

Report 3

Anglers Meeting on 21st February 2013

By John Miller

The Board met representatives of the Angling Associations at Friars Carse on Thursday 21st February 2013. The Burgh Anglers were invited but did not attend.

The Chairman, Percy Weatherall stated that the Board was happy to be approachable and would consider similar meetings from time to time but pointed out that the Board was busy and that such meetings should not become the norm.

The Clerk had summarised in writing all of the questions raised by the Associations and had issued the Board's detailed responses. This helped to avoid any duplication of items to be discussed.

I understand that the Board is releasing on its website a copy of these questions and answers.

All of the material was discussed at length. It was generally accepted that the lack of fish was a countrywide and indeed worldwide problem. On top of this, the river had been unfishable for a lot of last season. Even if there was a good run of fish, it would not have made any difference.

There was a lot of discussion principally led by New Cumnock Association about the lack of fish in the feeder burns. We should be investigating in more detail the reasons for this but it could do no harm to stock them or re-stock them in the meantime to give nature a helping hand. Re-stocking from hatcheries does not appear any longer to be regarded as cost efficient. The Scottish Government is reviewing this and the jury is out on whether hatcheries do more harm than good.

Upper Nithsdale responded by saying they have seen a difference already having been restocking for just three years with 3 – 9 inch brown trout. Toby Metcalfe from Crown Estates said that we should all co-operate in investigating each feeder stream and use the facts collated to determine what the best way forward is. The Fishery Director will invite representatives of the Associations to go with him when he is electrofishing some of these feeder streams. All information which the Board gathers during this exercise will be made public. The Trust Biologist confirms that this applies to data which she is compiling also.

There is a Dumfries venue for the publication of the results of the Celtic Sea Trout project this summer. The Fishery Director strongly suggests that as many of us as possible should attend. The Fishery Director also stated that pound for pound the best use of resources is to concentrate on habitat enhancement. It is now the role of the Trust to fund these works.

There was a discussion about pollution which some thought was coming from the open cast coal mines. Unfortunately, ours is a small voice when the Scottish Government is considering the lack of employment in Ayrshire. The SEPA representative said she is happy to supply sample bottles so that we can get evidence to her as quickly as possible of any apparent pollution incidents.

Allan Wells of the Association of Salmon Fishery Boards spoke on what is happening out at sea. He sits on various committees considering the problems as does our Fishery Director. There is no real control over what happens out at sea. It is not yet known exactly what is happening. We must therefore work on improving the habitat in the streams so that the number of smolts is maximised.

Catch and release was discussed. We have to encourage people to stop killing fish for the freezer. The Trust Biologist pointed out that millions of extra eggs would be spawned if we exercise more restraint and this would have a direct influence on the number of fish getting to sea.

Tagging will almost certainly be introduced for anglers. Comment was made on how difficult this could be to police. The response to this is surely that if any angler witnesses a fish being killed and not tagged he will recognise this as poaching and will report the guilty party to the Fishery Director. It is in all our interests to ensure that the tagging system succeeds.

There was discussion about marine renewables. All electricity in Scotland is to be from this source and from land based windfarms by 2020. Even if it were ascertained that these have an adverse effect on migratory fish it was not likely that there would be any change of direction on the part of the Scottish Government.

The word coming back to me and to others since this meeting took place is that it was a resounding success and has helped the Associations to accept that the Board is approachable and is as keen as everyone else involved with fishing in the catchment to ensure that the quality of fishing is as good as the Board can make it.