

**NITH DISTRICT SALMON FISHERY BOARD**  
**MINUTES OF**  
**BOARD MEETING**  
**HELD AT FRIARS CARSE COUNTRY HOUSE HOTEL,**  
**AULDGIRTH, DUMFRIES**  
  
**on**  
**20 December 2016 at 10am**

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**Present**

Percy Weatherall (Chairman)  
Robbie Cowan  
John Kingan  
David Kempself  
Peter Landale  
Danny Marshall  
Nick Brown  
Nick Wright  
Alan Nesbit  
Thomas Florey

**In Attendance**

Roderick Styles (Clerk)  
Jim Henderson (FD)  
Erin Hunter  
Christine Carson  
Brian Lord  
Debbie Park (FB)

**Apologies**

Peter Hutchison  
Tom McAughtrie  
Raymond Mundle

**Members of Public in Attendance**

Richard Little  
Charles Wilson  
Mr Little  
Jim McDonald  
Eddie MacIntyre

## **1. THE CHAIRMAN'S INTRODUCTION**

The Chairman welcomed everyone present and advised that this was to be a joint meeting of Nith District Salmon Fishery Board and Nith Catchment Fishery Trust. He welcomed members of the public in attendance, recognising their interest in item 9 of the Agenda, being conservation measures.

The Chairman advised that the members of the public would have an opportunity to hear what was discussed at the meeting and would be given an opportunity to speak to item nine at the relevant point of the meeting. The Agenda items for the meeting would be worked through and then the floor would be open at the end of the meeting for discussion.

## **2. DECLARATION OF FINANCIAL INTERESTS**

There were no declarations of financial interests that gave rise to conflict of interest.

## **3. BOARD MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF 20 SEPTEMBER 2016**

The Chairman asked for approval of these which was given unanimously.

## **4. MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MINUTES**

FD discussed various action points of previous meeting.

He had been successful in obtaining salmon through usual electro fishing methods for scientific purposes.

FB was engaged with science project with Scottish Government and had met with Scottish Government to discuss the projects.

FD advised that on the instructions of the Board he had made an appeal to SG Marine Lab on conservation limits to seek Category 2 Status within the requisite timeframe. The Status of the River had been changed for the 2017 Season from Category 3 to Category 2.

FD advised on discussions concerning electrofishing protocol changes. This is being held back pending Scottish Fisheries Co-ordination Centre & Marine Science working on a new protocol and the Board would await the outcome and determination of the new protocol before seeking to apply it.

It had been Peter Landale's idea to get twenty reputable anglers to provide a timed diary record of their fishing exploits during the course of a season to assist the future information gathering for the benefit of the river system.

FD reported that he had met with Findlay Carson, MSP and Oliver Mundell, MSP.

FD reported that he had met with IFI and Alan Nesbit of Buccleuch Estate of BEL to discuss the possibility of installing fish counters on tributaries running through land owned by BEL. Costs were discussed and reference was made to funds held by the Board and Consultancy income.

It was decided to take item 8. of the Agenda.

FD reported that he had been asked by the Board to look at fish counters in Southern Ireland. EIRE are leaders in provision of working fish counters and their use and benefits to the management of river systems.

The information had been obtained and presented at a presentation at the previous Board Meeting.

Members of IFI had attended to visit sites on the River Nith and tributaries. The best site without doubt would be on main stem river, downstream of Portrack but costs involved would be in the order of £200,000 - £250,000.

A site on the Cairn would cost approximately £100,000.

Sites on the tributaries at Crawick would cost £35,000 approximately and on the Scaur £40,000 approximately.

FD had spoken with Alan Nesbit of BEL in respect of availability of land on Scaur and Crawick and the Estate through Mr Nesbit had been positive about the idea. FD had also approached Richard Little, Architect who had offered his services free.

The construction of any fish counter would require Planning Permission. It would also be necessary to have a meeting with Marine Scotland Science to find out if they would be prepared to use the information that the fish counters provided to determine fish numbers and therefore contribute towards quantification of future category status for the River. Clearly, if Marine Scotland Science will not use the data then there might be little point in going to the expense of installing the fish counter.

David Kempself suggested that the benefit for the whole of the river system would be to have a fish counter on the main stem to count every fish.

There are no grants available. Heritage Lottery Fund will not invest in a capital project.

The Chairman pointed out that the largest project involving the main stem river is extremely expensive. The Board would definitely need to know if Marine Scotland Science would accept the data. It would also be necessary to investigate the likelihood of getting Planning Permission.

FD reported that a working group had been put together by Marine Scotland Science to look at the matter of fish counters and it was hoped that there would be meeting early in the New Year about matters. Richard Gladwin suggested that funds were available and within the gift of the Board.

Peter Landale asked if a fish counter would count smolts descending the river. FD replied that this was not possible but that other science might be applied to try to calculate this. FD stated that whilst the technology for these fish counters was old it was reliable. FD advised that not only did the counter count the number of fish ascending the river but there was also video footage activated when fish ascended which was of very good quality. A computer would count a fish ascending as an event. The system would allow quick identification of what passed over the counter and the fish could also be examined through the computer image.

It was agreed that action should be taken to get answers from Marine Scotland Science and Dumfries & Galloway Council's Planning Department in connection with the idea of installation of fish counter within the river system.

The Clerk made reference to the draft Budget prepared by the Board's Accountants. The ingathering of consultancy income by staff this year had been remarkable. In addition, costs were down in general terms.

Taking all of this into account, the Board agreed to retain the Assessment Gross Rate at £1.22 in the pound but provide Proprietors with a £65,000 refund from consultancy income.

