

NITH DISTRICT SALMON FISHERY BOARD
MINUTES OF
BOARD MEETING
ON
25 JANUARY 2022
VIA ZOOM

PRESENT

Percy Weatherall (Chairman)
Thomas Florey
David Kempself – Dumfries & Galloway Angling Association
Peter Landale – Dalswinton Estate
Freja Grant – BEL
Richard Gladwin – Blackwood Estate
Peter Hutchison – Douglas Hall Fisheries
Tom Brown - Drumburn Estate mandatory
Nick Wright – Angling Rep
Raymond Mundle

IN ATTENDANCE

Roderick Styles – Clerk
James Henderson – Fishery Director (FD)
Deborah Parke – Nith Catchment Fishery Trust (FB)

The Chairman welcomed all present. He referred to the Clerk in respect of Declaration of Financial Interests. The Clerk explained why the Declaration was sought. None were declared.

1. APOLOGIES

There were none.

2. BOARD MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF 24 SEPTEMBER 2021

The Chairman referred to the Minutes and matters arising.

3. MATTERS ARISING

On the Glenmuckloch presentation, FD reported no further news. It is likely that the matter is in Planning.

The Chairman observed that from the presentation given it would seem that no huge discharge emanated from the Scheme and the River System should be unaffected.

David Kempself suggested that there should be a watching brief on abstraction in low flows and in respect of the amount of discharge. FD advised that he would keep an eye on matters.

The Minutes were approved unanimously.

4. DRAFT BUDGET

The Chairman referred to the spreadsheet and the Clerk's Notes. He asked the Clerk to speak on the Notes.

The Clerk referred to Additional Information on his Budget Notes and point (u) thereof, the SEPA Upper Nith and Laggan Flood Alleviation Scheme Funds in the sum of £1,170. The Board had withdrawn from the Scheme. The Clerk recommended that these funds be amalgamated with item (f) Environmental Project Management Fund. This was unanimously agreed to.

The Clerk referred to his Notes and due consideration was given to them by the Board. The Clerk proposed a rate in the pound and a rebate as had been offered in the previous financial year.

David Kempself asked that the rate in the pound be looked at and reduced in the future. Richard Gladwin endorsed the view. Thomas Florey applauded the staff for the financial control shown. Peter Hutchison observed that consultation income can vary and suggested that the proposal on rate in the pound remained as per last financial year's rate.

Richard Gladwin asked when next re-valuation would take place. The matter was discussed. The Clerk advised that in order to obtain re-valuation application would have to be made to the Assessor. The last re-valuation had taken place in 2017.

David Kempself observed that higher rateable values means more valuable fishing in theory, but there was a need to save money.

FD reported that FMS are looking at the whole matter of funding. In essence, it is now felt that the funding model for Fishery Boards is broken.

Peter Landale reported that Scottish Government had produced a report and summary on 14 January 2022, but that nothing had been covered regarding the financial position. The model of using RVs across Scotland doesn't work however, the structure of Board and Trust Management is a good model for future management. The question would be for the Board as to how it would structure itself in the hope of dealing with a future income stream. Peter Landale's view is that there needs to be a working group to examine the strategy, structure and development of future funding initiatives for the Board. It is doubtful that RVs can be used as a model for future financing. Fish stocks had fallen by 90% in the last 10 years which had an impact on the value of fishing.

The Chairman agreed that Proprietors must all feel the same but that the Board members must focus on the purpose of the current meeting, the budget and the proposed assessment for the financial year. It is necessary to adopt a sensible plan for the financial year. Richard Gladwin stated that in his view the Board was "kicking

the can down the road". The Board was hiding the black hole of river management funding by relying upon consultancy income and rebates to fishery owners.

Peter Landale recommended settling the budget for this financial year but that a strategic view of how the Board functions and how it could function in the future should be undertaken. In his view, there is a need to look at development of biodiversity schemes. It may be that large sums of money might come from biodiversity schemes which may give rise to funding from research and management. The structure of Board management would have to be examined.

Peter Hutchison stated that in any strategic review it would be necessary to examine all of the income streams. It would be necessary to continue with consultancy work.

After discussion, it was agreed that the Board should take forward the development of a strategic review of the Board's future finances with a view to forming a sub-committee to take this forward.

The Chairman asked for approval of the Budget which was then unanimously given. It was agreed that the rate in the pound would be £1.57.

