

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

on

20 September 2016 at 10am

Present

Percy Weatherall (Chairman)
Robbie Cowan
Peter Hutchison
Wally Wright
David Kempself
Richard Gladwin
Peter Landale
Danny Marshall
Nick Brown
Alan Nisbet

In Attendance

Roderick Styles (Clerk)
Jim Henderson (FD)
David McMichael
Debbie Park (FB)

Apologies

Thomas Florey
Nick Wright

1. DECLARATION OF FINANCIAL INTERESTS

No conflicting financial interests were declared by any Board member.

2. BOARD MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF 4 JULY 2016

These were referred to and unanimously approved.

3. MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MINUTES

FD referred to the matter of Tom Brown raising Annan Haaf Netters status at the previous meeting. FD referred to an email exchange between Scottish Government and Alistair Jack from Annan District Salmon Fishery Board. Alistair Jack had stated within the email exchange that it was not correct that Annan DSFB had supported the Haaf Netters with any representations to Scottish Government. Representation about the Haaf Netting status was purely the work of the Annan Haaf Netters.

Jeff Gibbons of Scottish Government advised that the Licence had been approved to take salmon in Annan haaf nets for sampling for fecundity and genetic variation. Provision had been made for the taking of ninety fish by Haaf net. This is a part of a wider project at various places throughout Scotland to establish fecundity in each area.

FD was asked as to how the figure of ninety fish had been established. FD replied that to the best of his knowledge it had been worked out on the basis of thirty nets for ninety fish to establish a reasonable sample. Apparently the Haaf Netters failed to catch ninety fish. Small fish were let go in favour of larger fish. Three rivers are providing scientific research. FD offered to provide samples from Nith fish whilst engaged in hatchery operations. These samples would not require the fish to be killed.

Robbie Cowan asked if a proportion of Nith fish could be given to Haaf netting for scientific research. FD responded that the reason Annan got permission to Haaf net was for scientific sampling and not for supporting Haaf netting.

Peter Hutchison asked if the Board could get the results of the data from these projects throughout Scotland. FD offered to ask to try to obtain it.

Peter Hutchison asked if it might be possible to establish what scientific projects Marine Scotland had ongoing as part of the feed in to legislative consultation. It was agreed that the Board should resolve to ask.

David Kempell stated that in his opinion the Haaf Netters should not be allowed exemption from the 100% catch and release. Robbie Cowan pointed out that there was a substantial drop off in numbers of Haaf Netters. David Kempell pointed out that there had also been a substantial drop off in the numbers of anglers taking up tickets.

FD mentioned that the Celtic Sea Trout Project had closed and that their report would be published.

4. RAINBOW TROUT ESCAPE – RIVER CAIRN

The Clerk excused himself on the basis of conflict of interest. FD apprised the Board regarding actions taken following escape of rainbow trout from Invicta Trout. This involved the reporting of the incident to Fish Health Inspectorate, SNH and SEPA. Fish Health Inspectorate subsequently visited the site for inspection. Fishery Board/Trust staff will maintain vigilant watch on the farm working with DGAA members to ensure that any subsequent escapes of rainbow trout are reported to Fish Health Inspectorate.

5. QUARTERLY MANAGEMENT REPORT

FD produced the Quarterly Report (see website) and offered to expand on it.

Peter Hutchison asked if Consultancy Income is doing well. FD reported that work is ongoing and more is coming in. During the course of next year there may be a gas pipeline for

Ireland. Dumfries & Galloway Council want a lamprey rescue done in connection with Whitesands Flood Alleviation Scheme.

The Chairman reported that the 400kv overhead electric lines may not be coming through the catchment.

Peter Hutchison asked about crayfish. FB reported that crayfish had migrated two hundred metres downstream in the Cargen Water. Trapping had been ongoing and twenty-eight had been trapped out of one small trap. The Cargen Water decants into the salt water estuary which should cut down the possibility of migration upstream into the River Nith.

David Kempzell reported upon mink at Dalscone and in the railway pools. FD responded the trapping of mink would take place over the Winter.

The Chairman reported on a newspaper article in which a Council official had stated that invasive species such as Japanese Knotweed, Himalayan Balsam and Giant Hogweed were apparently rife through the river system. The Board and Trust expressed unhappiness with this comment and Debbie undertook to meet with the relevant people.

David Kempzell noted that the Burgh Representative never attends the meetings. If he had then the work carried out by the Board and Trust to attempt to deal with eradication and control of invasive species would have been known of.

6. SEPA REPORT

FD reported that Shona McFarlane had been transferred so there is no report. Apparently, SEPA have neither staff nor cash to be able to make themselves available for the meeting.

7. NITH/ANNAN MEETING & WFR UPDATE

FD reported on the meeting where the Chairman and five other Nith Board members had attended with representatives of the Annan Board.

FD had been tasked with looking into the finance of both Boards to see how an FMO might be able to work and be financed.

It has been discovered that Nith DSFB pays more by way of rates and has more by way of capital assets and cash than does the Annan DSFB.

It became clear in discussion with Alistair Jack that an FMO of Nith/Annan would need Government funding of around £250,000 per annum.

Apparently, fifteen to sixteen FMOs are likely for Scotland. There may be £3.5 million of central funding required. Alistair Jack had reported that the Government recognised that the level of funding required at £3.5 million was agreed to be a reasonable figure.

