

NITH DISTRICT SALMON FISHERY BOARD
MINUTES OF
QUARTERELY BOARD MEETING
HELD ON
25 JANUARY 2023 AT 10AM
AT
THE HATCHERY, BLACKWOOD, AULDGIRTH, DUMFRIES

PRESENT

Percy Weatherall – Cowhill (Chairman)
David Kempself – Dumfries & Galloway Angling Association
Raymond Mundle - Angling Representative
Richard Gladwin – Blackwood Estate
Robbie Cowan – Caerlaverock Estate
Nick Wright – Closeburn Castle
Thomas Florey – Angling Representative
Tom Brown – Drumburn Estate
Freya Grant - BEL

IN ATTENDANCE

Roderick Styles – Clerk
James Henderson – Fishery Director (FD)

APOLOGIES

Peter Landale
Peter Hutchison

The Chairman welcomed all present.

1. DECLARATION OF FINANCIAL INTERESTS

None were declared.

2. BOARD MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF 18 OCTOBER 2022

The Clerk advised of typographical errors in the draft Minutes. It was agreed that these could be corrected and the Minutes were approved.

3. MATTERS ARISING

There were none raised.

4. ACCOUNTS & BUDGET

The Clerk referred to the Draft Budget prepared by the Board's Accountants and the Notes on the Draft Budget that the Clerk had produced and circulated. The Chairman pointed to the fact that the year had been a bad year for catch, but a good year for the Board's finances.

FD spoke to the increase in consultancy income earned during the course of the previous financial year ended 30 November 2022. One large payment of £110,000 had

been received from Keir Minerals who had wished to buy out their contract for ongoing monitoring on site, given the cessation of open cast coal operations on the site. The contract for the monitoring had been put in place eighteen years ago. Keir still want to keep the site and it will be developed possibly for three renewable energy wind farms..

FD reported that the Board would be free to continue to negotiate with any future land users who took leases of the ground from Keir. In particular, three wind farming companies want to come on site and the usual electrofishing survey work pre, during and post wind farm construction operations would be required. The previous monitoring arrangement with Keir would have extended until 2030. f Keir Management are now focussing on other engineering projects. The annual sums generated from monitoring the site at Keir was £15,000, but on a decreasing liability basis until 2030. FD reported that the owner of the site still remains liable for the site and for possible failure of the river diversion.

Board Members discussed the matter of the proposed sewerage disposal on the Keir House of Water site. Apparently, it had been ongoing for two years and monitoring was continuing.

Tom Brown asked if the newly created river course put in place as a result of the open cast coal mining operations was still working.

FD responded that the river course was still working well and that tree planting on either bank had grown a lot to help anchor the banksides.

The Chairman referred to the draft Budget. He stated that two assumptions were to be made, being that consultancy income will reduce during 2023 because of the one-off payment made by Keir but that in addition the income figure budgeted for of £120,000 was pessimistic.

The Chairman further explained that he considered that the projected budget expenditure estimated at 5% increase was underestimated.

The Chairman also stated that it was essential that a fourth employee be engaged by the Board to assist the Fishery Director and Fishery Biologist.

The Chairman stated that salary review for the Fishery Director and Fishery Biologist was necessary.

David Kempself asked how salaries would be budgeted for. The Chairman replied that having spoken to the Fishery Director, the revenue to come from consultancy income during 2023 will more than compensate for any additional salary increase.

FD also advised that the Holywood Trust was providing grant funding and that funding was available from NatureScot for the first phase of the new habitat enhancement project. If the project gets the go ahead then there will be additional funding applied for.

After much discussion amongst Board Members, it was agreed that the Board would refund to Proprietors a sum equivalent to 75% of last years Total Annual Assessment levied.

At this point FD was asked to leave the meeting temporarily.

The Chairman raised the matter of Fishery Director's wage. He reported that at the Fishery Trust meeting the previous evening it has been agreed amongst Trust Members that the Fishery Biologist's salary would be increased by 10%. The Board was recognised to help fund expenditure on behalf of the Trust but that in addition, the Trust was earning its own income from projects that it was undertaking.

The Chairman proposed a salary increase for the Fishery Director at 15%. David Kempself suggested that 10% was more realistic.

The Chairman in response stated that he considered that the increase at 15% was more than justified given the amount of work and the hours put in by the Fishery Director and the Fishery Biologist.

Nick Wright advised that he agreed with David Kempself.

Richard Gladwin stated that he strongly disagreed with a salary increase of 10%. He stated that fish numbers in the river being caught are not the issue. It is the amount of work that is being done by the Fishery Director in support of the aims of the Board and in respect of the finance that the Fishery Director generated that needs to be taken account of when considering any salary increase.

Richard Gladwin suggested 10% salary increase plus a bonus structure to reflect the efforts of the Fishery Director.

The Chairman pointed out the evolution of the Fishery Director's position from being one of bailiff when first employed to his development of a money-making financial initiative of huge value to the Board. Robbie Cowan stated that he recalled an increase in the Fishery Director's salary in previous years because the Board had been scared to lose him as a consequence of him being head hunted by another river system.

The Chairman suggested that the Fishery Director be paid at a 50% premium to the Fishery Biologist. As regard the new employee, research suggested that between £40,000 and £45,000 is the going rate for salary.

Raymond Mundle asked if all costs are to be included. The Chairman replied that they had and that his proposal on salary took account of likely future consultancy income that would be earned for the Board by the Fishery Director.

Robbie Cowan asked what the Bailiff, David McMichael, would get by a salary increase. The Chairman stated that he was proposing around 8% for Mr McMichael.

