**NITH DISTRICT SALMON FISHERY BOARD**

**MINUTES OF**

**BOARD MEETING**

**HELD AT BUCCLEUCH & QUEENSBERRY HOTEL, THORNHILL, DUMFRIESSHIRE ON**

**16 JANUARY 2025 AT 10 AM**

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## PRESENT

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| 1. Percy Weatherall | (Chairman (Cowhill – Upper Proprietor) |
| 2. David Kempsell | (D&GAA– Upper Proprietor) |
| 3. Matthew Law | (Portrack– Upper Proprietor) |
| 4. Mike Keggans | (UNAC – Upper Proprietor) |
| 5. Richard Gladwin | (Blackwood) – Upper Proprietor) |
| 6. Nick Wright | (Closeburn Castle - Upper Proprietor) |
| 7. James Hunter Paterson | (Barjarg - Upper Proprietor) |
| 8. Tom Brown | (Drumburn – Lower Proprietor) |
| 9. Anna Austin | (Caerlaverock - Lower Proprietor) |
| 10. Raymond Mundle | (Angling Representative) |

## MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC IN ATTENDANCE

None

## IN ATTENDANCE

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

The Chairman opened the meeting and welcomed all present.

## 1. APOLOGIES

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| Anna Ferguson | (Upper Proprietor – BEL) |
| Tom Florey | (Angling Representative) |
| Peter Landale | (Dalswinton - Upper Proprietor) |
| Ivor Hyslop | (D&G Council – (Lower Proprietor) |
| Ronnie Clark | (Tenant Netsmen Representative) |

## 2. DECLARATION OF FINANCIAL INTERESTS

The Chairman asked Board members to intimate any financial interests that might impact upon or cut across a Board member's duties. No Board member declared any conflict of interest.

**3. BOARD MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF 6 AUGUST 2024**

The Chairman referred to the draft Minutes, confirming that they had been circulated among Board members and asked if there were any comments on them. There were none. The Chairman thereafter asked for approval of the draft Minutes. There being no comment, the Clerk asked if they were considered approved. Unanimous approval was given.

**4. MATTERS ARISING**

**(a) Administrative Assistant**

FD advised that following on from the last meeting, he had prepared a draft advertisement with job specification and was now in a position to advertise the post, which he would attend to, following conclusion of the meeting.

**5. FINANCE SUB-COMMITTEE (“FSC”)**

The Chairman rehearsed the reasons for setting up the FSC and asked FSC member Richard Gladwin to speak on the subject.

Richard Gladwin reported on examination of the Board’s income and expenditure over the last five years between 2020 and 2024 with reference to a screen projected spreadsheet for all to examine. He made detailed reference to all aspects of the income and expenditure, the trends in both that could be drawn from the information displayed and the large amount of funds held at bank, which had increased since close of books on 30.11.24. He pointed out that the Consultancy Income earned arose through doing good for the river as a function of the Board’s duty to provide environmental protection of the river system. He stated that the income numbers were strong, but costs since 2023 had risen as a result of inflation, combined with the employment of an additional staff member, although the benefit of employing the additional employee had increased the Consultancy Income. He stated that there was a quirk in the accounts in respect of the declared Consultancy Income at £416,000 in that of the sums invoiced, approximately 70% had been paid and settled, but also that there was provision for Work in Progress that had yet to be billed for.

He stated that having investigated the financial position of the Board, FSC proposed that there should be an increase in the amount of the proposed rebate of Assessments due by proprietors to the extent that the total net sum of Assessments to be billed to proprietors be in the order of £33,250 or approximately one half of what had been paid by proprietors as total net Assessments in 2024.

He stated that FSC had asked Board staff for a “wish list” of items that would allow the funds held by the Board to be spent in better ways for the benefit of the river system and he made reference to a screen projected paper showing the wish list, which varied from small cost items through to a large cost item, being the possible provision of a fish counter. Mike Keggans asked where the fish counter might be located. FD replied that while there had been previous plans to install fish counter on tributaries of the river system, it was his opinion that the best place for one would be around the Dumfries Caul, in order to try to gather information on all fish entering the whole river system. The technology of fish counters had moved on since last being considered as a project, with the use of AI permitting the presence of fish passing over the counter being registered much more accurately. He wanted to visit fish pass sites on the Deveron and Laxford rivers to investigate the new counters being used there. Raymond Mundle asked if it would be possible to use the information gathered from the fish counter to seek to revise the categorisation of the river. FD replied that he thought that this would be possible and that it would be much more accurate than relying upon catch statistic returns as being a basis of river categorisation.

Richard Gladwin returned to his presentation and the on screen wish list stating that its use would allow for future project planning and funding. He stated that the Board must have confidence in aiming to take the projects forward. He referred back to his screen projected income and expenditure spreadsheet and restated that FSC's proposal was to have proprietors pay approximately 50% of 2024's net Assessment. He stated with emphasis that if accepted, such a proposal would be the bottom line figure that payable Assessments would drop to. He stated that there would be continued scrutiny of income and expenditure by FSC. At the moment there was disclosed early projected Consultancy Income for 2025. He stated that what should be important to proprietors are the sums that they would have to pay to the Board. Raymond Mundle asked if the rate in the £ would be £2.79. Richard Gladwin replied yes, but that the amount of work that the Board undertook pays for everything and if there is no Consultancy and environmental work then there would be redundancies. Mike Keggans stated that if Consultancy Income falls then redundancy has to be considered. Anna Austin asked that while income figures for last year had been good was the stated figure for Consultancy Income in 2025 contracted for work and was there an opportunity for more Consultancy Income to be earned during the year. FD replied that £250,000 is contracted for work. Anna Austin asked if Consultancy Income is realistically to be hoped for in future years. FD stated that he was very confident that there would be more Consultancy Income to be earned, citing examples of the pump hydro storage scheme and wind farm proposals that are oncoming. FD stated that it is very difficult for him to try to predict what future levels of income might be from these projects because it is only possible to have an idea of what might be generated once full worked up proposals and site visits to the proposed sites have been undertaken. Anna Austin stated that the Budget proposal was loss making, albeit a small loss. Richard Gladwin replied that he agreed but a very small loss overall, which could be made up with income from future work.

