

NITH DISTRICT SALMON FISHERY BOARD
MINUTES OF
BOARD MEETING
HELD AT BUCCLEUCH & QUEENSBERRY HOTEL, THORNHILL, DUMFRIESSHIRE
ON

24 APRIL 2025 AT 10 AM

PRESENT

1. Percy Weatherall – Chairman
2. Tom Florey – Angling Representative
3. Raymond Mundle – Angling Representative
4. Anna Ferguson – Buccleuch Estates
5. David Kempell – D&GAA
6. Peter Landale - Dalswinton
7. Tom Brown – Haff Netter Representative
8. Matthew Law – Portrack
9. Ronnie Clark – Tenant Netsman Representative
10. Ivor Hyslop – Dumfries & Galloway Council
11. Mike Keggans – UNAA
12. Jamie Hunter-Paterson - Barjarg

IN ATTENDANCE

1. Roderick Styles – Clerk
2. James Henderson – Fishery Director (FD)
3. Deborah Parke – Nith Catchment Fishery Trust (FB)
4. Ed Forest – Galloway & Southern Ayrshire Biosphere

MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC IN ATTENDANCE

None

1. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

The Chairman opened the meeting and welcomed all present.

Apologies were received from:-

Nick Wright – Closeburn Castle Fishings

Richard Gladwin - Blackwood

Anna Austin – Caerlaverock Estate

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. The Clerk reminded all present of the nature of the enquiry. No Board member declared any conflict of interest.

3. BOARD MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF 16 JANUARY 2025

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, failing which for approval of them, advising that in the absence of any further comment on them and silence of Board members, he considered that they were formally approved. No contrary view was expressed.

4. MATTERS ARISING

(a) Hatchery

FD advised that all hatched fry had been successfully planted out at various points in the Euchar Water in the presence of Board members Mike Keggans and Raymond Mundle. Peter Landale asked if the subject of the Euchar stocking policy would come up later in the meeting. FD in reply stated no. Peter Landale stated that in his opinion it would be great if Melanie Smith, research director of AST could provide advice on the project. FD stated that there were fifteen years of baseline statistics and research on the Euchar Water and that in addition there would be ongoing monitoring over the remainder of the five year stocking program. Peter Landale stated that he thought that it would be good to have a second opinion on the project.

(b) FMS Recommended Policy on Total Catch and Release of Salmon and Sea Trout

FD reported that since FMS had recommended this approach and the previous discussions on the subject at an earlier Board meeting, FMS had finalised the policy, but that it was too late in the season for the policy to be incorporated into Nith Angling Code and to the permit conditions of individual fisheries. The policy was advisory.

(c) 2025 Season Opening Ceremony.

FD advised that he felt that the opening ceremony had gone well, with a large attendance on what was the centenary year of the formation of DGAA. David Kempself agreed, stating that it was unfortunate that more Board members hadn't attended, although work commitments would probably have had a bearing on this.

5. GALLOWAY & SOUTHERN AYRSHIRE BIOSPHERE PRESENTATION – Ed Forrest.

The Chairman welcomed Ed Forrest and asked for his presentation. Mr Forrest thanked Board members for the opportunity to address them on the Biosphere's hopes and plans for the development of a catchment long source to sea development initiative for the Nith Catchment and gave to the Board his presentation. It was noted that Mr Forrest had stated that a FIRNS application had been made for grant assistance to take forward the Biosphere's initiative. The Chairman asked where the Biosphere stood in relation to the proposed National Park Initiative for South West Scotland. Mr Forrest stated that there was no hard policy on endorsing or objecting to the proposal. Peter Landale stated that he welcomed what Mr Forrest had stated in his presentation, advising that there had been an international conference on this type of proposal in furtherance of salmon preservation interests held in London in January, mentioning chapter 3 of Dieter Helm's book on the subject. Mention had been made in the presentation of "farmer clusters" and "river Trusts". Peter stated that salmon are an endangered species and that the presentation should include and give emphasis to this status. He stated that there was a massive opportunity for the Nith to raise millions of pounds to assist in developing and implementing a whole of catchment policy, which would cost money and time. There would have to be carried out a baseline survey of the catchment. The Chairman asked what Mr Forrest wanted from the Board. Mr Forrest stated that endorsement of the Biosphere project for the whole of catchment in the form of a letter of support was what was wanted. The big "ask" is that the Board endorse what the Biosphere want to do.

Mr Forrest was thanked for his presentation and left the meeting. There followed discussion among those present on the presentation and the implication for the catchment and the Board.

6. QUARTERLY REPORT

FD reported on the amount of work that he and the team are having to undertake in order to protect the salmon fishery in the catchment from damage as a consequence of engineering works. He made reference to SPEN having engaged contractors to carry out work on its behalf, but not being in a position to interfere with contractors operations after the job remit had been agreed. In one case, the contractors were carrying out the work so badly that there was a real possibility of damage to the immediate river environment and FD had shut down the job for twelve days until he and his team had managed to have arrangements made for clean-up operations to be carried out and that he was satisfied that the appropriate damage mitigation measures had been undertaken.

Scottish Water (SW) had five major projects to undertake within the catchment during 2025 and the Board team are involved in all of them, providing guidance to the SW workforce on minimising environmental damage. Raymond Mundle stated that it seemed clear that the Board was doing SEPA's work for them. FD replied that in all cases, the project operators were paying for the work that the Board's team carried out in respect of each project.

