

CAITHNESS DISTRICT SALMON FISHERY BOARD

MINUTES OF BOARD MEETING: 22 AUGUST 2016

Present

Chairman: The Rt Hon. the Viscount Thurso
Members: Sir Richard Dunbar, SWM Threipland, J Mackay, SWD Laird, T Stitt
Officers: A Youngson, EC McCarthy, E Constable
Observers: R Mackinlay, F Kinnear, H Sutherland

1. Register of Interests

NTR

2. Apologies

Apologies were received from the Earl of Caithness, A MacAuslan, I Cormack and R Willis.

3. Minutes of the last meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 June 2016 were approved. There were no matters arising, but Mr Youngson wished to clarify that the Conservation Plans being referred to relate to the river gradings (Grades 1-3) first issued by Marine Scotland (MS) to cover the 2016 season. These gradings affect the fisheries in various ways and MS intends to review them annually. The upcoming Conservation Plans are part of this process and they will probably be sought by MS in the near future. MS will probably ask the manager of each individual river for a Conservation Plan related to improving the condition of any low rated river or maintaining the status of a highly rated one.

The Fishery Management Plan (FMP) also currently being referred to is rather different; it is part of the process of setting up the new Flow Country Fisheries Management Organisation (FCFMO). A draft version of the Fishery Management Plan has been prepared by the board, jointly with the Northern and Helmsdale Boards. The FMP relates to the future scientific management of fisheries in the Flow Country rivers currently administered by the three Boards. The document is owned by the three boards and will eventually come into play as part of a submission to Scottish Government for the formation of an FMO.

4. Future Fisheries Management

a) Flow Country Fisheries Management Organisation final draft template

The Chairman had produced the final draft template for a FCFMO; the draft had been agreed with the Northern and Helmsdale DSFBs as parties to it and it had been circulated to CDSFB members to consider. The board formally approved the document at the meeting and noted that it would remain in its present draft form until such time as the Scottish Government began the legislative process of Wild Fisheries Reform (WFR).

b) Fisheries Management Plan

The draft FMP prepared by the consultant had been circulated and was well received by the board. The document was expected to remain live and subject to iteration until required, also as part of the process of WFR. Following a brief discussion on the merits of including more historical data it was proposed that members submit their comments in writing to Mr Youngson for action.

Action: Comments on the draft to be forwarded to AY

c) Fisheries Management Plan: interim cooperation

As part of the process for developing the FMP the consultant had met with individual fishery managers and their main staff on all the major rivers of the two other boards; the welcome received and enthusiasm expressed at all levels had demonstrated an understanding not only of the need for a plan deriving from legislation but also as a good idea in its own right. In light of the level of such positive feedback it was suggested that the three DSFBs should seek to cooperate informally to implement the thrust of the Plan at this early stage, notwithstanding that the legislative need might be some years away.

Action: Chairman to raise with the NDSFB and HDSFB

5. Finance and Admin

a) Expenditure update

Expenditure to date was in line with expectation. The bank account should stand at £47k once the final receipts for the rating assessments had cleared.

b) Stocking requests

Requests from the Wick and Dunbeath rivers to continue hatchery operations for restocking with their own broodstock in the spring were approved.

c) Electro-fishing requests

A request from the Wick Angling Association to carry out an electro-fishing survey in a number of areas of the Wick River catchment in late August/early September was approved and permission given for the use of the board's backpack equipment. Formal approval for electro-fishing on the Dunbeath was also given.

d) Consultation activity

MS had invited comments from the board in connection with the Shetland-Noss Head HVDC subsea cable, the Limekiln windfarm resubmission, and work on the Wick inner harbour for the Beatrice Offshore wind farm. No complications were expected by the consultant and responses had been sent. An Environmental Statement (ES) for a tidal array in the Pentland Firth off Orkney had been received from MS and was receiving attention (see para 6b).

6. Development and Conservation Committee

a) Scottish Government (SG) Salmon Conservation Measures

The board noted the latest update on the Conservation of Salmon (Scotland) Regulations 2017, together with possible implications for rivers in the event of reassessment of conservation status. All river proprietors in the district were to be made aware of the forthcoming assessment arrangements.

Action: Clerk to forward SG notice to non-board river proprietors

b) Brims Tidal Array (NW Pentland Firth)

The consultant had reviewed the ES accompanying the developer's licence application for the installation and summarised his concerns for the board's rivers and beyond. He was not satisfied that enough scientific information existed on salmon movements in the area for a realistic risk assessment to be made, even though the statutory criteria for the ES had been met. With the prospect of three such projects in the Pentland Firth (ie. with Meygen and Ness of Duncansby as well) the circumstances highlighted the need for greater effort to be directed to studying this important passage for migratory fish. The board echoed his concerns and agreed that MS should be prevailed upon to attempt to obtain the type of crucial information required for future decision making in the Firth area.

Action: Consultant to draft response to MS for Chairman to approve on behalf of board.

7. Flow Country Rivers Trust

The board noted the minutes from the last meeting of the Trust and an update on current activity of interest, viz:

- The Wester Restoration project had received a kick-start with the offer of a donation from the Sub Sea 7 Charity fund which would help meet the costs of preliminary electro-fishing work;
- A project on Saturation Stocking of two sites on the Wick and Dunbeath rivers was underway, the aim being to determine whether the biomass densities previously observed are the maximum possible values and perhaps come to some conclusions on the use of hatchery stocking.

8. Bailiffs Report

There had been no salmon netting this summer owing to the temporary SG ban. In response to reports of individuals exploiting the situation and selling fish on the black market the bailiffs had adopted a defensive position including the use of the boat to deter illegal activity.

It was agreed that a letter should be sent out to hotels in the district in late March/early April 2017 advising them of the law on purchasing salmon in time for next summer.

Action: Chairman to draft letter

9. Any other business

The ASFB is to hold a special meeting on 14 September, followed by a joint meeting with RAFTS, to discuss their future arrangements. Mr Mackay and Mr MacAuslan were authorised to represent the board at these meetings if they were able to attend.

Action: JM to liaise with AM

10. Meeting dates

The next meeting was scheduled for November, date to be agreed.