

NITH DISTRICT SALMON FISHERY BOARD
MINUTES OF
BOARD MEETING
HELD AT FRIARS CARSE COUNTRY HOUSE HOTEL,
AULDGIRTH, DUMFRIES

on

4 July 2016 at 3pm

Present

Percy Weatherall
Robbie Cowan
Peter Hutchison
Wally Wright
David Kempell
Erin Hunter (on behalf of Buccleuch)
Jim Gregory
Richard Gladwin
Peter Landale

In Attendance

Roderick Styles
Jim Henderson
David McMichael
Debbie Parke

Public/Attendees

Tom Brown

Apologies

Raymond Mundell
Derek Bathgate (replaced by Erin Hunter – Buccleuch Estates)
Nick Wright
Nick Brown

1. BOARD MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF 15 March 2016

These were referred to and unanimously approved.

2. MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MINUTES

There were none.

3. QUARTERLY MANAGEMENT REPORT

FD referred to the printed Report and in respect of engineering on the catchment, being item 3 of the Report, with his involvement of the flood mitigation scheme.

FD referred to a breach of bio security in that there had been an escape of Rainbow Trout into the River Cairn, being item 9 of the Agenda.

Discussion took place in connection with the possibility of conservation initiatives for the River given the categorisation as Category 3 under WFR.

FD advised that if maps were being produced of spawning areas in Scotland and in particular in the catchments then Scottish Government (SG) would have a better idea of spawning areas, access and counter data.

SG acknowledged that the information in respect of the Categorisation is far from perfect. FD and FB have been working on an interactive map of the catchment using electro fishing data collated over the years. The information had to go to SG by First July and will be used to formulate the Niths categorisation for 2017.

FD said that the Board needs to get scale samples. SG state that there is a “grilse error” in respect of the categorisation of salmon that may either be grilse or salmon but scale samples had revealed that large fish can be grilse. Grilse carry fewer eggs. In order to be able to identify whether or not a fish is grilse or a salmon it is necessary to take a scale sample. Not enough of the River is kepted to permit sufficient scale sampling to be taken. It is intended to use the Hatchery with caught up fish for the production of scale samples in the future.

It will be necessary to collect statistics on sex ratios, fecundity and scale sampling on grilse/salmon for Government conservation plans. FD reported that he wanted to go ahead with the collection of this data in the hope of improving the River categorisation. However, it would be necessary to identify how much effort is going into the catching of fish.

4. NITH/ANNAN MEETING

This is linked with Wild Fisheries Reform.

FD advised that flowing from WFR, SG had stated that the Nith System on its own is not a viable FMO, therefore talks had opened up with neighbouring areas. There had been a meeting with GFT and Annan DSFB but GFT had later advised that they didn't want any involvement with Nith and it had been subsequently learned that GFT wanted to join with Ayrshire Rivers.

There had been discussions with the Annan Board at an ASFB Meeting at Perth between the two chairmen, Alistair Jack and Percy Weatherall. Annan and Nith, through Alistair Jack and Jim Henderson, had met subsequently on several occasions.

There had been a group meeting of representatives of six Annan and six Nith Board Members to discuss the possibility of taking forward relations to create a shadow FMO. The meeting had been good with a lot of commonalities identified between the two catchments. There had been enthusiasm for the proposal to join with the Annan simply because of the logistically impossible alternatives with other areas and river systems. Nith/Annan has a lot of mutual benefit. They are similar catchments. There is haaf netting on both. Staff numbers would work. There are many similarities with both fisheries. The compatibility had not gone unnoticed by SG.

FD had been given a mandate to look into the finances for both Boards to develop a financial management plan.

SG wants Nith and Annan to manage all fresh water fisheries promotion. Therefore, there needs to be more funding from central Government and not DSFBs. There will have to be additional funds raised which is likely to come from management fees/rod licences. Wally Wright asked if this would mean that Lochar Water would be better managed. FD responded that he thought that this would be the case as it would fall within the combined management area.