5. RIVER REPORT

FD reported that in the 2021 season the Catch Statistic Returns made indicated that 249 salmon and 484 sea trout had been caught. It had been a disastrous year for salmon. There had been a prolonged drought. There has been no fishing effort because the river was so low. Fish had remained in the estuary and there had been concern about mortality as a consequence of the lack of river flow.

Tom Brown reported that there had been little or no haaf net fishing and he had seen only one salmon swimming up river.

FD reported on complaints being made in connection with SEPA and its operations. The Chief Executive had stood down the previous Friday with immediate effect.

Last week FD had heard of an incident being reported of an Annandale commercial dog kennel owner shipping and dumping dog excrement at a ford in the River Cairn and apparently has been doing so for a number of years. Names, addresses and car registration numbers had been supplied to SEPA and there was a meeting to take place with the Police. Social media have got hold of this issue and SEPA were aware and worried about the dumping. Residents on the way to the ford had reportedly seen it being dumped. They had got so sick of it that they had reported it. FD had photographs of the incidents.

Peter Landale reported on a new organisation called "Environmental Standards Scotland" (ESS) set up with a budget of £2.2 million. Scottish Government (SG) have set up ESS to oversee compliance regarding Scotland's environmental obligations. SEPA, Marine Scotland and Scottish Water all have to comply. However, ESS would have to go to SG to seek permission to pursue breaches.

Peter Landale stated that across Scotland everybody is concerned about SEPA. A new organisation to monitor the likes of how SEPA performed might be a good thing.

FD stated that he would like to see how ESS performed. They will not take individual cases, but consistent systems failure on the part of other bodies like SEPA would be something that they might pursue.

FD reported that he had reviewed the Board's insurances to ensure that they were fit for purpose and cost effective.

Consultation income was still being generated.

6. NITH CATCHMENT FISHERY TRUST UPDATE

The Chairman reported that there had been a good meeting that had taken place on 24 January. The meeting had examined:-

- (a) The smolt tracking project;
- (b) River update report;
- (c) Signal Crayfish sightings;
- (d) Fishing for the Future. This scheme creates enormous goodwill and lots of schools are signing up for the project. Finances are currently being examined in this regard.

The budget for the Trust will be the same for the forthcoming financial year. The Trust is looking for more sources of funding for environmental projects. It is hoped that the Board will fund at the same level as in the previous financial year. The Trust was generally in good shape.

7. NITH & WEST COST SALMON TRACKING PROJECT – PAPER & VERBAL PRESENTATION 2021

The results of the previous year's Smolt Tracking Project had been issued but they were confidential to Board Members only. There had been two projects, one for the Nith Smolt Tracking Project with smolts caught from the Crawick Water using a fyke net. 50 smolts had been caught and fitted with acoustic tags.

The second project is the West Coast Smolt Tracking Project funded by AST. A trap had been installed at Auldgirth. AST had paid for 100 tags and then after success of the tagging by Board Staff had provided a further 30 tags.

Listening devices were located at points on the river to monitor progress of smolts migrating down river. Monitoring stations were located at Dalpedder, Drumlanrig,

south of Thornhill, at Blackwood, at Cowhill, upstream of the caul around Nunholm Road, one below the caul and then one at Kingholm Quay.

The Board is part of a much bigger AST co-ordinated west coast smolt tracking project. The River Nith is furthest south, then the River Bladnoch and then certain rivers on the west coast of Scotland including the Western Isles. Seagoing monitoring devices were stretched from Stranraer and in between Malin Head and Islay and then at certain points north.

100% of smolts that had been tagged were released but there had been certain initial losses, believed to have arisen from the handling of smolts. Nith staff are tracking smolts further up river than any other river system on the West Coast of Scotland. As a consequence, there had been generated good information on smolt migration from the river.

There had been an initial steep loss after tagging, but these losses had substantially decreased during migration out to sea.

It is possible to measure the speed of migration and where smolts stop during the course of migration.

The smolts move quickly then slow up as they near the salt water at Dumfries. FD theorises that the deep water at the caul may attract migrating smolts to rest.

It was apparent that smolts predominantly moved at night.

The smolts having left the river, were the subject of detection by two arrays, one at Compass array between Larne and Stranraer and the other the SeaMonitor array between Islay and Ireland.

16 salmon smolts had been detected on the Compass Array. AST had been delighted with the first results.

