

CAITHNESS DISTRICT SALMON FISHERY BOARD

MINUTES OF BOARD MEETING: 11 AUGUST 2017

Present

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

1. Register of Interests

No changes

2. Apologies

Apologies received from John Mackay, Anson MacAuslan and Mark Newton.

3. Minutes of the last meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 16 June were approved. Action to discuss areas of collaboration with the Northern and Helmsdale DSFBs was carried forward.

Action: Chairman to contact other boards

4. Finance and Admin

a) Expenditure update

Assessment notices had recently been issued to all river proprietors based on the latest fishery valuations. The chairman reminded members of the valuation process and the system of calculating rates to explain why there were variations in the percentage increase due per individual fishery this year. Expenditure to date was in line with forecast.

b) Stocking/hatchery requests

Requests had been received from Wick Angling Association (WAA) and Dunbeath River to continue hatchery operations in the coming year. Both were approved.

c) Electrofishing requests

Permission was granted to WAA and Dunbeath to undertake electrofishing this year. The board agreed to loan the WAA its backpack equipment.

d) Consultations and other requests since last meeting

A letter had been sent to the Highland Council in response to a planning notice stipulating a requirement for pre-development surveys of the Achlachan/Black Burn. The landowner and developer had also been contacted (thanks due to Mr McCarthy) to explain the statutory function of the board and the rationale for imposing conditions at this stage. Developer now liaising with consultant to comply (see also para 5).

DRSL Dounreay had been granted permission to take a single salmon by rod and line for environmental monitoring in July.

5. Consultant's Report

a) Armadale tagging programme

The Caithness rivers had played their part with the receivers installed in rivers on time as planned and they would remain there until recalled by Marine Scotland (MS). On completion the board intended to settle an appropriate level of remuneration for individual rivers/operators for their contribution, to be reclaimed from the Scottish Government (SG) as per the budget submitted..

The programme itself was seriously behind schedule and the chances of any quantity of significant data being obtained appeared limited. The consultant understood via the NDSFB that tagging had been delayed until late July, reportedly only 70 fish of the planned 750 had been tagged so far, and one tagged fish caught. The CDSFB had failed to persuade MS to install receivers at the entrance to the Pentland Firth for maximum benefit, but with so few fish tagged this would have been nugatory.

The board voiced dismay at the failure of the programme to deliver, noting that this was a unique opportunity funded by the Scottish Government (at a cost understood to be £1.5m). With zero likelihood of a repeat in future this had been squandered. As at the previous meeting, the board reiterated its frustration at not being consulted by SG and MS, or invited to collaborate in the early stages of planning.

b) EF survey plans

Arrangements were in hand for the upcoming annual survey, covering the sites approved in March. In addition the Black/Achlachan Burn is expected to be surveyed on behalf of Whirlwind Renewables, with results being incorporated into the database on a confidential footing.

c) Pink salmon

Proprietors and river managers had been made aware of the presence of pink salmon in Scottish rivers this summer and what steps to take. A number had already been caught on the Thurso and Wick rivers. The appearance of these aliens is of concern but not a cause for panic. The message to anyone finding one is to catch, kill and hand it in to the Consultant (the fish may be refrigerated until convenient). The Head Bailiff is recording capture numbers and should also be notified.

d) Monitoring other changes to rivers

The consultant was asked what steps were being taken to monitor the consequences to rivers from major disturbances within catchment areas such as the Bad a Cheo wind farm construction work and tree-felling at Loch More. The board was reassured on several counts: the board's own approvals system at the planning stage, developer/operator contract responsibilities, SEPA monitoring, monitoring by river staff, and the board's 5 year electrofishing strategy which includes regular revisiting of sites on all rivers and scope to include new sites in areas of concern in any year.

6. Flow Country Rivers Trust

The FCRT chairman had announced his intention of standing down at the end of September.

7. Bailiff's Report

All quiet on the coastal watch front. The waters were high at present and the salmon were expected to be running shortly.

8. Any other business

Dr Kinnear informed the meeting that work to construct the low wall at the Forss estuary to improve access for salmon and sea trout was now complete and it seemed effective so far.

9. Meeting dates

The next meeting of the board will take place on Friday 10 November at the Ulbster Arms at 10 am.