At the meeting with Annan, staffing had been discussed. There would be a requirement for additional staff but it is unlikely that there will be staff redundancies from either Board. Peter Hutchison asked if Government had produced evidence on paper to justify how an FMO would benefit both catchments better than the existing system. FD replied that with publicity many anglers would be in a position to fish in both catchments. Employment resources would result in bigger bailiff teams. Environmental work would involve all species and therefore give rise to better management. There would be better combined resource management in that there would be a commonality of approach and sharing of resources over the two catchments.

The Chairman indicated that at the meeting the matter of joining with them was very much a "shotgun marriage".

Peter Hutchison agreed in respect of the compatibility but was concerned about the diluted effect of the management of the Nith. If rod licensing fees are required it is unlikely that there will be sufficient resources available to manage both catchments. Peter Hutchison stated that he was of the view that any funding gap must be funded centrally as core funding. Richard Gladwin raised a related point on how FMOs will fund conservation work. FD responded that SG supported the idea of earning consultancy income.

SG is uncertain as to how an FMO would work. It is the conservation side that is compatible with charitable funding. They are looking into what type of body could function legally assuming that charitable status might be available. The SSPCA might be a template to work from. It is likely that there will only be fifteen to sixteen FMOs. It is hoped that the commercial side of the work can be ramped up. SG's concern will be that if an FMO is not

structured properly then it may be open to legal challenge. There is no timetable yet. Matters are now progressing through Roseanna Cunningham of SG. SG has still to ratify FMO areas.

David Kempzell raised the issue of Rod Licence Fees. Income is crashing for clubs. People are giving up angling. FD advised that this had been pointed out to SG already. It is recognised at National Committee level that there is £3,000,000 hole in the financial budget.

Peter Hutchinson said that it would be prudent to have contingency planning if legislation does come but things may change.

FD is involved in various national committees. SG is setting up six or seven other committees. FB has been asked to sit on the development committee.

The Chairman summarised the discussions by advising that the Board is keeping apace with change but continuing to manage the River.

5. HAAF NETTING

Tom Brown reported upon the meeting with Haaf Netting Association. He is now the Chairman of the Haaf Netting Association. Category three status had shocked haaf netters. The demand for tickets was down. There are still three tickets for Drumburn available. It is unsure if they will ever be used. Haaf netters numbers have decreased substantially over the last twenty years.

Tom Brown had spoken with the Annan Haaf Netters about their work with SG. Annan had used an argument based upon the Annan Charter in that the Fishery was a historic heritage fishery.

Annan Haaf Netters had approached SG with the full support of their Board. They had worked on catch statistic ratio which suggested that there was 10% mortality in respect of rod caught fish. This statistic had been used and therefore allowed ninety fish permitted to be killed for thirty haaf net tickets, each fish to be tagged, taken to the local fishery station for statistical gathering and tissue sampling with the fish thereafter being given back to the captor.

TB asked for similar support from the Nith Board for the heritage existence/historic Fishings.

MSP, Joan McAlpine, had asked for statistics on haaf netting to support the historic use of it.

FD asked if the Annan's previous catch statistics were taken into account. There was no response. Robbie Cowan stated that haaf netters needed an incentive to go and fish. Catch and Release was not the answer.

David Kempzell expressed disappointment that the haaf netters were raising this matter. This request suggested that there would be a different approach for haaf netters and anglers. It was not possible to have one policy for one group of fishers and one for another.

Robbie Cowan pointed out that it was his job to protect haaf netting.

Peter Landale apologised for being late. He suggested that category three status meant that the Board must try to produce a conservation plan. Killing fish is unlikely to be seen to be compatible with a proper conservation plan. The Board had a duty to protect the River System.

FD made two points being:-

1. As regards the Annan, Joan McAlpine did not know that haaf netting took place on the Nith.
2. Part of FDs exercise will be to calculate haaf netting returns and then calculate what the 10% figure might be.

FD recommended that time be given to the Board to obtain details of what the position was so far as the Annan approach had been so that there was fullest information to be able to assist in connection with any approach that might be taken by the Board to Government.

Tom Brown stated that the Government opinion was that 10% of rod caught fish died therefore, the Annan was permitted 10% of their catch returns to kill for scientific purposes which may not be a lot in numbers.

Tom Brown asked how statistics might be gathered if no one was out fishing.