FD reported on the approach made to him in respect of the Dumfries Flood Prevention Scheme. He was neutral on the subject of whether or not the scheme was a good idea. He stated that he had been approached by the Council to act as "environmental policeman" in respect of the scheme. He and the team would begin to gather baseline information this year. Peter Landale asked what the cost of the Board's involvement might be in respect of the scheme. FD replied that the Council would be paying the full cost for the board and Trust involvement in the project.

FD asked for questions on the quarterly report. There were none.

It was reported that the first recorded salmon for the season had been caught on Closeburn Castle water.

7. and 8. PRESENTATION OF FUTURE FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLAN/PETER LANDALE'S EMAIL of 24.01.25.

FD referred to the paper circulated on behalf of the Fishery Management Team and gave a Powerpoint presentation on the subject. He referred to the habitat degradation identified by the Board in the mid-1990s and the programme of habitat enhancement work commenced by Nith Habitat Enhancement Committee at that time and referenced in his paper. He referred specifically to the schemes being undertaken from 2023–25 on the Crawick Water with the cooperation of the immediately neighbouring landowners. Funding had been provided by Extreme E (XE) motor racing, who FD reminded endorsed and supported environmental projects on a worldwide basis as part of their aims for promoting electric car racing. XE's environmental consultants who were based in Australia had measured the environmental benefits of the Nith schemes and stated that they considered the Crawick Habitat Enhancement Scheme to be one of the best projects currently being undertaken by them.

FD reported that the team had identified work to be done on the Corsebank and Carco sections of the Crawick water, although parts of these areas would prove challenging due to the topography of the surrounding land. FD made reference to slides of photographs showing the extent of the area of operations involved.

FD had recently attended a meeting with South of Scotland Enterprise on site. He reported that they had been very impressed with what they had seen by way of environmental

improvement schemes undertaken by the Board and wanted to offer grant support for a future project.

FD reported on the large number of trees and willow whips that had been planted during the course of all of the habitat enhancement schemes. A lot of the recent work had been funded by SPEN who had approached the Nith Board over the last two to three years to seek cooperation with the Board to carry out such schemes, with SPEN providing the funding. SPEN had also invited their staff to attend on an environment day to assist in planting trees. On the day, seven hundred trees had been planted by willing SPEN staff who seemed to have enjoyed their day on site, reporting that they felt that it had been one of their best ever charitable days.

There was a problem area for habitat improvement in the Cog Burn area, where the watercourse was heavily abraded and difficult to fence because fencing would ultimately get lost due to flooding. Alternative methods of bank stabilisation were being considered in the hope that additional trees could be planted to increase water cover and reduce temperatures.

SPEN had given grant aid for each of the proposed habitat enhancement schemes on each of the Mennock Water and the Laggan Burn. BEL were being encouraging in respect of their hoped for cooperation for the work in the Mennock Water. A BNG assessment would be undertaken and considered and discussed with BEL. FD stated that in his opinion work on the Mennock Water would be very worthwhile as it is a good salmon spawning tributary. If the BNG assessment was encouraging, a funding application could be put to SPEN.

As regards the Laggan Burn, a BNG assessment had been undertaken. Discussion with landowners had taken place and they seemed to be favourable. If all goes well with this project development then it seems likely that SPEN will support it as well.

FD reported on hoped for future projects on the Scaur water and referred to his paper on the subject. It is one of the best producers of salmon and FD expressed keenness to carry out work on this tributary. He hope for support from SPEN and Community Windpower for this project, but it will take time to bring forward.

FD reported that monitoring of these projects is key to determining if there has been possible improvement and success resulting from the work carried out. However, annual monitoring of these schemes was pointless, given the length of time that it would take for trees to grow, so FD proposed that triennial monitoring of these projects would take place in future, spread on a rolling basis throughout the catchment. The likely cost of monitoring would rise substantially over the years and FD suggested that in time the Trust should have earmarked funding for the cost of future monitoring work.

FB endorsed what FD had stated and that funding for habitat work is what has been identified as being most important.

Peter Landale suggested that a more holistic approach on the part of the team is required. Ed Forrest's presentation needs to be considered very carefully. It would appear that the biosphere is making a play to control this type of work and they could end up taking over this work. There was full discussion on the subject. It was noted again that a FIRNS application had been submitted by the Biosphere and that Mr Forrest should be asked to produce the application to determine its contents and to find out if the Board's interests in fisheries protection could have provision adequately made within the application. FD undertook to ask

Mr Forrest for a copy of the FIRNS application to allow the Board to consider its position thereafter.

9. AOB

The Chairman reported on having attended the FMS AGM at Scone with the management team. The background noise at the conference was for pushing habitat enhancement projects.

Mike Keggans asked what the view on grayling in the river was. FD reported that historically pools were netted with grayling specific nets to attempt to decrease their numbers, but that this was no longer undertaken as it is not thought that grayling adversely affected salmon. Grayling generally inhabit pools whereas salmon and sea trout ascend higher into the catchment watercourses and burns to spawn. Grayling numbers have increased, but it is more likely that grayling anglers do more damage to a spawning bed with the “stamp/shuffle” method of fishing, hence the need to emphasise the right rules for grayling fishing.

FD stated that he had been asked by the Council to respond on behalf of the Board regarding one angler’s wish to have the rule changed regarding the maximum breaking strain of nylon leader that could be used from 15lb to 40lb, because the angler used spinning lures for fishing that were expensive and were lost in his opinion when he hit a snag, due to the limitation on breaking strain of nylon leader that could be used. The Board agreed to continue to maintain the breaking strain level at 15lb.

FD reported that the Sanquhar Arts Festival organisers want the Board to produce information boards on the salmon lifecycle.

There being no other business raised, the Chairman closed the meeting.