**CAITHNESS DISTRICT SALMON FISHERY BOARD**

**MINUTES OF BOARD MEETING: 22 November 2019**

**Present**

Chairman: Lord Thurso

Members: SWM Threipland, D Mackay, R Dunbar, I Cormack and J Mackay

Officers: EC McCarthy, A Youngson, M Blackwood

Observer: -

**1. Register of Interests**

None to register

**2. Apologies**

M Newton, SWD Laird, A Macauslan, and R Willis

**3. Minutes of the last meeting**

1. **Approval**

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

**4. Finance and Admin**

1. **Correspondence/Consultation**

A table of recent correspondence form August to November 2019 was circulated to and viewed by the board. It had been a quiet spell and nothing to act on.

1. **FMS – Scottish fish counter network, potential future sites** More can be found out about this and links sent if any board members are interested in this.
2. **Scottish Government – New policy for hatcheries –** At the moment very vague and more information can be circulated once received.

**5. Consultant’s Report**

1. **Pink Salmon/Diseased fish**

In 2017 there was an unusually large influx of stray pink salmon from northern Europe to rivers further south including rivers in Caithness. Repeat invasions are possible but because of the species’ life-cycle they are likely only in odd years. The possible repeat event of 2019 did not materialise. .

The so-far undiagnosed disease outbreak of 2019 caused substantial mortality among potential spawners in some rivers, including the Forss in Caithness. It is hoped that more information will become available from MS because without a diagnosis it is impossible to predict whether the problem may recur in coming years and what measures might be taken to reduce its impact.

1. **Student project**

In September Liam Godwin joined ERI in Thurso to start a PhD project with Dr Roxane Andersen, supported in part by CDSFB, NDSFB and FCRT. The project will link peatland restoration with invertebrate and salmon assessment. The Board’s archive of survey data on juvenile salmon in Caithness will form an important resource for Liam’s work and, it is anticipated, will lead to new insights imparting additional value to the Board’s dataset.

1. **Preliminary Assessment of 2019 electric fishing surveys**

The 2019 electric-fishing survey was completed more-or-less as planned despite the wet summer. Densities of fry were lower than usual throughout the Caithness rivers but probably still adequate to generate reasonable densities of parr in most places. The low densities of parr observed at all sites in the River Forss is a concern, however, and will require further investigation.

**d) Options for electric fishing activity in 2020**

To be discussed at next meeting of Board.

**6. Flow Country Rivers Trust**

Chairman of the trust advised what work had been carried out as listed below;

a) The Bad a Cheo windfarm on the Causeymire was surveyed by electric fishing before construction and it was resurveyed in September this year after construction. No effect was detected on salmon in the Little River catchment.

b) A habitat report on the Loch Toftingal catchment was completed. These various contracts and reports add extra pieces to the jigsaw of the understanding of our area.

c) Work was completed to delineate the transition in conductivity of the streams and rivers from east to west Caithness. A report will be published.

d) Last year the conductivity measurements of all the rivers in the North was carried out in drought conditions. Further work will now be done in high flows for comparison.

e)The Wick Smolt Tracking Project 2016 will now be peer reviewed and put forward as a scientific paper.

**7. Bailiff’s Report**

Bailiff reported that there seems to be a more positive outlook and things seem to have settled, that people seem less aggressive and less inclined to poach. There are no current concerns.

**8. Any other business**

None to note

**9. Meeting dates**

The next meeting of the board will take place on Friday 13 March 2020 at the Ulbster Arms. Time to be confirmed.