There was much discussion among Board members about the value of the Fishery Director to the Board. The Chairman reaffirmed his proposal for an approval of 15% increase in salary for the Fishery Director. It was agreed to increase the Fishery Director's salary by 15%.

The Chairman then raised the matter of bonus or equivalent to be paid and shared amongst the Fishery Director and the Fishery Biologist. The Chairman proposed 5% of the Consultancy income earned by the Fishery Director during the course of the previous year be treated as bonus to be divided between the Fishery Director and the Fishery Biologist. Based upon that figure around £15,000 would be available for giving as bonus.

There followed discussion upon the subject. It was agreed to offer £15,000 by way of bonus to divide it in suitable ratios between the Fishery Board and Fishery Trust staff.

FD was then asked to return to the meeting.

5. QUARTERELY REPORT & UPDATE

FD reported that a huge amount of work was still coming from the renewable energy schemes, railway maintenance projects with Network Rail and other schemes. Project leaders were now becoming more understanding and accepting of the need to have environmental considerations taken account of in connection with any engineering operations that might impact upon the environment and the river system. The consequence of this is that the Board's staff are being approached much more regularly to carry out the required monitoring giving rise to consultancy income.

FD reported on the large flood on 23 December 2022 which had caused a lot of problems. D & G Council had asked FD for input from the Board with regard to future flood mitigation measures.

FD is now largely involved in the NatureScot Project and this has meant that FD is working on his own. This is proving to be very difficult and time consuming. Work continues to come in and those involved and engaging with the Board are generally appreciative of the Board's involvement in assisting with the project.

FD reported on the Polneul bridge collapse. FD had been involved in assessing potential environmental damage, but there had been none to fish thankfully.

FD stated that he continues to be very busy and foresees very exciting times ahead for fishery management.

FD reported that results for year 2 of the Smolt Tracking Project are not yet available. Year 3 of the Project taking place in spring 2023 will be the last year of the project in the Solway Firth. AST are again providing funding for a number of tags. In addition, private financial funding had been made available to the Board for the deployment in smolts for a further fifty tags. The Nith System is providing more tagged fish for the project than any other River System in Europe. FD reported that Adam Keswick and

the Weatherall Family Trust have provided the private funding for the additional smolt tagging. There were comments of thanks and approval from amongst Board Members.

FD reported on the Nature Restoration Fund Project. The Trust had applied to NatureScot which had approved the idea of the three previously identified tributary improvement projects proposed for the Laggan Burn, the Pennyland Burn and the Crawick Water. Separate independent assessment was to be undertaken in the hope of securing an options approval document. If this was approved, then funding will be applied for to take forward the Project.

FD reported that SEPA have been pushed to deal with obstruction on the Laggan Burn and have refused. It is hoped that the Board can have the Project approved.

6. TRUST UPDATE

The Chairman reported on the previous evening's meeting, which had been good. Survey work shows good numbers of invertebrates and of fish where work is undertaken. However, the flood on 23 December 2022 may have impacted on early spawning fish by disruption of redds.

Crayfish are now reported to be at the Carnation Bridge at Nunholm, Dumfries.

The Fishing for the Future Project funding is now available and the Project is ready to go for the new season.

The Trust had discussed the Smolt Tracking Project. The Trust had also discussed the idea of the Fishery Biologist being assisted by the employment of extra personnel on a funded basis, the funds being made available from the projects being undertaken.

The Trust's Accounts and Budget were satisfactory.

7. FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLAN

FD reported that Scottish Government had issued a draft Fishery Management Template to Scottish Fisheries Coordination Centre, an off shoot of FMS, which FD and FB will work on to produce. It is hoped to have this written up before the end of this year in draft form for the Board's consideration before publication.

A Fishery Management Plan was needed to qualify for applications for grant funding.

Raymond Mundle asked if the River Categorisation is part of the plan. FD replied, yes the Categorisation was likely to play part of it.

8. EVENTS – 2023

FD spoke about the salmon fishing season opening event to be held on 25 February 2023 at Blackwood Hatchery. The date falls on a Saturday. The Chairman reported that he could not make it. Richard Gladwin reported that he could not attend.

FD reported that Claxtons, the whisky bonded warehouse organisation based on Dalswinton Estate, would provide a special bottling labelled with the Board's

promotional logo for issue on the opening day, together with related publicity. Fox Clothing are also providing sponsorship.

FD commented on the Sea Trout Festival that had been held last year which had been very successful. He proposed that the Scheme be taken forward again for Season 23 and proposed dates of 23 June, 30 June, 7 July and 14 July. FD asked for Proprietor's support in connection with making available sea trout fishing for that purpose, which was generally given.

FD suggested that the salmon event should take place on Saturday, 2 September for the same fisheries and this was agreed too.

FD reported that the Galloway Country Fare would be held on 12/13 August and that the Board would be represented by him and the Fishery Biologist.

FD reported on Catch Statistic numbers for the previous Season which amounted to 410 salmon produced.

The Nith being a Category 3 River did not help. The fact that a large number of Lower Proprietors were net fisheries which were simply not operating because of the Categorisation requiring return of all salmon suppressed the fishing effort being put in. Angling effort had also been reduced as a result of a sustained drought during the course of the Season.

9. AOB

The Chairman moved that the Board fix Board Meeting dates and it was agreed that these would be held on:-

14.04.23

13.07.23* **NB this minuted date has been changed to 21.07.23**

19.10.23* **NB this minuted date has been changed to 12.10.23**

The Meeting thereafter closed.