Salmon detected on the SeaMonitor Array seemed to be heading to the seaward side of the Western Isles rather than migrating through the Minch, which was felt to be of benefit by avoiding salmon farms in the Minch. If smolts released from the Nith had gone through the Minch then they would have been detected.

The time of travel of smolts to the last monitoring station at Kingholm Quay to the Compass Array was noted, with the fastest being 7 days and the slowest being 18 days. Speed to travel to Compass Array had averaged 0.21m per second and 0.5m per second from Compass Array to the SeaMonitor Array between Islay and Ireland.

Nith smolts had migrated through the Irish coast gap and went on, either through the coasts of both Ireland and Scotland and not mid Channel as was the case with Bladnoch Fish.

FD believed that most fish migrated to the western route rather than through the Minch, but qualified this by stating that Arrays can miss fish because of the vast distances involved.

In the last fortnight AST had confirmed that it would go ahead with the project again in 2022 and Nith System would be involved.

The Compass Array and Sea Monitor Arrays are both used by other organisations. 2022 will be the last year of monitoring.

AST will give 100 tags which will be used at Auldgirth. In addition, the Board has funding to secure 75 tags for smolts on the Scour Water.

FD reported that he wished to acknowledge with thanks the contribution of £15,000 made by the Weatherall Family and Ben Weatherall for tagging fish in the Scour Water.

Richard Gladwin noted the survival rates in every river, but the significant problem for survival was immediately after release. He asked if this was as the result of handling fish.

FD responded that he had consulted with AST on the loss. AST had reassured FD that the Board did as well as was possible. There appears to be an issue with handling smolts.

FD reported on the statistics and it only gave an indication. He would like to continue to carry on with the statistical analysis on smolts caught upstream with recapture downstream to gain more information.

Another method would be to take genetic sampling of smolts upstream and then again downstream to try to get more information.

Peter Hutchison asked if there is a possibility for making the acoustic arrays less "leaky" or unable to detect fish? FD undertook to raise this with AST.

FB reported that the thrust of the West Coast Tracking Project was to determine spread and direction of migration and whether via the Minch or via the west of the Western Islands, not to determine losses.

FD pointed out that SG had published areas for potential locations of offshore wind farms. Information on migration routes may help in the future.

Peter Landale stated that the Nith Project had been much bigger than anywhere else. The smolts were much bigger. Reference was made to the east coast results. Nith mortality of smolts after tagging is comparable with other rivers.

Peter Landale thinks that there may be a big issue at Robin Rigg. The effect of wind farms on smolts is unknown. There is a possibility that approach might be made to Robin Rigg for funding.

The real purpose of the West Coast Project is to try to determine the effect of fish farms on migrating smolts. The concern is the effect on migrating wild fish by sea lice infestation. The tracking arrays are tricky to set out and it is hard to deploy and service them. Vast distances are involved.

Peter Landale reported that the Nith appeared to have a healthy population of smolts. More were able to migrate to sea, but not a lot seemed to come back as adults. He had thought that the Caul was the problem. It appears not to be the case. It will be interesting to see what the examination results show next year.

8. RIVER NITH ANGLING PROMOTION

FD reported on the Trust employing an Officer part of whose functions will be for angling and its promotion. He is aware of lack of anglers fishing. FD asked if the Board wants to have a River Opening Event this year. Friars Carse is keen to hold the event.

FD reported on the Sea Trout Experience, that had run in previous years prior to Covid. Do the Board want this to be followed through again? Board Members indicated that they would give support for the Sea Trout Experience. Discussion also took place and it was agreed to run a salmon fishing day event.

9. DRONE EQUIPMENT

FD reported that he considered the acquisition of a drone would be of benefit to the overall functions of the staff. It could be used to produce film footage of each individual beat with relevant information. It could also be used for mapping the Catchment and its features with a view to providing best information for future funding initiatives. He asked if the Board would give consideration for the acquisition and training to use it. After discussion, it was agreed that the marketing side of matters should be left out of any application for the use of a drone. Budget was approved.

10. AOB

FD advised that the Board usually changes its vehicles every three years. The three years will be up in Winter 2022. There is a general shortage of vehicles because of microchip shortage due to the effects of the Covid Pandemic. He asked if steps could be taken to place an order for the purchase now in time for its purchase next December. This was agreed to.

FD reported that he had a Goosander Licence.

There being no other business for discussion, the Chairman thereafter closed the meeting.