

**NITH DISTRICT SALMON FISHERY BOARD**

**MINUTES OF**

**BOARD MEETING  
HELD AT FRIARS CARSE COUNTRY HOUSE HOTEL,  
AULDGIRTH, DUMFRIES**

**on**

**10 DECEMBER 2018 AT 10.00 AM**

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**Present**

Percy Weatherall – Chairman  
Raymond Mundle  
David Kempself  
Peter Landale  
Anna Fergusson  
Wally Wright  
Thomas Florey  
Tom Brown  
Richard Gladwin  
John Charteris

**In Attendance**

Jim Henderson  
Deborah Parke  
David McMichael  
Scott Kerr  
Christine Carson

The Chair opened the meeting by welcoming all present. The Chairman explained that the Clerk was not present for the meeting but if there were any questions or issues requiring input from the Clerk they be postponed to the next meeting.

**1. Apologies**

Roderick Styles  
Robbie Cowan

**2. Declaration of Financial Interests**

None declared.

### **3. Board minutes of the Meeting of 21<sup>st</sup> September 2018**

The minutes of the previous meeting were taken as true and accurate.

#### **4. Matters arising:**

FD raise the matter of the Fishery Management Plan template (FMP). At a recent meeting he discovered that the SG FMP template is currently being trailed on a number of rivers. Chair enquired if it was sensible. There are 12 pressure points that have been identified and the template works through these. Online reporting will be feasible. PL enquired about the timescales but there isn't a firm time scale set as yet. Once trial has been completed then it will start to be rolled out to all rivers.

Peter Landale has successful been elected onto the FMS Board.

#### **4.1. Proposed Budget 2019**

This item had not been included on the agenda but was added. FD ran through the notes that had been prepared and circulated by the Clerk. FD reiterated that the Board required £272,000 to operate during 2019. The matter of rate appeals was raised and that to date the Clerk did not have a complete assessment roll of for the whole River. Accordingly, it would not be possible to set a rate in the pound at this meeting. However, it was possible to agree a rebate figure based on the accounts produced.

Based on the figures the FD considered that £65,000 would be a suitable rebate this year. DK enquired how the expenditure had compared with 2017. FD replied that it hadn't really changed. The Chair stated that it was unlikely that the assessment would increase. The figure of £272,000 is needed to operate for 2019. Money had been allocated for the counter project on the Crawick Water - circa £50,000.

RG stated that it sounds like appeals have decreased and that he believed that we weren't in a position to decide on the rebate and that we should wait for these figures to be known. The Chair recommended that we set the rebate at the suggested £65,000. PL enquired about the level of monies that were in the bank account.

DK asked if the entire budget for the fish counter was being paid by the Board and if external funding is still being sought. FD replied that all funding options were being sought.

PL stated that going forward, when the FMP plan is initiated it would be beneficial to have some future investment to improve research on salmon stocks. FD stated that he has been approached by Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI) to put acoustic listening devices in the Solway to monitor tagged sea trout in the Solway. The Nith can take part in this type of project but that it all required funding and in the future we may need to make provision for this type of research. PL supported the rebate this year but stated that we need to make provision for participating in research projects in the future.

TF asked if we were in contact with the assessor and what happens in the future if the rates keep dropping. FD had raised this with FMS and this is a concern with a lot of rivers throughout Scotland. Subscriptions for FMS have dropped this year as a result of decreasing fish numbers but the FMS Board are looking into this subject.

FD asked to authorise the Clerk to set the new rate in the pound to raise the sum of £272,000 to operate in 2019. This was approved unless the assessment following appeals differentiated in excess of 20%. It was agreed that if the assessment figure comes in over 20% differentiation then there should be another meeting but that a rebate of £65,000 is approved in the meantime.

## **5. River Reports**

The FD stated that it had been a very busy year but that there were no outstanding events i.e. pollution reports. FD discussed the coal industry and the fact that it was nearly finished at the top of the Nith. There are only a few years of operation/restoration left within the Coal industry. We continue to work with the coal industry and monitor fish stocks.

PL enquired about the Whitesands Flood Prevention Scheme. JC stated that the final meetings are due to be held this week but there haven't been any conclusions announced. There is not a lot of support from locals. FD enquired about the Caul and what happens in the event of an engineering failure. FD stated that it was starting to degrade. JC stated that there is interest in reinstating the mill lade to be used as a hydroelectric scheme. It was agreed that removal of the Caul would be one of the biggest positive impacts that could be made to fish passage on the Nith. The Caul poses an obstruction to salmon and sea trout migration.

TF asked if there was any possibility of receiving funding from the sale of gold panning tickets. FD stated that there are agreements in place with Buccleuch with Gold panners and they are not permitted to pan in designated areas during the spawning season.

JC recommended that the Board keeps an eye on the group called the River Nith Harbour Authority who have taken on the right to manage lower the River Nith and boat traffic. They are looking at re-establishing some of the old ports. FD stated that as a statutory body the NDSFB will be informed of any plans that they put forward. SEPA do not have any authority below the Caul. Marine Scotland does have authority there. The NDSFB has statutory authorisation to 5km out into the Solway and would be involved in consulting on any activities proposed.

## **6. 2018 season**

In general, it has not been a good season for salmon. This was common with the rest of Scotland. At FMS AGM a map showing the decreasing numbers of salmon was presented showing the problem to be wide-spread.

Of concern to the FD is the lack of reported catches to FishPal so that it appears that nothing has been caught on the Nith. A recent article in The Times newspaper reported that the Nith had failed to catch a single salmon during 2018, singling out Blackwood beat. FD read the report to the Board. This report was totally untrue and damaging to the Nith. RG, proprietor of Blackwood, stated that it was a reasonable season with a higher than average catch had been achieved on Blackwood. PL stated that specific beats can request to turn off the reporting mechanism for their beats.

