

# CAITHNESS DISTRICT SALMON FISHERY BOARD

## ANNUAL REPORT

**2013**

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### BOARD MEMBERSHIP AS AT 31 DECEMBER 2013

<b>Chairman</b>	Viscount Thurso MP
<b>Upper Proprietor Representatives</b>	A MacAuslan – Berriedale/Langwell S W M Threipland – Dunbeath River S W D Laird – Thurso River Sir Richard Dunbar – Wick River
<b>Lower Proprietor Representatives</b>	J Mackay – Wick Angling Association Earl of Caithness – Forss House Fishings
<b>Co-opted Salmon Angler Representatives</b>	I Cormack – Wick Angling Association T Stitt – Thurso Angling Association
<b>Co-opted Tenant Netsmen Representative</b>	R Willis
<b>Scientific Advisor</b>	A Youngson
<b>Inspector/Head Bailiff</b>	E McCarthy
<b>Clerk</b>	Mrs E Constable

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### CONTACT DETAILS

The Clerk, Skerraboe, North Keiss, Keiss, Wick, Caithness, KW1 4XF  
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The purpose of the Annual Report is to summarise the work of the Board during 2013 and plans for the current year, with particular regard to the Board's statutory functions and responsibilities.

## 1. 2013 ACTIVITY

### Catch data

	Total Catch Salmon/Grilse	Released
<u>Rod Catch</u>		
Berriedale	147	116
Dunbeath	58	30
Wick	322	133
Thurso	1177	975
Forss	343	193
<u>Fixed Engine</u>		
Thurso area	1078	n/a

Numbers have been drawn from voluntary district returns and Marine Scotland's provisional catch statistics for 2013 and have yet to be finalised.

### Conservation

The majority of the rivers in the Board's area are in single ownership which facilitates conservation action by those owners. As each river is actively engaged in conservation measures the Board believes it is not appropriate to adopt single policies covering all rivers where different rivers have different requirements. The Board regularly reviews salmon stocks and juvenile populations in all the rivers in its area (see details below) and discusses conservation policies adopted by each river.

### Regulatory measures

Regulatory measures were promoted through responses to planning applications and through the provision of environmental guidance to national organisations, developers, utility companies etc as required. Contact was made with a number of organisations to raise awareness of the Board's interests during the year to ensure that we are involved at a sufficiently early stage in the planning process where new development or changes to infrastructure are proposed, and this has been of mutual benefit.

In consequence there was a sharp increase in the number of consultations that we contributed to over the year and 14 responses were issued. 50% of these related to renewables, the other 50% to a mix of forestry, electricity grid infrastructure, public water supply, water, transport and offshore oil undertakings.

### Fish surveys

The Board, supported by The Crown Estate, commissioned a team to carry out a survey of young salmon in the Caithness rivers in late summer 2013 under the supervision of Scientific Advisor Alan Youngson. The results were published earlier this year and can be viewed on the Board's website (see Section 4).

The new survey updated work carried out by the Board in previous years but the particular purpose of this survey was to obtain high quality information on the state of its rivers in the run-up to development of major tidal- and wave-energy projects taking place around the Caithness coasts.

The Pentland Firth and its approaches are central to plans for renewable energy. In future, salmon from the Caithness rivers will share the Firth with major, new developments. It is not known whether development will affect salmon in any way but the 2013 survey is the first step towards ensuring that any problems that do arise can be pinpointed and dealt with.

In support of this aim, the survey was funded with the help of The Crown Estate, the public body that grants sea-bed leases to developers.

In total, 21 sites were surveyed in the Forss, Thurso, Wick, Dunbeath, Berriedale and Langwell catchments. Both the Berriedale/Langwell and the Thurso are European designated Special Areas of Conservation for salmon. The survey provided separate assessments of the numbers of salmon fry that had been spawned in 2012 and the numbers of 1-year-old salmon parr that had been spawned in 2011. A new analysis was devised and this proved particularly informative. No particular problems were identified at any of the survey sites. Indeed, some survey sites were saturated with fish and competition had been so intense that their growth had been slowed. In short, the survey results proved excellent for both fry and parr.

