

**NITH DISTRICT SALMON FISHERY BOARD
MINUTES OF BOARD MEETING**

HELD AT FRIARS CARSE

**On
11th FEBRUARY 2014 at 10.00**

1. PRESENT

Percy Weatherall – Chairman
Nick Brown
David Kempself
Jim Gregory
John Kingan
Wally Wright
Peter Landale
Mark Coombs

2. IN ATTENDANCE

James Henderson – Fishery Director (FD)
Deborah Parke – Nith Catchment Fishery Trust (TB)
Shona Mitchell – Admin
Roderick Styles – Clerk
John Miller (JM)

3. APOLOGIES

Robbie Cowan
Tom Florey
Tom McAughtrie
Nick Wright

4. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS BOARD MEETING

Amendments were made to today's meeting agenda as follows:

- a) Point 2 should read Approval of Minutes of Meeting – 10th December 2013
- b) Point 8 should be numbered point 5. These amendments will be added to our website.

The clerk asked for any changes/additions to declarations of interest given at the previous Board meeting. It was unanimous that there are no changes. The Chairman asked if the minutes of the previous Board meeting dated 10th December 2013 were agreed to be an accurate account of proceedings. Peter Landale referred to an email sent to the Clerk regarding the Minute of the Fishery Management Plan, stating Mark Coombs and Peter Landale were to produce a format for reporting for next meeting. The Chairman asked all present with this amendment in place if the Minute of the previous meeting be approved, this was unanimously agreed.

5. MATTERS ARISING

Mark Coombs enquired on the level of predator control the Board was allocated this year. FD informed all present that in 2013 a licence was granted to kill 8 Goosanders and 2 Cormorants, however this year the Board were granted a licence to kill 15 Goosanders and 4 Cormorants. The Chairman asked if this success in obtaining a larger licence was the same across Scotland. FD stated no and TB responded by explaining the work and calculations required to justify the increase in the Boards licence. FD reported that the Board staff conducts two counts for the licence each year and inspectors can come out with Board staff to see how the counts are conducted, to prove the accuracy of our recorded counts and requests. Each year we try and improve on the numbers allocated.

Peter Landale expressed his approval of the Fishery Management Plan format changes and states the Chairman's forward is first class outlining clearly the way things are and the way forward.

6. FISHERY DIRECTORS PRESENTATION

FD gave a presentation summarising the Celtic Sea Trout Project, this included:

- The partnerships involved with CSTP such as Bangor University, Inland Fisheries Ireland, Environment Agency, University College Cork etc.
- The sampling zones, both freshwater and marine, 99 rivers were involved with 219 sites, 10,536 tissue samples were gathered.
- Outlining the processes samples go through in order to gain data on, ectoparasites, microchemistry, age and growth, length and weight, life history, genetics, scale reading, feeding etc.
- Reporting the findings on external parasites and abundance of *L.salmonis* and *C.elongatus*.
- The vital importance of sandeel, sprat and herring which is the main food source for sea trout in the marine environment.
- To establish a genetic baseline from samples from each of the rivers entering the Irish Sea and to use the baseline to match genetic profile of fish captured at sea to individual rivers and regions using genetic stock identification/individual assignment.
- To identify the principal patterns of movement from sea trout leaving the rivers within the Irish Sea and the importance of tidal currents.
- The knowledge gained so far:
 - a) Irish sea is common ground to all sea trout
 - b) Sea lice not a problem
 - c) Sandeel/sprat are vital
 - d) Sampling techniques (marine/freshwater)
 - e) Genetics can confidently assign
 - f) Importance of tidal currents
- Future work:
 - a) Tracking of sea trout smolts
 - b) Do our sea trout go North?
 - c) Need to collaborate with others, Living North Sea and the Moray Firth project.