Conservation limits were being banded about. Peter Landale had attended an IFM Conference and met Walter Crozier, expert on conservation limits. Thought should be given to employing Water Crozier on a consultancy basis.

The Chairman stated that FD is likely to be involved in the management of both Boards in a single FMO. The Chairman's preferred position is that the status quo concerning the existence of separate Boards should be maintained meantime. This position was agreed.

WFR Update

FD advised that everyone had been awaiting WFR to be incorporated into the 2016/17 Scottish Government legislative programme but it was not. FD reported that this made things difficult and left funding for management organisations in limbo. Other DSFBs are holding back on investment in equipment and manpower. It was not satisfactory and it was not known when WFR would come into force.

Whilst Government was encouraging the formation of shadow FMOs there was no legal mechanism for recognising their existence or for a shadow FMO to be able to ingather funds or indeed even receive them. Consequently, the Board agreed that it must continue to carry out business as usual and continue to do the best that the Board could in running its own river system.

Peter Hutchison agreed that the Board should continue to manage and provide more input with time to provide for future representation on legislation.

8. CONSERVATION LIMITS - 2017

FD reported that the Nith system had been assigned a Category 3 status for 2017 but that a 28-day consultation period was currently in effect. Some rivers in the South West of Scotland had a change of categorisation. FD advised that fullest support and information had been provided to Scottish Government. The best available Catch Statistic Returns had been provided to Marine Scotland with GIS data on the catchment. The Board was working with Dumfries & Galloway Council to investigate the decrease in angler numbers coming to the River System. FD had spoken with Walter Crozier when in Ireland. Mr Crozier is an expert on conservation limits. Mr Crozier had stated that there was maximum importance in gathering enough data on a scientific basis to inform Scottish Government's position therefore as much information from electro fishing sampling should be obtained as was possible.

Mr Crozier has written a protocol on classification of fish. Grilse error has a massive impact upon how many eggs come from returning fish. The Board is licensed to take fish for Hatchery to deal with sampling. At this time there will be analysis of sex ratios/fecundity, size and scale sampling.

This information will be of importance to Scottish. Walter Crozier is an acknowledged conservation limits expert. In addition, the Nith data will be run through the Irish computer model. It would be necessary to update sampling to allow for the modelling to take place. The idea is to try to get any future conservation policy based on accurate scientific data.

Peter Landale reported on a meeting of Atlantic Salmon Trust in Telford. Walter Crozier had been speaking on analysis of river basins in Ireland since 1978. Peter Landale had spoken with him. The Board needs to know its real position. Walter Crozier very much seemed to know what he was talking about. He has been involved in meetings for the Atlantic Salmon Trust in the past.

Richard Gladwin suggested that Walter Crozier could look at the Scottish Classification System to find out if it was accurate.

FD reported that Mr Crozier suggested a full assessment of the whole catchment rather than specific sites in limited areas.

It had been suggested that the Electro fishing protocol to be changed to include timed (rather than area) basis.

Richard Gladwin asked if the Board should seek that Walter Crozier carry out a critique of the Scottish Government's approach. FD replied that he hoped that this might be possible.

It was suggested that Nith/Annan DSFB should try to agree to employ Walter Crozier, each offering £1,000 towards his consultation fees.

David Kempself asked if it might be possible for the Board to appeal the river classification before 29 September. FD responded that he and FB were already taking detailed steps to try to ensure that as much information on the river system could be supplied to Marine Scotland prior to that date to seek to have the categorisation reviewed.

9. AOB

Peter Hutchison asked if it was possible to establish the number of people who were actually angling. FB reported on ticket sales from four large fisheries producing a graph showing a decrease in numbers. Less people were visiting and taking out local tickets. Apparently, Scottish Government and its civil servants do not believe that there has been a decrease in numbers.

Peter Landale suggested a sample group of twenty reliable anglers should be contacted to provide information on fishing effort. Peter Hutchison agreed that this would be useful.

Nick Brown reported fewer anglers but more salmon. David Kempself reported more fish in the water than last year. Robbie Cowan advised that since the announcement of Category 3 status had been raised there had been bad feeling against the Board. People's perception was that the Board were not doing enough and the Board should be blamed.

FD reported that a Councillor had asked for two Freedom of Information requests on Catch Statistic Returns. Richard Gladwin asked if the Board should approach its MSPs for support.

There was then a presentation on fish passes in Ireland by the FB after a recent fact finding trip to Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI) to determine if it would be possible to have a fish counter on the River Nith. There are currently 40 fish counters successfully operational in Ireland and they are used to feed into the Conservation Limits used by IFI. The presentation outlined the different scales of counter visited and the feasibility of different counter systems. It has been identified that a crump weir and Logie counter would be the best option and that they would be suitable for a range of sites on the Nith.

Thereafter there was general discussion. It was agreed that there should be more investigation with personnel from IFI to give advice on location of fish passes throughout the catchment, one preferred site being the Scour. If fish passes capable of measuring the passage of salmon could be located within the river at various places then the data provided would be more accurate in providing a detailed plan for conservation policy. It may be that there was possible grant aid and sponsorship.

Finally, it was recognised that the new Factor, Alan Nisbet from Buccleuch Estates Limited would attend in future as its representative.

The Board Meeting thereafter closed.