

CAITHNESS DISTRICT SALMON FISHERY BOARD

MINUTES OF BOARD MEETING: 25 NOVEMBER 2016

Present

Chairman: J Mackay
Members: Sir Richard Dunbar, SWD Laird, I Cormack, T Stitt, R Willis,
Officers: EC McCarthy, E Constable

1. Register of Interests

Addition: Mr Laird, Director, Reay Farms Ltd

2. Apologies

Apologies were received from the Earl of Caithness, SWM Threipland, A Youngson, A MacAuslan and Lord Thurso.

3. Minutes of the last meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 22 August were approved. Matters arising were dealt with under the relevant headings. Action carried forward: cautionary letter regarding purchase of fish to be sent out to hotels prior to 2017 season.

4. WFR/FMO

Mr Mackay briefed the board on the salient points of the recent ASFB and RAFTS AGMs he attended on behalf of the CDSFB and the Flow Country Rivers Trust (FCRT) respectively:

a) ASFB/RAFTS Reorganisation

- ASFB to become Fisheries Management Scotland (FMS), with new Board in place by 31/1/17
- RAFTS to be wound up as legacy projects and funding arrangements allow
- Trusts to be encouraged to join FMS – the FCRT has already signed up for membership
- Board to consist of 12 members, six representing the DSFBs and three for the Trusts; 2 further members for Boards and 1 for Trusts may be co-opted by the elected board
- Nominations for candidates to be received by ASFB by 24 December.

The Board proposed to nominate a candidate and settled on either Mr MacAuslan (currently an ASFB member) or Mr Mackay, subject to their wishes and avoiding conflict with any FCRT nomination.

Action: JM and AM to discuss

Outcome: Mr MacAuslan's name to go forward as a DSFB representative

b) FMOs

Pilot FMOs are planned by the Scottish Government for early next year although the associated legislation is still some way off.

With the proposed Flow Country FMO being a potential candidate for a pilot, the board queried how far down the road the organisation could go beyond the practical level of the Fisheries Management Plan. It seemed imprudent to have resources such as finance and staffing in place if there was no guarantee of the organisation being permanent. It was hoped that the picture would be clearer by the time of the next meeting when further input from the Board Chairman on the transition stage would be welcomed.

Action: JT to update Board on pilot arrangements for next meeting

5. Finance and Admin

a) Clerk's report

Finance and procedural matters were noted. The Head Bailiff confirmed that he would be coordinating arrangements for the fishing of the salmon by Dounreay (DRSL) for radiological analysis.

b) River Forss

The draft report commissioned by the Forss House Fishings Association (FHFA) to address problems at the River Forss estuary had been received and was with the Consultant for review. FHFA was proceeding with an application to MS to reinstate the estuary to its former state and the board expected to be consulted by MS in due course.

Action: AY to report to board on the Forss report

The chairman of FHFA had contacted the board for advice following interest amongst rod owners in extending the Season from 15th to 31 October. The issue was discussed at some length, taking into account comments from the Consultant, contributions from individual board members with longstanding experience of the river, and the emphasis on conservation within the latest wild fisheries legislation. The board concluded unanimously that there were no grounds for an extension.

Action: JT to relay board's view on extending the season to FHFA chairman

c) Consultation activity

The board noted the record of requests received and responses provided since the last meeting.

Following on from discussion at the previous meeting on the lack of scientific information available in relation to the Pentland Firth and the attempt to bring this to the attention of MS in the context of the Brims/Orkney tidal array, the board concluded that a plan was needed to tackle the issue. The plan should identify the information required, the type of study to be undertaken, the resources involved and any possible funding sources. Further renewables developments were already being proposed for the Firth, and owing to its geographical location the board considered that it had a unique responsibility to protect the interests of all migratory salmon in the Firth area.

Action: JM and AY to discuss plan and funding

6. Development and Conservation Committee/ Consultant's Report

The board noted the progress and findings to date of the 2016 CDSFB electrofishing programme.

The preliminary findings of the Wester site surveys carried out by the FCRT and an improved understanding of the distribution of stock were viewed as an encouraging start to this project and board members expressed a keen interest in seeing the river achieve its potential.

The prospective benefits to the board from the FCRT's purchase of a microscope enabling juvenile salmon scales to be viewed for ageing, together with the offer of training in the use of the equipment so that scale reading could be undertaken locally in future, was acknowledged.

The board agreed that the portable backpack electric fisher should be repaired rather than replaced.

Action: AY to arrange repairs

7. Flow Country Rivers Trust Report

Updates were provided on two ongoing trust projects:

- The Wester restoration project: the EF surveys (cf. para 6) represented the first step
- Saturation stocking: scale readings had been completed and the results were awaited following electrofishing surveys at single sites on the Dunbeath and the Wick.

8. Bailiffs Report

There were no incidents to report for the year. The heavy presence of bailiffs appeared to have paid off in deterring illegal fishing around the coast.

9. Any other business

There was no further business.

10. Meeting dates

Mid-March was proposed for the next meeting, date to be fixed nearer the time.