Peter Landale asked about the number of sandeels in and around Robin Rigg? FD is unsure if research has been done on this. Jim Gregory asked if we knew what effect the electromagnetic fields around Robin Rigg are having on fish stocks. FD reiterated that sea trout do not change what they eat and the size importance, no herring will equal a knock on effect. FD informed all present that sandeels, herring essential for the survival of sea trout exist beyond NDSFB jurisdictional limits. FD reiterated the reasons why projects such as the Northern Periphery are so important for the future management of our rivers. Wally Wright asked if technical advances in trawling equipment could be affecting sea trout numbers. FD responded by stating that in order to catch sea trout trawlers have to be moving at 5 to 6 knots due to the speed of the fish, this would cost too much so it would not be economically viable only a few ever get caught. Jim Gregory stated that if the trawlers are depleting the stocks of herring, sprat etc this would affect sea trout stocks. John Kingan asked if sea bass coming into Celtic sea is having an impact on sea trout stocks. FD responded by stating that predators and their numbers are always of concern for example the increase in seal numbers, cormorants, sea bass etc out competing sea trout for sandeels as well as eating sea trout. FD informed all present that one of the aims of the Northern Periphery is to look into the predator issues, for example if marine aquaculture is attracting predators. A discussion ensued regarding the effects of predators on sea trout stocks and the Scottish government involvement. Mark Coombs reiterated that it is a complex issue with a number of factors, which would require many partnerships joining together to each do their bit.

John Miller asked for a recap on what CSTP did out at sea. FD stated that CSTP hired a trawler for 10 day at 40000 euro a day and reiterated the effort required to obtain samples in the marine environment, its cumulative effort, within budget and resources available. FD stated that CSTP was excellent value for money proven by the results obtained so far. FD informed all present that the Barrow-In-Furness off shore Windfarm has just been approved, which equals 100 turbines. The Chairman recapped that the Boards involvement in CSTP has contributed positively towards our own catchment and to fishery management in general. The Chairman stated that the balance of resources and time spent by FD within the Boards statutory remit on migratory Salmonids was worthwhile participating in CSTP and the knowledge is still being amassed, demonstrating to people on the river that the Board is taking these issues seriously.

FD reported that the Northern Periphery final submission has been submitted. FD stated that we are the only Scottish partner and that research into the Solway is approved to go forward in the application. The Chairman reiterated that the Northern Periphery funding would be external and the Board would not be funding the project only FD and TB's time and that it is a smaller project compared to CSTP. Peter Landale asked what area the project covers. FB explained which countries will be involved. Wally Wright asked if the decline in sea bird numbers which feed on sandeels could be an indicator of sandeel populations and as such could funds be sourced from RSBP for further research. FD stated that this would be something the Trust would be looking into in the future. Peter Landale asked if our fish are going up the north coast and how do we protect sprats, herring etc. Peter Landale expressed his concerns on the amount of time FD would spend in relation to the Northern Periphery

project rather than his time spent directly managing the catchment. FD stated that it is the Boards decision on what FD spends his time on and the priority that they place on tasks to fulfil the statutory obligation of protecting and managing migratory Salmonids in the catchment, as with any management strategy it is a fine balancing act which is ultimately the Boards decision. FD stated that the level of administration has increased and is crippling the management of fisheries due to the sheer volume, which is an issue FD raised with ASFB and with ministers. It was reiterated that it is up to the Board to assess the value for money on what FD spends his time engaged on. It was unanimously agreed by all present that the CSTP represented value for money. Peter Landale and Mark Coombs stated there was a balance required on time spent. FD responded by stating that management is always a juggling act and a balancing act in order to manage the catchment as per the Boards statutory remit and that FD will do what the Board tasks him to do, as ultimately it is the Boards decision. Mark Coombs stated that judgment is required. The Chairman responded by stating that money and resources are used in the best way for Salmonids in the river and reiterated the importance of balance within management and if concerns are founded then they are aired and rectified by the Board, within the Boards remit.

7. DRAFT ACCOUNTS AND ANNUAL REPORT

The Clerk informed all present that for the first time the annual report was produced at Walker and Sharpe saving £800 per annum. The Clerk issued the annual report to all present stating the new legislation on how annual reports are dealt with and the changes. The report will be in draft form and taken to the annual proprietors meeting for consideration, amendments will be made at that meeting and then the report will go forward to the annual public meeting for final approval. The report will then be submitted to the Scottish Government and published on the website. The Clerk proposes that the report issued today be the only hard copies produced and asked for approval to write to proprietors to request their email addresses and if no response is received, will signpost them to our website where the report can be viewed. The Chairman asked that if a request for a hard copy is received from a proprietor then this will be provided, however if a member of the public requests a hard copy then a small charge will be added. The Clerk suggested the annual report be in electronic format and not to deny anyone of a hard copy, saving on costs as well as complying with the Scottish Governments preferred method. The Clerk stated the statutory requirement of approving the previous Annual Report Meeting Minutes of the 12th March 2013 in the report. The Meeting Minutes from 12th March 2013 were unanimously approved as a fair and accurate record of events.