## **5. QUARTERLY MANAGEMENT REPORT**

FD reported on projects continuing to arise and grow on. Administrative work was involved, for example, in relation to predator control licence. It was hoped that a licence would be granted to provide extended coverage from February to October rather than February to May.

FB reported on the "Fishing for the Future" project with new funding being made available from Hollywood Trust, the Council and other private sources to continue with the project to encourage children in respect of the work of the Board, an interest in the river system and fishing in general.

One hundred and twenty two children had visited the Hatchery. Salmon eggs had been sent to schools. Field trips and angling trips had been organised, all to encourage interest in the younger generation and to show value to the community.

FD offered thanks to the Angling Clubs and the Council who had participated in connection with the Scheme.

Peter Landale spoke of ten assigned sites for electro fishing survey. The Fishery Board are to email these details to Board Members.

FB reported a slight trend downwards but not to the point where it impacted upon escapement threshold of fish. It was necessary to gain information on long term trends to show more information in the statistics.

FB reported on examination of sites for which there was data accumulated over the course of the last twelve to fifteen years.

Richard Gladwin asked if other river systems undertake the same type of work to which FB replied in the affirmative, this being the aim a new Marine Scotland Project.

FD reported on a recent meeting held at Kelso in connection with the Tweed system. They apparently have six hundred years of data and the speaker from Norway indicated that in his opinion there was evidence to suggest that there was 140 -180 year over cycle which could be applied to numbers of salmon at sea and returning to river system.

## **6. NITH/ANNAN MEETING & WFR UPDATE**

The Chairman referred to the Wild Fisheries Reform and the preference of Scottish Government to disband Fishery Boards and create new fishery management organisations to deal with river and water catchments.

The Trusts were involved at this meeting because Trusts and Boards may be abolished for the future.

### **WFR Update**

FD reported on WFR. Scottish Government want to have involvement in management of fish stocks. They also want to take control of management and the finance gathered from it from the locality in which the funds were raised to central Scottish Government.

Reform has been proceeding at full steam ahead dealing with meetings on how Fishery Managers could try to make the best out of this. Scottish Government had then discovered that there would be £3.5 million per annum shortfall in funding, although more likely that the real figure for required Government funding would be in the order of £5 – 6 million annually. Matters concerning WFR have slowed down. However, it was clear that Scottish Government did not want forty one District Salmon Fishery Boards to exist. They wanted the creation of new FMOs for larger areas. It was proposed that there be a marriage of Nith and Annan for management purposes, although at one stage it had been muted for whole north Solway FMO or indeed, one incorporating the whole of the South West of Scotland from Glasgow South.

Scottish Government has apparently come to the conclusion that there would be seventeen amalgamations of fishery areas, the amalgamation of Nith and Annan Boards into one being such an area for future FMO purposes.

With this in mind, Nith Board Members and Annan Board Members have met to discuss matters.

During the course of these meetings displeasure has been expressed with the Government's conservation policy analysis.

At the suggestion of Peter Landale, Nith/Annan have discussed the idea of meeting with Walter Crozier, Fishery Consultant from Ireland who is an expert on conservation limits to seek his opinion on the analysis of the Nith/Annan Conservation Limits as imposed by Scottish Government.

Walter Crozier has visited, seen both catchments and will be supplying a draft report.

Scottish Government have been asked for the conservation data to be used to formulate the Nith Conservation model and this should be available in the New Year.

The Board continues to develop the relationship with and share information about the catchments with Annan.

## **7. CONSERVATION LIMITS - 2017**

FD gave a presentation on the basis of how Scottish Government appear to have calculated conservation limits, which apparently revolve around a rolling five year average of Catch Statistic Returns and were also linked in a large part to the perception that Scottish Government had in relation to the amount of available angling water within the Nith Catchment.

It was decided to give consideration of this at the end of the meeting.

## **8. AOB**

FD raised the matter of his having been involved with ASFB over the course of the last ten years. He does not want to stand for re-election to ASFB. The position was noted.

**Conservation Limits** – David Kempself reported that angling effort is down by 50% on DGAA water. Scottish Government does not take that into account in fixing its categorisation. The Board should take that into account. In considering the Catch Statistic Returns, it is likely that angling effort has been reduced by 50%.

Marine Scotland should be aware that angling effort is a major component of Catch Statistic Returns. In addition, with there being no haaf netting effort the availability of catch statistics from the source will be lost.

Nick Brown reports that on Friars Carse water bookings have reduced and rod sales have dropped but that catch returns have increased. Danny Marshall suggested that the policy for the 2017 Season should be left as was for the 2016 Season being 100% catch and release. A lack of interest in fishing does not help. Brian Lord reported that in previous years account had been taken of the protection of early running fish. The Angling Code says we should not take Spring Salmon. It is noted that in any event, it is now illegal to take Spring Salmon before 1<sup>st</sup> April and the Angling Code prohibits the taking of salmon before 1<sup>st</sup> June.

Richard Gladwin said that the policy lacks scientific and financial basis but all that matters is that no fish are being caught. The flaw is the angling effort or the lack of it and the failure to take that into account. What is needed is to make angling more appealing and getting more people to fish but on a scientific basis, we have the opportunity to lead. Would it not make sense to identify a percentage, say 5% - 10%, as being fish that could be kept? He also suggested offering tags on an option basis, the money for which could be recycled into the conservation system. David Kempzell replied that using an option would leave tickets with those who could afford them. Richard Gladwin suggested raffling tickets rather than auctioning them.

The Chairman brought the matter to a conclusion by indicating that consideration of the policy to be adopted would be taken to a meeting to be held in January and the feeling that he got from the floor of the meeting was that there was much support for the notion of 100% catch and release for the forthcoming season.