meeting</i> . Proposed to be held in January 2023. Board to agree date and venue.	
3.2 28.10 – <i>Review and update existing sea trout guidance and make available at the places where permits are issued</i> . Outstanding.	
3.3 Item 6.4 – Sept 22 <i>It was agreed that the single authorisation payment limit on the Board's internet banking facility should be reduced from £15,000 to £5,000</i> . A9 Accountants to advise on appropriate level. BS to report back to Board.	BS
4.0 Health and Safety report	
4.1 There had been no incidents to report. A report by the Director had been circulated prior to the meeting and was taken as read.	

5.0 Good Governance

- 5.1 **Action - Clerk to send a Register of Interest declaration form to new Board members. FMS guidance paper on good governance to be sent to all members.**

AC/BS

6.0 Finance report

- 6.1 BS reported with regret that Deidre Watson, who had looked after the Board's books for over ten years, had recently died. After a short hiatus in book-keeping, A9 Accountants had been appointed and were now largely caught up with the accounts.

- 6.2 A copy of the Board's management accounts for the six months to 15 November 2022 had been circulated prior to the meeting. Expenditure was lower than budgeted due to one fewer staff member than expected. Proprietor assessment demands had been sent out and income was due in February. The Board's bank balance was healthy at just under £200,000. As a consequence, it had been agreed by the Board (by email exchange) to retain the temporary 12.5% discount on assessments in 2022-2023.

- 6.3 A full review of the proprietor assessments would be undertaken prior to the 2023-24 notices. It was agreed a working group should be set up to consider this in detail.

Action – Assessment working group to be set up.

NC

- 6.4 An update on current debtors was provided in the finance report to the meeting. There remained a couple of long-outstanding debtors. And it was noted that escalatory action should be taken against these. It was noted that any proprietor who remained in arrears should not be permitted to participate or vote in Board meetings.

Action – escalatory action to be taken against long-outstanding debtors

BS

7.0 Loch Ness Pumped Storage Schemes

- 7.1 BS had prepared and circulated a discussion paper prior to the meeting, outlining concerns relating to the cumulative impact of proposed new pump storage schemes on Loch Ness, in particular Red John and Loch Kemp (in addition to the long-standing Foyers scheme), though a potential fourth scheme had also been mooted.

- 7.2 CB submitted a declaration of interest. As a member of the Council's planning committee he could not make public comment on a live planning application as this could prevent him subsequently participating in the committee's decisions.

- 7.3 It was reported that the cumulative impact on the rapid fluctuation of loch levels if all the schemes abstracted or discharged water to the loch concurrently could be: -
Foyers – currently 3.5 to 4 inches (more than twice the volume of the River Ness average flow)
+ Red John – take cumulative impact to 8 inches fluctuation
+ Loch Kemp take cumulative impact to 1ft fluctuation
+ potential 4th scheme could take cumulative impact to 1m

- 7.4 A wider ranging discussion took place covering amongst other things: -
- Concerns over the impact of migrating smolts potentially disorientated by large scale abstraction flows in particular, making them more vulnerable to predation.
 - Concerns over the impact on fish spawning and redds in the fringes of the loch.
 - Concerns over the impact on populations of fresh-water pearl mussels and oysters in the mouth of the River Moriston.

- Concerns over how management of sluice gates on the Dochfour weir could be achieved with several separate schemes operating. Comments were also made that the current sluice management was not particularly responsive to the Foyers scheme. It was noted that an inflatable barrier had been proposed to supplement the weir, which could be inflated / deflated as required, though it was not know if this has been trialled elsewhere.
- Concerns were expressed that such a barrier could prevent freshets / spates on the River Ness, required to encourage fish passage.
- It was noted that the new planning framework, NPF4, is in favour of such renewable developments and that to have merit, any objection would require to be strongly evidenced

7.5 BS reported that initial engagement had taken place with Statera, who were developing the Loch Kemp scheme. They had indicated support for funding a smolt tracking study. Approaches had been made in respect of Red John, however it was understood this scheme was currently for sale. BS was also seeking a meeting with the Scottish Government's Energy Consents Unit to ensure they were fully aware of the potential impacts.

