

CAITHNESS DISTRICT SALMON FISHERY BOARD

MINUTES OF BOARD MEETING: 10 NOVEMBER 2017

Present

Chairman: Viscount Thurso

Members: Sir Richard Dunbar, SWM Threipland, A MacAuslan, J Mackay, SWD Laird,

Officers: EC McCarthy, A Youngson, E Constable

1. Register of Interests

Office bearers with other organisations: add J Mackay, Wick Harbour Authority.

2. Apologies

Apologies received from M Newton, I Cormack, T Stitt, R Willis.

3. Minutes of the last meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 11 August were approved.

4. Clerk's Report

a) Finance

Expenditure to date, including the electrofishing programme, remained within budget.

All rating assessment payments received, bar one from a longstanding defaulter. It was agreed that formal proceedings should be taken to recover the outstanding debt if not forthcoming by the end of the year.

b) Admin

The board had been consulted on water network improvements to the Houstry Burn, Dunbeath and a variation to the marine licence for BOWL construction works at Wick Harbour.

5. Consultant's Report

a) 2018 proposed river gradings

The board had sent a comprehensive letter to MS disputing the downgrading of three of the Caithness rivers and querying the effectiveness of the methodology and inclusion of catch data to assess the conservation status of smaller rivers. With the benefit of 5 consecutive years of electrofishing and study of fish biomass the board considered the Dunbeath and Forss should remain Grade 1, with Grade 2 for Berriedale/Langwell pending further investigation.

FMS was to respond to the river grading consultation on behalf of all DSFBs and Trusts. The CDSFB had submitted its concerns about the assessment methodology and the difficulties confronting fisheries with erratic grade changes from one year to the next.

Action: Clerk to follow up with MS by Week 3 of December if no response to letter received.

b) EF survey update

A provisional report of survey results had been circulated to board members; the final report was likely to be ready around the end of the year. The indications were that the rivers would be found to be in as good a state as in preceding years. With the need for a better understanding of conditions within the Berriedale/Langwell system this was expected to be the main focus for EF next year.

Action: Consultant's 2018 EF plans to be confirmed at next meeting.

c) Pink salmon

The Consultant had produced a report for the board's records of all pink salmon identified during 2017 and associated activity. Thirteen (all males) were recovered from Thurso River (mostly the lower river) and a single female was caught in the Wick River. Spawning activity was noted in the Thurso mostly on the lower reaches and largely restricted to the third week in August. Although no females were reported it is estimated that some 50 pairs were present in the Thurso from the end of July onwards.

The board was prepared for pink salmon being present again, in line with their 2-year cycle, in 2019. The particular challenge for fisheries will be to devise ways of catching and removing as many pink salmon as possible without compromising native fish. With Beat 1 of the River Thurso seemingly particularly susceptible Thurso Angling Association was understood to be considering how to manage repeat incursions already.

All the fish that came to hand this year were sampled for genetic analysis and the samples passed to MSS. It is hoped that this will assist in determining whether pink salmon appearing in future are returners or strayers, and thus the measures necessary to minimise the chances of their becoming established.

d) Armadale tagging programme

The twin listening stations deployed in the Caithness rivers over the summer were being collected by the Consultant and returned to MS for data downloading and analysis. The board was to reimburse rivers for costs incurred and provide an allowance of £600 per river for staff involved in the operation.

Action: Clerk to coordinate river payments and reclaim from MS.

6. Flow Country Rivers Trust Report

a) Moray Firth Smolt Tracking 2018

The FCRT had attended an initial meeting by the Atlantic Salmon Trust outlining proposals for a smolt tracking project in the Moray Firth. The Trust was considering the form and scope of the contribution it could make, in collaboration with the ERI, with the current focus to see if an extension to the 2016 Wick Smolt Tracking Project might fit in with the organisers' plans.

b) SEPA visit

SEPA had invited fishery/rivers trusts from the north-east coast to a workshop to discuss how river basin management planning aligned with local fishery priorities and to consider respective classification systems and available data. FCRT had been impressed by the range of information held by SEPA and advised that both Board and Trust could benefit from this resource. A general discussion ensued on the protection of watercourses from livestock.

c) Water chemistry

The Trust intended to take a series of water samples from the Berriedale/Langwell SAC for testing by the Freshwater Fisheries Laboratory at Pitlochry as part of the further investigations of these rivers. Water testing could be carried out on other rivers in the Trust's area if the results proved informative.

d) Chairman

John Mackay replaced James Fleming as FCRT Chairman on 1 October.

7. Bailiff's Report

Good rainfall this year appeared to bring fish into the river systems quickly, apart from a period in early June when there was evidence of fish remaining on the coastline. The bailiffs maintained a strong visible coastal presence and there were no incidents.

8. Any other business

2017 was considered to have been a good year with early spawning generally, despite some rivers reporting fungal disease affecting numbers in the Spring.

9. Meeting dates

The next meeting will take place on Friday 2 March at the Ulbster Arms at 10 am.