Richard Gladwin reiterated and emphasised that the proposed sum to be sought as net Assessment from proprietors was a basement floor for Assessments and FSC would not be thinking about recommending reducing the Assessment below this figure. Assessments may rise in future and Consultancy Income may drop. The financial position will be monitored in future.

The Chairman asked for approval of the draft Budget. He stated that provision had been made in the draft Budget for a Bonus pool to be share among Board and Trust staff. Bonus figures to staff had been £15,000 for work done in 2022 and £17,500 in 2023. A projection of Bonus of £20,000 had been made in the draft Budget for Consultancy work done in 2024. James Hunter-Paterson asked if approval of the draft Budget should include provision for expenditure on minor items on the wish list.

Richard Gladwin agreed that this would be a good idea. He stated that the Board bank balances held at today's date amounted to £539,000.

Mike Keggans asked how the Chairman had arrived at the proposed Bonus figure. The Chairman stated that the proposed Bonus figure was discretionary and that he preferred to use this basis to retain maximum flexibility on Bonus. Mike Keggans stated that he would not be prepared to accept such a position on discretionary bonus for the year 2025. He proposed that there should be something more clearly stated as a basis for calculating Bonus. He stated that he believed that the current position on staff incentives leaves the Chairman and the board exposed. The Chairman replied that he was against the idea of a fixed basis of calculation of Bonus, preferring the ability to use discretion and not to tie Bonus to concepts like Key Performance indicators. Richard Gladwin stated that he thought that some form of Bonus scheme could be worked through by FSC for implementation in 2025.

The Chairman again asked for approval of the draft Budget, the Bonus and when asked by the Clerk for agreement on it, the rate in the £ at £2.79. The Board unanimously approved the draft Budget, the Bonus pool at £20,000 and the rate in the £ to achieve the draft Budget at £2.79.

**6. QUARTERLY REPORT**

FD referred to the circulated report. Catch Statistics for season 2024 were being returned to him, although two big beats were still to make returns. It had been a better season for salmon caught, with around 500 salmon showing on returns received to date. FD hope for a possible 650 salmon caught when all returns were received. Sea trout returns were down, but the summer had been wet, which did not suit sea trout angling.

During the cold weather, a parked digger had slid into the Cairn water, but nothing of a polluting nature had apparently leaked out of it. The digger owner had advised FD that all fluids in the digger were contained in sealed containers.

**(a) Euchan Water**

FD reported that the salmon ova taken to stock the Euchan Water had begun to hatch, although the cold spell had slowed down hatching progress. He stated that he was aiming to plant out hatched juvenile salmon to the Euchan in March 2025.

FD advised that this would be the final year that compensatory stocking of the Dalgig water could take place under licence.

**SPEN UIOLI (use it or lose it)**

FD rehearsed the information available on the taking forward of three projects with financial support being provided by SPEN. He reminded Board members that SPEN had committed to the Board funding for (a) the Carco habitat creation project at

£130,000 (b) the Laggan Scheme at £7,800 and (c) the Mennock Water scheme at £7,900. Tree planting would commence shortly. SPEN would be supplying staff time for this in a publicised event. The Trust are the contracting parties with SPEN, but the Board would be engaged by the Trust to provide labour and deliver the projects.

The Chairman reported that at the Trust meeting the previous evening there had been a hope expressed that attempts would be made to try to identify more projects with similar funding models to the one provided by SPEN.

FD reported that good relations were being maintained with Ayrshire and D&G Councils, who had both recently recommended consultation with FD on a proposed flood restoration project on the River Cree.

**Saprolegnia Project**

FD reminded everyone that the Board was providing financial support by way of yearly grant for this project, being researched by Aberdeen University. He and FB had attended a recently held conference on waterborne diseases. More virulent strains of Saprolegnia had being identified. The disease could be identified by the presence of white fungal growth on salmon. Board staff supplied water samples for analysis of presence/absence of Saprolegnia on a fortnightly basis. There are three categories of river supplying samples for the testing of presence/absence of Saprolegnia, the Nith system being categorised as “good” for the apparent absence of Saprolegnia.

**7. Trust Report.**

The Chairman reported on the Trust meeting held the previous evening.

The Fishing for the Future project was being developed for the forthcoming season, with grant funding having been secured to allow for this.

The Trust had discussed the SPEN project.

A short term intern was to be engaged on a no salary basis to assist the FB.

OSCR were expanding their regulation of registered charities.

**8. Season Opening Event.**

FD asked if one was to take place for 2025. After discussion, it was agreed to see if this could be organised on DGAA water, given that DGAA were to celebrate their centenary year in season 2025.

**9. AOB**

**(a) Fish Capture And Their Future Treatment**

FD circulated the FMS paper on fish capture and their future treatment, arising out of the endangered species categorisation declared in respect of salmon. There were two proposals, one for each of the complete return of all salmon and sea trout captured. After discussion it was agreed to promote the FMS recommendations as part of the Nith Angling Code.

**(b) Dates of Future Meetings**.
The Chairman advised that these would be circulated to Board members soon.

The meeting thereafter closed.