7.6 It was agreed that the Board should continue to object to all schemes until their full impact on migrating fish was known. It was agreed that, given the potential scale of impact on salmon fisheries, that a working group should be set up from amongst the Board to address concerns as a matter of urgency.

Action – working group to be set up

NC/BS

8.0 Director's report

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

- The annual rod catch reported to date was 767 salmon. Anticipated final total for the year was around 800.
- Concerns over smolts becoming stuck in the canal had been raised at a meeting with Scottish Canals. One suggestion for further consideration was the installation of a removable net across the canal mouth at Dochfour.
- DNA analysis by Marine Scotland had confirmed the presence of escaped farmed smolts in Loch Ness. It was understood Marine Scotland inspectors had now visited the farm site.
- Issues with the old Isuzu pic-up were discussed in the report. An offer had been received for the vehicle at £10,000, which was above the book value in the accounts. It was noted that the second vehicle had recently come out of its finance contract, freeing up budget resource for a new purchase. It was agreed that a replacement vehicle should be purchased second hand at 12-18 months old, low mileage.

Action: BS to source replacement vehicle

BS

9.0 Activity Report

9.1 A report on recent activities had been circulated prior to the meeting. CD reported on the juvenile surveys conducted in 2022. The format differed from recent years due to there being no NEPS contract. This meant historic sites could be revisited (last assessed by AURIS in 1993) to assess changes over time. Overall higher densities had been observed, which was encouraging, though this should be caveated in relation to potential differences in equipment and user technique. More detailed results are in the report.

9.2 PW expressed concerns over compensation flow levels on the Garry in winter, which resulted in very low water levels, endangering spawning redds. It was not clear what the historic reason for this was, but it was agreed this should be raised with SSE. It was commented that the situation on the Moriston is similar.

Action: BS / NC to raise with SSE at next liaison meeting

9.3 BS commented on the following additional points for discussion with SSE, as detailed in the report.

- Kelts stuck in the River Garry after the Borlund lift ceases for winter
- Freshets at Clunie affecting upper Moriston spawning
- SSE intended to commission a report on the fish pass at Ceannacroc heck

9.4 PR commented on concerns over flows in Holm Burn, Inverness, controlled by Scottish Water. BS confirmed this was on the radar to seek improvements.

10.0 Bailiff's report

10.1 A full bailiff's written report had been circulated prior to the meeting. This was taken as read.

10.2 JM commented that, due to apparent backlogs at the Fiscal's office, no fines had recently been issued for poaching offences, but only written warnings.

11.0 Purchase of Drones

11.1 CD presented a paper on options for the purchase of drones to improve fisheries management, along with training and licence requirements. Initial costs estimated at £3,750 to £4,000. PR queried what the annual cost might be, including batteries and damage. It was noted the annual cost of software was £450. MR commented that care had to be taken not to film members of the public without consent.

11.2 Following discussion it was confirmed to proceed with a purchase and training at an initial budget of £3,500.

12.0 Conservation Policy 2023

12.1 BS spoke to a paper circulated prior to the meeting, noting that the catch and release rate on the Ness was lower than desirable and had declined recently. This will not be helped by the resumption of netting. A discussion took place about how to improve rates. It was concluded that the policy should remain unchanged, with efforts focused on persuasion and compliance with the policy.

12.2 It had been noted by several Board Members that an upper river proprietor had been letting fishing in the upper Garry in October through Fishpal. During discussions it became clear that other proprietors also allowing fishing into October. BS was of the opinion that breaches of the long-standing agreement concerning the cessation of angling in the catchment upstream

of Dochfour Weir at the end of September were limited, and that the voluntary season end was generally well-respected. AS stated, that he was in favour of the continuation of the current agreement, but that it should apply to equally to all proprietors in the upper Ness system including Loch Ness in the interests of fairness. It was agreed to consider this, along with the overall policy ahead of the 2024 season. **Action point**

13.0 Any other competent business

- 13.1 NC reported that a remuneration committee consisting of AM, TM & NC had met and agreed staff salary reviews. These were being implemented.
- 13.2 PW reported to the Board on increased difficulties with canoeists on the River Garry, following years of useful cooperation. This was largely due to new players on the scene.
- 13.3 There being no further business, the meeting was closed.