Peter Landale requested an executive summary of the annual report outlining what has been done and what is planned, in order to save time as the report is lengthy. The Clerk stated that the annual report must be in this form in order to pass the requirements of the Scottish Government and stated that the annual report is the Boards management tool and needs to be considered by management. The Clerk voiced his concern that if the annual report is not considered by each Board member as a key management tool for the management of the catchment, to fulfil its statutory obligations and the Scottish Government finds this out at review then the Board could be liable. Peter Landale then requested an abbreviated version of the annual report for the general public to be put up in his fishing huts along with the Fishery Management

Plan. The Clerk stated that an abbreviated version for the public could be added to the website if required, however this adds to the workload in order to achieve compliance within the legislation. FD reiterated the fact that he spends more time producing these documents than he does on anything else and this is only to comply with good governance. The Clerk informed all present that it is a statutory requirement that the annual report is produced in this format. The Clerk asked all present to consider the annual report, its layout, format, contents etc. to be taken to the proprietors meeting. The Clerk asked for the Boards approval on the electronic format, this was unanimously agreed.

8. ACCOUNTS

The Clerk referred to his notes on the accounts and asked for any questions. The balance this year is down due to consultancy income dropping and the decision to finance a second Bailiff last year. The Clerk reiterated that in respect of the consultancy income it be considered a luxury. The Chairman asked for any comments/question in relation to the accounts or annual report in general to be emailed to The Clerk prior to the proprietors meeting in March 2014 to be tabled for the meeting.

9. AOB

Peter Landale informed all present that he has not got round all proprietor yet in relation to Fishpal. He also informed the Board that meetings are due to be held at the hatchery offices board room on the 6th March or the 13th March to try to reiterate the value of Fishpal in relation to selling the Nith Catchments fishing tickets and to encourage the catches being reported through Dougie Smith for Fishpal.

The Clerk issued all present with a letter received from Pollock & McLean for discussion. The Clerk voiced his surprise on the catch return stated in the letter compared to the reports received from Danny Marshall who stated the sea trout catches had been better than the previous years, with at least two anglers having an extremely good season. FD stated that the Common Good Fishings received 68% of their ticket returns back and were trying to do better. David Kempself stated DGAA received 80% ticket returns back and said that if they are not returned a fine is issued or the loss of future tickets, Jim Gregory stated that MNAA work on the same principal. FD asked Mark Coombs what percentage of tickets UNAA returned and if they are recording accurate numbers. The Board asked Mark Coombs to look into the catches reported, this was agreed. FD requested approval to write a letter to all proprietors on behalf of the Board to reiterate the importance of accurate catch returns, even nil returns. It was agreed that FD and The Clerk would write to proprietors on behalf of the Board as it is essential for good management, protection and promotion of the river to have accurate catch returns. A discussion ensued regarding the merit on ticket returns on pain of fines or no ticket next year and Fishpal being more appealing for selling fishings. FD stated that accurate reporting has a positive effect on all aspects from marketing fishings, statistics, management etc.

David Kempself reiterated the positive aspect of voluntary catch and release rather than mandatory. As the catch statistics show that education on the river has proven valuable. Peter Landale stated to the Board that the nets men released two sea trout in

2012 representing 1% of all sea trout captured by them and that they released fourteen sea trout in 2013 representing 8% of all sea trout captured by them compared to rod fishers returning 55% of all sea trout caught by them in 2012 and 62% of all sea trout caught by them in 2013. Peter Landale stated that it would be good if the nets men put back sea trout rather than kill them.

David Kempself reported that due to the flood waters a lot of flood banks have been lost for example the bank at the boys pool at Dalscone, there has been flooding there for the past three events and as such has flooded the sewerage works. David Kempself asked the Board to contact SEPA to ask if the Water Board has to protect the sewerage work with flood banks. John Kingan asked The Clerk to remind/reiterate what has been done previously by the Board on this subject. The Clerk stated that the Board can raise the matter with SEPA again at the next meeting. John Kingan informed all present that SEPA stated that the sewerage was well diluted when the works flooded and as such is not at harmful levels. The Chairman stated that in order to protect the river we should raise our concerns again regarding the level of pollution.

The meeting thereafter closed at 12.10.