FD replied that the point had already been made to SG.

Tom Brown indicated focus should have been more on this type of thing. Spending on the Celtic Sea Trout Project would have been better spent on a fish counter.

Robbie Cowan asked for haaf netting support. He recognised that the Board needs to get the facts on the Annan approach but haaf netting and netting in general has to be supported or it will be lost.

David Kempzell advised that it was necessary for the Board to use all efforts to get the categorisation of the River increased to at least category two. RG stated that there needs to be more fishing effort. The choices are less fishing with no information or more fishing with some incentive being given by means of taking the odd fish. Given the small numbers of haaf netters/their existence and the small number of fish that are being

taken, Peter Landale asks what chances there are of raising to category two if a conservation policy was acceptable.

FD replied that a draft Conservation Management Plan template had been published by SG. It was necessary to show that the Board had a robust plan to try to improve categorisation.

FD stated that large numbers of catch statistics returns etc are what is required to improve categorisation.

It was agreed that the basis of the categorisation at the moment was nonsense on the basis of how it was produced.

Thomas Florey suggested following the Tay template in respect of the number of fish returned and kept be adopted as a conservation proposal to take forward.

The Chairman brought matters to a conclusion by advising that the Board will continue to work to try to improve the information available and make representations for re-categorisation of the River.

6. CONSERVATION COMMITTEE REPORT

FD and FB advised that a draft SG conservation template had been produced. It was necessary to obtain information on weight, sex ratio, length of fish, fecundity of fish and all to try to supply best information to assist in the production of a Management Plan.

7. RAINBOW TROUT/RIVER CAIRN

The email from Simon Duffin was produced. There was a history of escape of Rainbow Trout into the Cairn. It had happened again. One angler had caught seventy three Rainbow Trout. Sixteen to eighteen Rainbow Trout had been caught by electro fishing with gut analysis taking place. Two fish had contained two small fish.

FD had gone to the fish farm but Simon Duffin was not present. FD spoke to his son. FD had been concerned about the matter and wanted to have the Rainbow Trout removed. The email from Simon Duffin did not admit that they are his fish. Rainbow Trout are now being caught as far down as Four Mile Corner.

Whilst not admitting to the fact that the Rainbow Trout were his, it was suggested that it is most likely that his Rainbow Trout Farm is the source. There is no other Rainbow Trout farm on the Cairn. It was noted that he was unlikely to be able to admit to the problem because of the insurance cover that he might be carrying.

FD reported that such escape was not doing the bio diversity of the Cairn any good. Brown Trout had been stocked into the River. FD intimated that he would be reporting the matter to the various relevant authorities.

The Board agreed that FD should write to Simon Duffin. The Clerk declared an interest and stated that he could not involve himself in any response to Simon Duffin.

8. STAKE NET FISHINGS

Peter Hutchison was given the floor, produced a pamphlet and spoke at length in connection with his representations for stake net fishings.

In his view there was no evidence in a scientific basis in respect of the outlawing of stake net fishings. He had asked SG for more research but there had been no response other than a basic one. Catch statistic returns for the season 2016 will be substantially reduced because of lack of effort. There was complete ignorance as to how and where fresh fish run before they get into each natal river. It might be possible to try to identify what might be mixed stock fishery. There is a ten year running average of fish of four hundred and fifty from the stake nets. The statistical analysis to try to work mixed stock fish is a work in progress. Proceeding on from this the model suggest a stake of 3%-5% of returning Nith fish. There are three different times of year for fish to run – spring, the summer run and winter fish. All of this needing modelled.

In Peter Hutchison's experience there is a nine year cycle for fluctuation of fish numbers caught. The stake net fishery would be a good place to catch fish and carry out tagging. He asked what the Board could do as a group to make representations on the point. Peter Hutchison feels that the Board should lobby for the science to be improved. It was necessary to lobby Marine Scotland to back the Board. Then argue for good governance.

9. AOB

FD reported on electro fishing at Wanlockhead and had found huge density of trout in the catchment, 75% of them had been affected by Black Tail, caused by heavy metals. The possibility of lead coming from lead mine workings might have had an effect on Sea Trout.

The Board Meeting thereafter closed.