

**NITH DISTRICT SALMON FISHERY BOARD**  
**MINUTES OF**  
**BOARD MEETING**  
**HELD ON**  
**14 APRIL 2023 AT 10.30AM**  
**AT**  
**THE HATCHERY, BLACKWOOD, AULDGIRTH, DUMFRIES**

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**PRESENT**

Percy Weatherall – Chairman  
David Kempself – D&GAA  
Peter Hutchison – Netting Representative  
Nick Wright - Closeburn Castle Fishings  
Peter Landale – Dalswinton Estate  
Richard Gladwin - Blackwood  
Thomas Florey – Angling Representative

**MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC IN ATTENDANCE**

James Hunter Paterson (Barjarg)  
Melanie Hunter Paterson (Barjarg)

**IN ATTENDANCE**

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

**APOLOGIES**

Robbie Cowan – Caerlaverock Estate  
Tom Brown – Drumburn  
Anna Ferguson – BEL  
Raymond Mundle – Angling Representative

The Chairman welcomed all present.

**1. DECLARATION OF FINANCIAL INTERESTS**

None were declared.

**2. BOARD MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF 25 JANUARY 2023**

The Chairman confirmed these had been circulated. They were considered and approved by all present.

**3. MATTERS ARISING**

The Chairman asked if any matters were arising and none were reported.

**4. QUARTERLY REPORT & UPDATE**

FD referred to the Quarterly Report circulated by him. He and FB had been extremely busy. Reference was made to the Conference in Aviemore and the considerable information released, particularly including the involvement of SG in new initiatives to take forward for fisheries being included within the Government's Biodiversity Initiative.

FD referred specifically to reports of pollution incidents in the Balloch Burn. When reported to SEPA their response had been to the effect that they would “check it on the way home”, which FD found to be appalling. Peter Hutchison asked if SEPA would take samples of allegedly polluted water supplied by the Board. FD confirmed that SEPA would not accept such samples.

The Chairman and Peter Landale stated that there is a collective view that SEPA are not performing their statutory functions as they should. Peter Landale reported that Alison Baker of Forth DSFB is now attending SEPA Board Meetings and expressing dissatisfaction at these meetings about the lack of proper governance by SEPA. SEPA are apparently unhappy about this. Pressure needs to be put on SEPA to deal with and accept sampling from external sources. It was agreed that Peter Landale would take this matter forward to FMS with a view to trying to provide a proposed policy for negotiating with SEPA and SG to allow for sampling to be more efficiently dealt with in the future.

FD reported that Vodafone would sponsor two constant water monitoring devices to be installed within the River System to try to determine what is happening regarding water quality within the system. Richard Gladwin asked if all Fishery Boards on a collective basis could put pressure on SEPA.

Peter Landale responded that with the new Biodiversity Initiative there will have to be monitoring systems. A baseline of information would be required to assist in connection with future monitoring. Peter Landale advised that he will take the Board’s observations and hoped-for policy to FMS to try to push for a standardised policy between FMS, SG and SEPA for taking samples for future analysis.

The Chairman (expressing the wish to take matters out of agenda) raised the issue of Nith Life, an organisation that had apparently developed within the course of the last year. FB and FD had attended its meetings. Peter Landale had been contact with Mr Wheeler of Nith Life. The relationship with Community Groups such as Nith Life was discussed and it was agreed that the Nith Board should work to understand the aims objectives of community groups and make sure future opportunities were maximised for investment in the River Nith Catchment and not jeopardised. In this regard, the Chairman reminded those present on the Board’s funding initiative, hoped to be supplied for three tributaries, to a deliverable stage. These could be adversely affected if any funding initiative from Nith Life should crosscut or be in competition with the aims of Board and Trust in this regard.

During discussion, it was considered that this formed part of a much larger subject that had been developing during the course of the previous two years and it was agreed that Peter Landale as the Board’s representative on FMS and with his involvement with AST should address the Board on developments at National level through FMS, AST and SG, having regard to the hoped for future of Salmon Fisheries Management and the development of SG’s Biodiversity Initiative.

Peter Landale reported on the Annual General Meeting of FMS which he, the Clerk, FD and FB had attended. SG’s Minister had delivered a remote presentation and this

combined with the technical report given by the SG representative at the FMS meeting were strong indicators that SG had very much come round to the idea that in order to develop their Biodiversity Initiative in the most efficient manner, all River Catchments should be looked at as being the best models by which to deliver aspects of the Biodiversity Initiative.

In addition to this, the value of individual salmon fisheries as assessed by the Assessor were crashing downwards because the values could not be sustained in the face of plummeting Catch Statistic Returns. There is a transition of approach apparently developing and taking place now. FMS through finance made available from the Missing Salmon Alliance and the ESME Fairbairn Foundation seed funding, have produced a direction in which to take catchment management forward, particularly with regard to Fishery Management. In this regard, FMS is hoping to appoint a new Director of Nature Finance to help Boards and Trusts to navigate funding initiatives available through the private sector. All parties with an interest in providing ecological benefit to the Catchment would be entitled to apply. Consequently, it would be advisable for the Board to continue to interact with Nith Life with a view to trying to coordinate an approach that could be taken for the benefit of the whole Catchment.

Peter Landale also recommended that the Board engage with Galloway Biosphere. FD reported that he was already in contact with Galloway Biosphere and hoped to continue with that contact.

