

NITH DISTRICT SALMON FISHERY BOARD
MINUTES OF
BOARD MEETING
HELD ON
8 JULY 2022
AT FRIARS CARSE COUNTRY HOUSE HOTEL

PRESENT

Percy Weatherall (Chairman)
Richard Gladwin – Blackwood Estate
Peter Hutchison – Douglas Hall Fisheries
Tom Brown - Drumburn Estate mandatory
Raymond Mundle - Angler
David Kempself – D&GAA
Freya Grant – BEL
Thomas Florey - Angler

IN ATTENDANCE

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

The Chairman welcomed all present.

1. APOLOGIES

Peter Landale/Dalswinton
Andy Ferguson/D&G Council

2. DECLARATION OF FINANCIAL INTERESTS

The matter was put to the floor of the meeting by the Chairman and the Clerk. None were declared.

3. BOARD MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF 25 JANUARY 2022

These were unanimously approved.

4. MATTERS ARISING

There were none raised.

5. RIVER REPORT

FD referred to his Quarterly Report. He had assisted the River Cree in legal matters. He had been involved in tendering advice from a Fishery perspective on monitoring engineering works at Kettleton Reservoir for Scottish Water.

He continues to be involved in consultations regarding proposed engineering works throughout the catchment, the legality of what is proposed so far as Fisheries Management is concerned, engaging with consulting engineers, carrying out survey work and producing consultancy reports, attending site meetings in respect of ongoing

work, charging for the work involved and carrying out post work completion electrofishing and other assessments to ensure that damage to the Fishery is minimised.

FD reported that he had applied for a licence to shoot seals and had been granted it. The Board was the only one in Scotland that has succeeded with such an application.

All management matters revolve around the management of a species which is now deemed to be in crisis.

FD reported in being involved in a TV appearance at the Caul Back in respect of a film made by FMS on Fisheries Enforcement.

Raymond Mundle asked about the dumping of dog excrement within the catchment. FD reported that the matter had been investigated and that a prosecution was going to arise.

Peter Hutchison asked FD what he saw as being the top key factors of importance looking ahead in respect of fisheries management issues.

FD reported on the increase in the amount of construction work within the catchment. Such was the volume of it, he had been attending on sites from 5am every morning onwards for the previous four weeks concerning fish rescue and attendance at project sites every day. FD stated that he was very keen to ensure that any work carried out on the catchment was done in such a way as to try to make a better job of both the project in order to save/minimise damage to the River. FD reported that he found that the Board were acting more as an interface between the contractor and SEPA.

FD had been particularly involved in a project to carry out reinforcement on flood defences and the Flood Improvement Scheme at New Cumnock. The project has been five years in the lead up to this stage of river improvement.

Wind Farm applications continue to have to be dealt with regularly involving the examination of hydrology environmental and ecology that might be potentially affected. Parts of environmental reports produced by the contractors allow the Board to provide input and report and respond accordingly.

FD's time was largely spent on all things involving construction within the catchment. A good grasp of law in respect of Fisheries Management is important.

Richard Gladwin asked how frequently the Council and SEPA are clients of the Board.

FD reported on the involvement in these schemes following on previous talks with the Council and SEPA representatives on site. The Board is now involved to the stage where it is called upon constantly to assist and provide input.

Richard Gladwin asked how frequently Government Agencies were involved as the client. FD responded that he reckoned about 17% of the time.

6. NITH CATCHMENT FISHERY TRUST UPDATE

The Chairman spoke of meetings held on 7 July 2022 at the Blackwood Hatchery.

Matters raised at the meeting were discussed. The AGM had taken place with no matters of significance arising. The annual Report had been examined and there had been an update on the state of the River and the Quarterly Report produced by FD.

Fishing for the Future proved to be a great success over the last three to four years.

Borderline staff who had previously assisted in connection with this project had retired last year. They had donated all of their equipment and funding to the Trust to allow for the Fishing for the Future project to continue.

The Trust had taken on another member of staff on a part time basis. Steps were being taken to look at the Trust and try to improve the running of it for the future. Trust members felt that its existence was very important for the future of the River. It is frustrating that the Education Authority will not provide funding for the project.

Matters for further discussion at the Trust meeting involved invasive species, smolt trapping and the presence crayfish, now identified as being in the Town water. No beavers had been seen as yet but they exist on one side of the wind farm on Dee/Ken Catchment.

Elections had taken place to Trust Office Bearers status. Three Trustees had stood down and Freya Grant, Robert Schiller and Thomas Florey had been elected.

7. NITH & WEST COAST SALMON TRACKING PROJECT

FD reminded of the Tracking Project. One hundred smolts had been trapped during the course of the year, tagged and released with finance made available from AST and private funding for a further quantity of smolts from the Scaur Water. Additional funding had permitted the tagging of an additional seventy five smolts, making the total number of captured, tagged and released smolts one hundred and seventy five for the year.