Buccleuch stated that they no longer work with FishPal and it did more harm than good. TB raised the issue that FishPal had previously received substantial funding from Scottish Government.

FD to contact Tom at FishPal to request that all beat reporting on the Nith is switched off unless the beat proprietor states otherwise.

FD asked for guidance as to how to combat The Times newspaper article. It was agreed that PL would discuss this subject with Alan Wells from FMS and that it would be responded to in general terms rather than Nith specific.

## **7. Scottish Government conservation categorisation (Category 2)**

Scottish Government (SG) published their proposed conservation categorisations for the 2019 season and have declared that the categorisations model will be kept the same for the next few years to let it stabilise. The Nith has been declared a Category 2 river and as such we must put management conservation measures in place to ensure the salmon stocks are conserved. FD suggested 1 salmon per year be retained. DK requested that we stay with status quo and have a max of 2 salmon per year retained. TC and WW agreed and stated that most haaf net tags have been returned unused. DK felt that we still need to encourage visiting anglers and the ability to kill 2 fish does attract people.

FD stated that during 2017 season the Nith achieved a 89% C&R rate. Buccleuch stated that they achieved a 90-95% C&R rate in 2018. Scott Kerr stated that Buccleuch would like to see the salmon season reduced as he considered that there is no longer a back end run and that it is doing more harm than good to continue fishing during November. It was stated that every proprietor has the ability to close their beat as they saw fit. DK stated that DGAA close their fishing on the upper Cairn to protect spawning stocks. FD agreed that the main run of fish is by with come November and that proprietors are free to close their season early. PL stated that we are in a PR game and agrees with Scott in closing the river in November. If it is voluntary then we need to publicise this. WW asked if it would be possible for anglers to be given tags similar to the haaf netters. It is felt that issuing tags for anglers is a logistical nightmare. DK would welcome a tagging system. FD stated that of all of the netters issued tags that only two proprietors returned their tags. It was agreed that they should not get tags the following year and that no NDSFB rebate of assessment be paid if no tags were returned. TB supported this view. TB as Chair of the Haaf netter association supports the motion and does not see why he should keep going to them.

It was agreed that we extole the benefits of C&R and that our anglers and nets men show the greatest of restraint and recommended that a target of 90% C&R per beat be achieved. Those beats that that don't achieve the 90% to be visited by FD to offer assistance in them achieving this figure. All other mechanisms to reduce exploitation would be recommend and that beats consider closing in November.

FD showed a photo of a fish that had been killed which was very coloured and full of roe as an example of bad practice experience during 2018.

## **8. 2019 Opening Event**

DGAA are hosting the opening event for 2019. The previous event had been at Dalswinton and it was very successful. The Chair apologised that he will not be available for the date. FD stated he was working with DK and RM to organise the event. FD asked for a budget to facilitate the event, it was

agreed that FD use his discretion. DGAA stated that they were looking for a small marque and asked if anyone had one. PL offered his for the event. DGAA are hoping to open their fishing to attendee on the opening day.

### **9. 2019 Sea Trout experience**

FD wanted to know if proprietors wanted to run the sea trout experience in 2019, this was agreed.

FD suggested that the members consider having an open day for salmon fishing on the Nith during August so that we could get some additional rods on the River for a day. Anglers would register with NDSFB and then they would be assigned a beat/permit. It was agreed that a salmon open day would be run in 2019 – all proprietors present were in agreement.

### **10. A.O.B**

FD read a letter from Peter Hutchison to the Board. PH has an issue with his rates. PH has not been allowed to fish since 2016 and has received compensation for those three years. SG have reconsidered the moratorium on coastal netting and have agreed that it will continue. PH appealed his fishery assessment and has received a zero rating for the fishery. PH wants the Board to discount his NDSFB rates which he has been levied during part of the period over which the net has not operated. The Chair asked that if he is now zero rates can he still qualify as a Board member/proprietor. FD agreed to speak to the Clerk and get legal opinion which will be discussed at next meeting.

The second point that PH raised was read out. Essentially PH seeks that NDSFB support Douglas Hall Fishery in their campaign with the Scottish Government to reconsider the closing of the coastal nets. The Chair asked if other Board were experiencing similar situations. FD confirmed that this was the case.

TB asked if he would still qualify to be sitting on the Board as Drumburn now does not have any active fishings. This question has been raised in other districts and FD will contact FMS for their opinion. FD agreed to get legal opinion from the Clerk on these issues and it was generally felt that any campaign with the Scottish Government would be one for the Scottish Net Fishing Association rather than the Board.

IFI are keen to monitor some sea trout smolts on the Solway and have contacted us to see if we can place some trackers in the Solway. FD was tasked to speak to them further and provided there were no direct costs to the NDSFB this was agreed in principle.

PL asked for an update on the Fish Counter – A deposit for the counter has been put down and we are preparing to build counter in late May 2019 weather permitting. Everything will be shuttered and built in place. All of the permissions are in place. PL asked about the fish stock research – FD has spoken to James Hunt from the Tweed on how they correlate the figures from a tributary against the whole river. FD reiterated that it may take a while to fine tune the counter once it is up and running. PL feels that we need to understand the methodology for future research with long-term goals. RG stated that for this correlation to work then we must start recoding angling effort. It will be mandatory for proprietors to report fishing effort to Scottish Government along with their catch returns in 2019.

The meeting closed at 11:47am.