As part of this project, new links were forged with estates and a number of local estate staff received basic training in electric fishing. In addition, new links were forged with the gamekeeping course at North Highland College with a view to increasing awareness of fishery matters among young people entering the profession.

#### **Bailiffs**

There were 15 warranted bailiffs available to the Board during 2013, all of who have now been issued with new credit card style warrant cards with photographic ID and hologram and valid for 5 years. Routine coastal monitoring was supplemented with the use of a boat and 2 bailiffs attended skipper courses. The baseline survey project provided an excellent opportunity for updating skills and to increase the numbers with electrofishing experience, so the Board is now well staffed to undertake future surveys of this nature.

#### **Concerns**

The primary concerns during the year were with regard to the potential impact of renewables, with numerous applications for windfarms in the pipeline and the uncertainties associated with trial turbine activity in the Pentland Firth.

#### **Scientific Studies**

Close links were established with the Environmental Research Institute (ERI), UHI, in Thurso, thanks to efforts of the Chairman and our scientific adviser. The particular focus was the new Pentland Salmon Initiative set up by ERI to provide a science-based forum for stakeholders with an interest in salmon in northern rivers and coastal waters.

The Board meeting in May was held at ERI to give members an opportunity to view their new premises and facilities and learn of the research work being carried there which addresses the areas of mutual interest. In particular, an ecologist from ERI described research on potential interactions between migrating salmon and marine renewables development. At the August Board meeting a peatlands ecologist from ERI attended to talk about work on peat restoration in the Flow Country, in particular the impact of restoration on the river environment.

#### **Rivers Trust**

A working group was set up during 2013 to evaluate the benefits of a river trust. At the time of writing the Flow Country Rivers Trust, incorporating the rivers of the Caithness and the Northern Districts, has just been formed and a member of the Board has been nominated to represent our interests on the Trust. The Board intends to contribute funds to the Trust for an initial 3 years.

## **2. PROPOSALS FOR 2014**

### **Meetings**

Board meetings are scheduled for March, May, August and November 2014, with the Annual Meeting of Proprietors and the Annual Public Meeting of the Board due on 26 August. The Triennial Elections also take place in 2014.

### **Fish Surveys**

It is hoped to arrange a repeat electrofishing survey across the District to build on the findings established in the 2013 survey. The scope of the survey will be governed by available funding but with Meygen trials of underwater turbines due to begin in 2015 there is added pressure to have the necessary data on salmonid populations before work starts and the benefit of 2 consecutive years of data for comparison.

### **Scientific Studies**

Discussion is expected to continue with ERI to explore opportunities for specific research projects in areas of mutual interest.

## **3. COMPLAINTS**

No complaints were received during the year.

## **4. GOOD GOVERNANCE**

The Board took note of the provisions of the Aquaculture and Fisheries (Scotland) 2013 Act which came into force on 16 September 2013 and welcomed the Guidance to DSFBs on Good Governance Obligations published by Marine Scotland in tandem with this.

- A website was launched in the autumn to provide information about the work of the Board, its management and procedures: [www.caithness.dsfb.co.uk](http://www.caithness.dsfb.co.uk)
- All meetings are now advertised on the website and associated minutes published once agreed.
- Our Complaints Procedure was published at the start of the current year and will be kept under review; it can be found on the website.
- We have included a standing item at each Board meeting inviting members to declare new/amend existing interests and these are recorded in meeting minutes. The register of members' interests is available to view on request to the Clerk.
- We expect to be fully compliant with all obligations by the end of August 2014 when our annual reporting/meeting cycle is complete and the Annual Report and Statement of Accounts are submitted to the Scottish Government.