**CAITHNESS DISTRICT SALMON FISHERY BOARD**

**MINUTES OF BOARD MEETING: 21 AUGUST 2019**

**Present**

Chairman: Lord Thurso

Members: SWM Threipland, SWD Laird, D Mackay

Officers: EC McCarthy, A Youngson, M Blackwood

Observer: Mr J Sinclair

**1. Register of Interests**

Application of windfarm at Tormsdale, Chairman is proprietor of this and John Mackay will handle the dealings of it.

**2. Apologies**

M Newton, R Dunbar, A Macauslan, I Cormack, J Mackay and R Willis

**3. Minutes of the last meeting**

1. **Approval**

 The minutes of the meeting held on 21 June were approved. All actions are ongoing.

**4. Finance and Admin**

**a) Correspondence/Consultation**

A table of recent correspondence form July and August 2019 was circulated to and viewed by the board. Board members requested that clerk was to circulate the boards response to the Scottish Government regarding the Tormsdale Windfarm.

1. **Expenditure to 30 June 2019**

A table of Expenditure was circulated to and viewed by the board. It could be seen that expenditure was on track to the final estimated budget of 31 December 2019.

**5. Consultant’s Report**

**a) Pink Salmon**

Only sporadic records of pink salmon have come from rivers in Scotland this summer and none have been reported from Caithness. The closest occurrence appears to be a report several weeks ago from the River Polla in north Sutherland.

The rate of build-up of reports this year has so far much less than in 2017. However, the 3rd week of August was the peak week in 2017. So, it is probably worth keeping a close watch on things for a little longer.

**b) Diseased Fish**

There have been reports of diseased fish from rivers around the North since the beginning of July. Fish were showing a belly rash on river entry and subsequently became infected with the fungus, *Saprolegnia*, which is a naturally occurring and opportunistic pathogen in all fresh waters. Diseased fish were not present everywhere but some rivers suffered notably heavy losses.

The Fish Health Inspectorate obtained samples near the start of the outbreak. The results of the lab tests have not so far disclosed the cause of the fishes’ symptoms although they have discounted all of the more sinister possibilities.

Board received an email from a longstanding fisher of Forss who stated their concern of the diseased fish and asked a professor they knew for their opinion. The answers to what have caused this to the fish seem to be unknown. Board discussed this and agreed that FMS needed to intervene and give more information as to what work has been undertaken. Chairman is to write to them for this information.

1. **Electric Fishing Update 2019**

The NEPS electric-fishing programme is underway. The programme is more-or-less on schedule although the survey team has been severely hampered by the recent bad weather. It is too early to comment in detail on the findings. But so far fry densities seem to be only moderate as was perhaps expected following reports of a poor spawning in 2018.

1. **River Gradings for 2020**

Gradings issued very recently (on 20th August). Berriedale has been graded only at 2 for 2020. This appears to be solely due to late return of the 2018 catch data and their omission from the MSS exercise. I have taken the liberty of querying this on behalf of the Board by asking MSS to re-run the model with the 2018 data included. This should result in an upgrade to 1. All the other Caithness rivers retain their 2019 Grade 1 for 2020.

**6. Flow Country Rivers Trust**

The Smart Rivers project on stream invertebrate sampling and identification in Caithness and Northern Board rivers is quickly coming together. Reuben Sweeting of Halladale is liaising with the main organiser, Salmon & Trout Conservation, on behalf of the Trust. The Trust part of the national (UK) project is expected to start next spring.

A post-development e/f survey around the **Bad a Cheo** windfarm site (Little River, Thurso) has been commissioned by Innogy and will be completed later this summer.

**7. Bailiff’s Report**

Bailiff reported that there seems to be a more positive out look and things seem to have settled, that people seem less aggressive to go out and poach. Protection may be allowed to ease off but will be reviewed.

**8. Any other business**

**a) River Pollution**

An email of complaint about river pollution had been received from a fisher. The pollution complaint is the same as made two years ago. It was previously reported to SEPA but they did not find the exact cause, but think it may have been a septic tank. Chairman was going to write to suspected household occupants but decided it is not fair to when it is not known for certain. It was agreed to report this to SEPA again to have them re investigate and let board have report of their findings. Bailiff was also happy to take a look/ accompany SEPA. Chairman will write to the fisher who sent the complaint to make them aware of what action has been taken.

**b) FMS Regional Meetings**

FMS have arranged regional meetings, meeting local to the board is on 11 September at Kildonan Hall. Chairman asked members present if they would wish to attend and will also ask those who were not present.

**9. Meeting dates**

The next meeting of the board will take place at 2.30 pm on Friday 22 November 2019 at the Ulbster Arms.