FD had attended a telemetry conference in Ireland earlier this year. He displayed a map of all European Countries contributing the project. The Nith has carried out more tracking and tagging than any other river system throughout Europe. More technology is coming through and being applied to the Tracking Project. Monitoring is carried out in the River until being removed in the previous week as a result of the cessation of the smolt run.

FD reported that the smolt numbers in terms of size and numbers were larger than in 2021. No smolts had been lost at the Dumfries Caul. The smolt run had been extended in terms of the time taken to complete it during the course of 2022. In summary, there had been monitoring for two years and it was to be hoped that there might be a financial package made available from AST and from private funding for monitoring in the year 2023.

The Chairman reported that he, FD and FB believe that the matter of smolt tagging was worth pursuing.

8. RIVER NITH ANGLING & PROMOTION

The Chairman pointed out that thus far the Board's involvement in this subject had been broadly covered by the Fishing for the Future Project.

FD reported on the Sea Trout Festival and the support given by Fishery owners. There had been good fishing success results. Anglers had come from Fife, the Central Belt and from England. A total of twenty three sea trout had been caught. Photographs had been taken to promote the river. Fifty anglers had signed up for the festival.

There is to be a Salmon Open Day on 13 August with professional instructors present. There had been publication in Trout & Salmon of the promotional days.

9. THE FUTURE DIRECTION OF THE BOARD

The Chairman asked the Board to consider the subject. He referred to page 8 of the Annual Report on the Catch Statistic Returns that suggested that it had been a very poor decade. The Board paid for itself out of two sources of revenue being Assessments and consultancy income. There is a Board and Trust. The employees are FD and FB, together with temporary employees. The Trust can receive charitable donations but the Board cannot.

Assessments will come under pressure if fish numbers continue to fall. Expenses incurred by the Board were reviewed in detail and cut approximately three years ago. The Board is trying to perform its legal duties but the question to be asked is where could it go on in its current format in the face of such poor Returns.

FD reported that he had attended a film show in Dumfries earlier in the year called "River Woods" which showed what is happening in the Scottish environment and how it impacts upon salmon. It showed how land and habitat had been changed by man over many years.

Having seen the film and with the knowledge of fisheries and land management, if money is to be obtained then adopting Government strategy on carbon capture could be followed and the Trust would be an ideal format to manage such a scheme.

FD reported on the Habitat Enhancement Scheme that had been instigated by the Board in the 1990s, with work continuing in these areas to upgrade and improve the existing Habitat Enhancement Schemes.

Tom Brown pointed out that during the 1970s pollution and the likes had been rife on the River but salmon were still being caught in considerable numbers. Now, with all of the environmental and habitat improvements fish catches were less.

FD suggested a showing of the film at a joint Board/Trust meeting and it was agreed that this should be arranged for the next available Board meeting.

FD stated that he believed that the Board should be continuing to improve habitat and trying to become the foremost Scottish Government agency implementing such schemes.

The Chairman suggested a showing of the film to get an idea of the direction in which future habitat management could go in years to come.

Peter Hutchison referred to the “climate change panic button”, the cycle of global warming and the cycle continuing. The FMS Report on current stocks was important. He did not believe that the Habitat Enhancement is the Panacea for all problems on the River. There are issues elsewhere that could not be resolved.

The Chairman reported on previous Hatchery involvement, now apparently discredited, but that the Board had to do what it could to improve matters on the River System.

Peter Hutchison suggested that there should be continued Government lobbying.

FD suggested that if staff time is allocated to carry out habitat enhancement work, then there should be view taken to seek Government funding for the process.

Discussion on the River, the poor stocks and the general decline of salmon fishing took place for a considerable time. It was agreed that the Board should show the film and try to identify the way forward with Habitat Project and funding to come.

Richard Gladwin stated that the Board was in an enviable position in that it can levy taxes through rates and had a monopoly for consultancy services. However, the Fishery issue is in his opinion a bit like the revenue generated from petrol which will drop. If the Board is running flat out with the staff it has got then how can the Board manage to continue to efficiently manage the River.

FD stated that alternative Fisheries Management in the management style of the Environment Agency with funding being made available by rod licence would be unlikely to work.

The Board had accumulated through its consultancy service data throughout the catchment for the last thirty years. This would be of value for future consultancy projects. On this basis Proprietors would have continue to fund to some extent.

10. AOB

New dates for meetings – these were agreed as being, Friday, 14 October, 2022 and Wednesday, 25 January 2023.

FD reported on the sudden development of his heart problem which had now hopefully resolved.

The Chairman noted the retirement of John Charteris as a Board Member and the succession to his position on behalf of Dumfries & Galloway Council of Andy Ferguson. Thanks were extended to John Charteris for his service as a Board Member over the years.

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

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