

## CAITHNESS DISTRICT SALMON FISHERY BOARD

MINUTES OF BOARD MEETING: 11 MARCH 2016

<b>Present:</b>	Viscount Thurso (Chair)	SWM Threipland	SWD Laird
	J Mackay	ACW MacAuslan	I Cormack
	T Stitt		
<b>In attendance:</b>	A Youngson	EC McCarthy	E Constable

### 1. Apologies

Apologies were received from the Earl of Caithness, Sir Richard Dunbar and RF Willis.

### 2. Register of Interests

Addition: Lord Thurso taking up post of Chair of VisitScotland from 1 April.

### 3. Minutes of the last meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 November 2015 were approved.

### 4. Matters arising from previous meetings

All matters arising were dealt with later in the agenda.

### 5. Finance and Admin

#### a) Draft Accounts

The draft Income & Expenditure account and Balance Sheet for the year ending 31/12/15 were approved.

#### b) Draft Estimates

The draft Estimates for 2016 were considered. An assessment rate of 37p in the £ was provisionally agreed in respect of anticipated expenditure, subject to confirmation at the next meeting.

#### c) Staff

Eddie McCarthy had retired from Thurso River Ltd and had taken on a position with Thurso Fisheries Ltd. He was invited by the board to continue serving as Inspector and Head Bailiff, and thanked for agreeing to be re-appointed.

#### d) Consultation Activity

The Board had been contacted by BEAR Scotland, MS Licensing, the Scottish Govt Energy & Consents Unit, and SEPA's Flood Risk Management department during the last quarter. Details were provided.

### 6. FMO proposals

#### a) Potential Fisheries Management Organisation (FMO)

Following positive discussions with the Chairs of the Northern and Helmsdale boards the Chairman had produced a draft proposal for an FMO based on all three respective board areas, to include the participation of the Environmental Research Institute (ERI) and the Flow Country Rivers Trust (FCRT). The draft had been circulated to board members to consider and comments were taken at the meeting.

The principles of the organisation were approved and the draft agreed as representative of the board's position, subject to a conclusion.

Action: Chairman to draft conclusion and re-circulate paper for final board approval.

## **b) Fisheries Management Plan**

According to the draft WFR bill recently published by the Scottish Govt for consultation, a fishery management plan will be required by each FMO. There was some discussion as to the content and cost of producing this but it was agreed that a comprehensive plan would be a pre-requisite for an application to form an FMO. It was proposed that work should begin on this as soon as possible, subject to a commitment from the two other boards to share costs and supervisory effort.

Action: Chairman to discuss arrangements for a draft plan with the Consultant.

## **c) Next steps**

The finalised Flow Country FMO draft would be issued to the other parties for consideration. The Chairman had held exploratory talks with the Head of ERI regarding their prospective scientific contribution and would develop this. The FCRT had already indicated a wish to be associated with the potential FMO and were being consulted. He was due to present the Caithness proposals to the Helmsdale DSFB in May and the NDSFB was expected to consider them at their next board meeting.

Action: Chairman to liaise with all parties in preparation for a joint FMO application when applicable.

## **7. Development and Conservation Committee**

### **a) Completion of 2015 EF survey**

All work arising from the 2015 EF survey had been completed, the consolidated report for 2013-2015 published, and an index of electrofishing sites produced to aid future monitoring. The results were highly favourable for the Caithness rivers and the accumulated data is expected to stand the board in good stead in the context of national categorisation of rivers.

### **b) Proposals for future electro-fishing surveys**

The board considered the Consultant's recommendations for further surveys with effect from this year, prioritised as:

- i. Resurvey of Berriedale/Langwell, to establish whether fry recruitment in 2015 was sufficiently low to impact parr recruitment in 2016 (7 sites);
- ii. Single sites on the Forss, Dunbeath and Wick plus 2 sites on Thurso annually to maintain continuity of surveillance;
- iii. Establish new single sites on Sleach, Haster and Houstry Burns to fill gaps in river network coverage;
- iv. Establish new single sites on minor streams at Sandside, Reay, Isauld and Freswick to complete coverage of network.

The overall impact on the budget of a rolling programme of surveys was discussed but no firm plans for 2016 would be made before the next meeting. The Berriedale/Langwell and Thurso SACs were due for reassessment by SNH this year and rather than both the board and SNH undertaking electrofishing work it was agreed that it made sense to discuss collaboration with SNH in respect of those rivers in the first instance.

Action: Chairman and Consultant to liaise with respective SNH contacts.

### **c) River Plans and Stocking Policy**

The Consultant drew the board's attention to the impending requirement from Marine Scotland for river conservation plans under the Conservation Limit Initiative. Whilst these plans were the responsibility of the individual rivers it was noted that the resultant information could tie in usefully with the proposed FMO Fisheries Management Plan (see para 6b).

It was anticipated that plans would throw up a need for more robust policy in some areas. The board's stocking policy would probably need to be strengthened to ensure that the present range of hatchery options remain available to the Caithness rivers.

Action: Consultant to look at developing the current Stocking Policy.

**8. Flow Country Rivers Trust**

The Board reviewed the Trust's Annual Report for the year 2015. Discussion focussed on the smolt tracking project scheduled for April for which the Trust is funding the electronic tags. The project has been transferred to the Wick River instead of the Wester as originally planned and is intended as a prelude to research further offshore in due course.

**9. Any other business**

NTR

**10. Meeting dates**

The 2016 Proprietors AGM was scheduled for Monday 13 June at 10 am, with a board meeting taking place immediately afterwards – to be confirmed.