

NITH DISTRICT SALMON FISHERY BOARD
MINUTES OF
BOARD MEETING
HELD AT FRIARS CARSE COUNTRY HOUSE HOTEL
ON
26 SEPTEMBER 2019 AT 10.30AM

PRESENT

Percy Weatherall – Chairman
David Kempself – Dumfries and Galloway Angling Association
Peter Landale – Dalswinton Estate
Raymond Mundel – Dumfries and Galloway Angling Association
Wally Wright – Netting Representative
Peter Hutchison – Douglas Hall Fishery
Anna Ferguson – Buccleuch Estate
Robbie Cowan – Caerlaverock Estate
Tom Brown – Drumburn Estate
Mike Machin – Netting Representative

IN ATTENDANCE

Roderick Styles – Clerk
James Henderson – Fishery Director (FD)
Scott Kerr – Buccleuch Estate

The Chairman opened the meeting by welcoming all present.

1. APOLOGIES

Thomas Florey – Angling Representative
Nick Wright – Closeburn Castle Fishings

2. DECLARATION OF FINANCIAL INTERESTS

There were none.

3. BOARD MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF 7 JUNE 2019

The Chairman sought approval which was given unanimously.

4. MATTERS ARISING

David Kempself will provide the address of Dumfries & Galloway Angling Association Treasurer to the Clerk for the purposes of payment of the Angling Association's assessment.

FD raised the matter of item 6 of Peter Landale's presentation and report. As a consequence a second hand smolt trap had become available and been purchased from the River Annan Board. Finance for the purchase had been earmarked from Irish Gas funds paid for Environmental Improvements.

Peter Landale advised that if the tracking project comes off for the Solway Firth then Marine Scotland will provide finance for the Board's input to the project.

5. RIVER REPORT/ QUARTERLY REPORT

FD reported that he finished surveying and electrofishing for both the National Electrofishing Project and the Commercial Projects, all listed in the Quarterly Report. Peter Hutchison mentioned the Trust Meeting touching upon this subject and asked if there were still parts of the Catchment where gaps existed in our fisheries data and which FD would like to obtain and to survey.

FD responded that all areas of the catchment that he required to survey were surveyed. There are no gaps in our fisheries database which we desired to fill. In respect of the National Electrofishing Project, Scottish Government had picked locations for electrofishing surveys with reference to maps which sometimes gave rise to strange areas being surveyed that would never have had the benefit being surveyed.

The Chairman asked about cormorants and goosanders.

FD responded to the effect that the Board had a research licence to supply carcasses for gut analysis along with the Rivers Tweed, Dee and Spey. With the research licence, the season for control of cormorants and goosanders had been very much extended. The specialist employed to analyse the gut contents had offered to come to a Board Meeting to give a talk on what was involved in connection with the analysis.

Tom Brown asked about enforcement and an incident at Kirkcudbright in respect of haaf netting. There was no history of haaf netting ever having taken place on the Kirkcudbrightshire Dee since 1951. FD confirmed that as such it was illegal.

The Chairman reported of finding nets at Southernness the previous weekend. FD advised that they are capable of being legally set for white fish. The problem is that they also intercept salmon. However, in order to succeed with prosecution, it is necessary to prove intent to fish for salmon. FD had seized nets in the past and attempted prosecution but it was difficult to prove.

Peter Hutchison asked if there is a National base line account for river systems from RSPB or anybody else in respect of fish eating predators.

FD replied in the affirmative stating that the information was available from Fishery Management Staff on an annual basis. He did not think that the Nith Catchment had more of these birds than any other catchment.

Peter Landale stated that he thought that it was very easy to fixate on a particular problem within the Catchment but Moray Firth analysis should show significant amounts of fish mortality, particularly where there are river obstructions such as weirs

or canals. Work done in respect of avian predation is very important but there are no base statistics for it yet. There are two species of cormorants. It is the one from Europe that decimates fish stocks.

FD reported that when carrying out predation control he cannot exercise control by use of guns in the vicinity of the Town.

Peter Landale stated that if West Coast monitoring comes off, then information received from above and below the caul could give significant results.

6. SALMON EXPERIENCE 2019

FD reported that Proprietors were generous in providing beats. Scott Kerr from Buccleuch and Andy Edgar from Dalswinton were of great help. Sixty five to seventy people attended. Not all were properly equipped. Some were well travelled from south of England.

Scott Kerr advised that some expressed enthusiasm with the Beat and would return.

David Kempself was at DGAA. The river had been rising and had not been in good condition for fly fishing.

FD asked if the project should be repeated in 2020. There was general discussion on the point and the consensus was that it should. It was a good idea to promote the river. The end of August was the best date.

7. RIVER CATEGORISATION

FD advised that the Nith system will move from Category 2 to Category 3 for season 2020, resulting in 100% catch and release of salmon in Season 2020. Marine Scotland has released a video showing how categorisation is decided upon.

Tom Brown advised that Nith Estuary Haaf Netting Association have appealed the categorisation as has Dumfries & Galloway Council concerning Rivers Nith and Annan, and submissions are awaited.

Tom Brown advised that all coastal netting had ceased.

There was general discussion on the categorisation. A question was raised as to whether or not the Board could object.

The Clerk advised that the Board's statutory duty is to protect fish, not commercially promote each Proprietor's interest. It might be possible to complain on the very narrow point of the lack of clarity, methodology and reason given in respect of the annual categorisation.

Peter Landale suggested that representation could be made to the effect that the modelling of categorisation is flawed.

FD reported on the Fishery Director's meeting. There was a problem with lack of footfall on rivers. Nobody seems to be as interested in fishing these days as has been the case in the past. It was suggested that a letter be produced on the point to Scottish Government. FD reported that there are problems with accuracy of Catch Statistics Returns made. Peter Landale suggested that there has been an over emphasis on Catch Statistics on the part of Scottish Government and their use concerning categorisation. He believed that there are other things affecting salmon that are more important.

8. FMS REGIONAL MEETING

FD reported on good attendance from South West Rivers with representation from Rivers Urr, Annan and Ayr. FD had spoken to Alan Wells the previous morning. It was generally thought to have been a good thing for FMS to have done. Good information was forthcoming. It was clearly apparent that they are making an effort.

9. FINANCIAL REVIEW

The Chairman referred to the three illustrations produced. It was acknowledged that consultancy income was of great benefit to the river.

Cutting staff numbers would impact upon consultancy income. The matter was for internal discussion.

It was after discussion suggested that Option 1 be followed with Option 2 being kept under consideration and Option 3 being rejected.

Thereafter the meeting closed.