

CAITHNESS DISTRICT SALMON FISHERY BOARD

MINUTES OF BOARD MEETING: 16 JUNE 2017

Present

Chairman: Viscount Thurso
Members: J Mackay, SWM Threipland, SWD Laird, T Stitt, Sir Richard Dunbar, R Willis
Officers: EC McCarthy, A Youngson, E Constable
Observer: Fiona Kinnear (Forss House Fishings Association)

1. Register of Interests

This was the first meeting of the Board following the triennial elections and the register was circulated to all members present for completion.

2. Apologies

Apologies were received from Anson MacAuslan, Mark Newton and Ian Cormack.

3. Minutes of the last meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 24 March were approved.

4. Finance and Admin

a) 2017 Assessment Rate

The revised Estimates for the current year had been circulated prior the meeting, confirming the requirement to raise £34k through the rates. Following the latest revaluation of fisheries which came into effect on 1 April 2017 the total value of fishings in the district has risen from £90,800 to £198,400, with netting stations exempt from liability. A rate of 17p in the £ was agreed for this year.

c) Consultation activity

Marine Scotland had granted a licence for the remedial work at the Forss estuary to go ahead. A Highland Council planning application for wind turbines at Achlachan in the Thurso SAC had been spotted in the local press that day.

Action: Clerk/Consultant to follow up application

5. WFR/FMO/Cooperation with other boards

The Chairman updated the Board on the steps taken to continue collaboration with the Northern and Helmsdale DSFBs at a working level. A meeting of the 3 chairs had been postponed, but preliminary soundings from the Helmsdale board suggested that there would be enough common ground between them to consider an MOU if there was agreement in principle on areas of cooperation.

Whilst science and plans relating to rivers within the respective Districts had been identified as the particular focus for collaboration, board members suggested that other matters of common interest should also be taken into account.

In the interim the joint Fishery Management Plan remains in place and plans are underway for electric fishing data to be collected uniformly across the 3 boards.

Action: Chairman to contact other boards

6. Consultant's Report

a) Caithness support for the Armadale tagging project

All five Caithness rivers had agreed to take part in the tracking of 750 mixed stock salmon to be tagged off Armadale this summer at the instigation of the Scottish Government (SG). The Consultant was distributing receivers to river staff and coordinating arrangements for their installation and oversight. It was proposed that the board cover costs in the short term, to be recouped from SG at the end of the exercise; an estimate had already been submitted to SG, with the exact pay rate for the operatives to be determined later. The board approved the undertaking.

It was understood that notices were to be issued by Marine Scotland (MS) asking anyone finding a tagged fish to remove the tag and send it to MS, with a small reward as an incentive. The board debated the risk of tags being removed before fish reached their home rivers and the possibility of the results being skewed, and considered a better method would be for tag details to be recorded.

Action: Consultant to query with MS

[Nb. MS Notices issued next working day, so too late for instructions to be altered but issue subsequently clarified by MS to request release of fish and tags, in line with board thinking.]

b) Pentland Firth monitoring

The board discussed the unique opportunity afforded by the tagging project to track fish through the Pentland Firth. There was no provision for this in the SG programme so the Consultant had written to MS on behalf of the Trust and Board urging it to consider placement of receivers in the Firth and to BTAL, the developers of the underwater turbine complex at Brims/Hoy, with an expectation that they would wish to obtain first hand data on migration routes to support their licence application. Neither had expressed any interest, however, and time was now running out.

The board agreed to raise the matter with Alan Wells, Chief Executive of FMS and the Head of Marine Scotland at the earliest opportunity to point out that DSFB interests do not appear to be given due consideration or to be properly protected by government, and requesting that MS consult more widely and more regularly, keeping the board up to date with MS/industry initiatives in a more timely way to enable it to perform its duties to best effect.

Action: Chairman to liaise with AY and write letter on behalf of CDSFB

c) Electrofishing equipment

A reconditioned backpack electric-fisher had been ordered and was scheduled to arrive at the end of the month (cost £4560 + carriage).

7. Flow Country Rivers Trust

River Wester regeneration: the 2 applications for funding had been unsuccessful and the project was on hold.

Wick Bay II smolt tracking: this is not expected to take place before 2018. Plans include placing monitoring devices well beyond the bay this time, possibly as far away as Duncansby.

Project reports issued by the Trust are to be added to the CDSFB website.

8. Any other business

There was no further business.

9. Meeting dates

The next meeting of the board will take place on Friday 11 August at the Ulbster Arms. The Annual Public Meeting will start at 11 am, to be followed by a routine board meeting.