

## CAITHNESS DISTRICT SALMON FISHERY BOARD

### MINUTES OF BOARD MEETING: 24 MARCH 2017

#### Present

Chairman: Lord Thurso

Members: J Mackay, A MacAuslan, SWM Threipland, SWD Laird, I Cormack, T Stitt

Officers: EC McCarthy, A Youngson, E Constable

#### 1. Register of Interests

No change.

#### 2. Apologies

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

#### 3. Minutes of the last meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 25 November were approved. Follow-up actions and matters arising were dealt with under related agenda topics.

#### 4. Finance and Admin

##### a) Draft Accounts

The draft Expenditure & Income accounts and the Balance Sheet were approved.

##### b) Draft Estimates

The draft Estimates for 2017 were considered and approved in principle. Concern was expressed at the relative cost of FMS (formerly ASFB) membership; the board intended to join for this first year but would review before signing up again in 2018.

It was agreed that the assessment rate should remain at last year's figure of 37p in the £, subject to confirmation at the next meeting.

##### c) Consultation activity

Details of exchanges with external organisations since the last meeting, consisting predominantly of responses to consultation requests from Marine Scotland (MS), were noted.

#### 5. WFR/FMO

The board considered the recent statement from the Scottish Government calling a halt to Wild Fisheries reform "at this time" and reflected on the impact on board plans to date. Conclusions:

- It was quite possible that legislation would be brought forward at some point in the future.
- With this in mind the template proposal for a Flow Country FMO (FCFMO) bringing together the Caithness, Northern and Helmsdale boards, with links to the ERI and the Rivers Trust, should be "kept warm".
- Until such time the existing DSFB management structure was effective and there was no reason to consider a reorganisation.

- The exercise had demonstrated the value of collaborative working between the boards, and most particularly at the river management level and in the production of the common Fisheries Management Plan.
- The boards had begun cooperating from a science perspective, starting with electro-fishing, and it would be worthwhile exploring other areas where they might usefully work together.

**Action:** Chairman to consult NDSFB & HDSFB re continued collaboration and how this might be achieved.

## **6. Development and Conservation Committee/ Consultant's Report**

### **a) Restoration of River Forss outfall**

The consultant had reviewed the proposal from FHFA to improve fish access and regarded the work as a very gentle solution to the problem, with no cause for concern. The board supported the plans and would respond accordingly to MS's ongoing consultation.

### **b) Electrofishing equipment**

Unfortunately it had proved impossible for the portable backpack equipment to be repaired so a decision was taken to replace it with a new one, at a cost of £4000-£4500 (+ VAT). Approval was given for the bankside generator equipment to be serviced.

### **c) 2017 electrofishing programme**

The board approved the programme of 13 to 14 sites proposed for a similar outlay to 2016. The strategy for the year was to focus on the Thurso, expanding the range of sites to cover upcoming events in windfarm development and forestry clearance while maintaining surveillance elsewhere in Caithness and checking up on minor issues identified in 2016.

## **7. Flow Country Rivers Trust Report**

The Trust's 2016 annual report, minutes of the latest meeting and the 2017 Spring Newsletter were distributed to inform board members about recent activities and future plans, with updates as follow:

- River Wester regeneration project: funding is being sought to take the project to the next stage, with 2 applications due to be submitted by the end of March.
- The report on the Pentland Firth harnessing the knowledge of the remaining north coast netmen due shortly.
- The Sinclair Bay smolt tracking project has been rescheduled for 2018. In the meantime ERI is expected to develop its tracking technology within Wick Bay on the back of last year's results.

## **8. Bailiffs Report**

A letter of thanks had been received from Dounreay Site Restoration Ltd for the board's support in providing salmon from the Thurso for its environmental monitoring programme.

The local press had been contacted and had published an article by way of pre-emptive publicity to highlight the current law regarding the sale and associated purchase of wild salmon before the season got underway. This was in lieu of distributing cautionary letters to hotels and restaurants as discussed previously, in the expectation of reaching a wider audience and hopefully deterring illegal fishing.

## **9. Any other business**

There was no further business.

## **10. Meeting dates**

The next meeting will take place on Friday 16 June. The session will start at **1.30 pm** with the Triennial Elections, followed by the Proprietors AGM, and then the board meeting. Elections papers will be sent to proprietors in May.