Peter Landale reported that FMS is applying to FIRNS (Facility for Investment Ready Nature in Scotland ) for seed funding to create a river catchment restoration project. Stakeholders will come from the financial, community, landowners, fishery managers and SG.

The results of this project may supply FMS with the infrastructure to apply to industry for funding to invest into the Nith and other river catchments. The development of this work is hugely complicated and a lot of work is going to have to be done to put all matters into place.

Peter Landale reported that the Nith Trust because of its charitable status is very important for the future of bringing in substantial funding to allow for the Board and Trust to take forward fishery management initiatives.

After full discussion, it was agreed that the Board would continue to keep a watching brief upon bio-catchment improvements and will continue to try to understand what Nith Life and other similar bodies are trying to achieve on a community catchment basis. Peter Landale would continue to report to the Board on the development of the Biodiversity Initiative and Catchment and Fishery Management Plans being developed at National level.

The meeting then reverted to consideration of the agenda items in stated order.

FD reported on smolt trapping. The Board was now in its third year of catching smolts with a view to surgically implanting electronic tags within smolts to allow them to be

monitored at acoustic monitoring stations at various stages down the River System and ultimately at sea, to try to determine the migration patterns of juvenile salmon smolts making their way to sea. The Board will tag 125 smolts of a specified size and weight. Migration will be monitored down river and at sea through the means of acoustic arrays in the Solway Firth and up the west coast of Scotland. Tagging was commence on starting on this day, after the meeting.

Peter Landale reported that the results of year two of the West Coast Smolt Tracking Project were not yet available. The seas had been too rough to allow for the acoustic buoys to be collected in order that their data could be downloaded.

FD reported that he was working with BEL and Wanlock Community Council to assist in riverbank repairs and fish rescue. FD reminded the Meeting that Wanlockhead was the highest village in Scotland and yet during his fish rescue operations salmon juveniles had been found in water courses in the area.

Peter Landale asked if fyke nets were used for the capture of smolts and FD confirmed that they were and it was proposed that these fyke nets be used and deployed in other tributaries of the Nith System after the West Coast Smolt Tracking Project has finished at the end of year 3.

## **5. EXTREME E RACING**

FD reported on the new Formula of electric car rallying taking place throughout the World. FD had been contacted by Anna Ferguson of Buccleuch Estates. Extreme E wanted to come to Scotland. The racing formula holds events throughout the world travelling by boat with all of the cars to minimise carbon footprint. It was proposed that they have a Formula event at the former Glenmuckloch OCCS. Extreme E agreed to sponsor a green project as part of their environmental credentials. FD had discussed a proposal for a project with Extreme E's advisors. The project aims had been identified and the Board and Trust will implement the project. FD has been involved in the publicity for Extreme E and the project. The racing is to take place on 13/14 May. A project has been funded at Corsebank to link into other projects already carried out by the Board and Trust. £50,000 has been paid into the Trust bank account to allow for completion of the Corsebank project.

Richard Gladwin has supplied ground for a tree nursery to feed into the project. Vodafone have also supplied £10,000 for river quality monitoring equipment as earlier advised by FD. The Board and Trust will be present throughout the racing event to give a presentation.

FD and FB were congratulated by those present for the initiative.

## **6. STAFFING**

The Chairman advised that staffing numbers had been similar for the last three to four years. However, the Board had identified that given the amount of consultancy work that both FD and FB were carrying out, more staff were required. Two Interns had been employed for six months by the Trust. The Board will employ a new permanent member of staff who starts on 1<sup>st</sup> May. One of the Trust's Interns is being funded by

Nature Scotland. The other is doing a Masters in environmental risk and is carrying out the work unpaid for three months.

## **7. TRUST UPDATE**

The Chairman spoke of the previous night's Trust Meeting. Invasive plant species management had been discussed. Signal crayfish monitoring was continuing. E-DNA water testing would define the presence/absence of signal crayfish at various points of the River System. E-DNA works upon the basis of sampling water and putting it through specific filter systems to be used to test for all species and provides a useful tool for a biodiversity "read" of the River System. It can be used to identify a single species such as crayfish, which is the basis upon which it may be used in the future in the catchment.

Trust finances are in order. No other contentious issues were raised at the Trust Meeting.

## **8. FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLAN**

It was agreed that its production is in motion, per earlier discussions.

## **9. AOB**

The Chairman asked for any input.

Nick Wright from Closeburn Castle Fishings advised that he had 70 Members in the Closeburn Castle Fishings syndicate and at a recent meeting he had been asked to take forward to the Board the question of any views that the Board might have in connection with escalation of the Hatchery operations.

FD reported that the Board's ability to be able to operate its hatchery depended upon the issue of a Licence by Marine Scotland. The Licence Conditions were very strict and specific. Information was required with regard to the numbers of fry to be reared from hatchery and where these juvenile fish were to be planted back into the river systems. The Board had to have a justifiable reason for the operation of the hatchery and it relied upon the requirement to stock new water courses created as a result of open cast coal work. The agreement for the Licence lasts for 10 years and will expire within the next few years. The consequence of this might be that the Board would lose the right to operate the Hatchery. Scientific opinion had restricted the use of the hatchery on the basis that hatchery operations could potentially cause more genetic damage than good.

Nick Wright thanked FD for the explanation.

The Chairman asked for any other comments. There being none, the Meeting closed. It was observed that the next Board Meeting would take place on 21 July 2023.