

CAITHNESS DISTRICT SALMON FISHERY BOARD

MINUTES OF BOARD MEETING: 8 JUNE 2018

Present

Chairman: Lord Thurso
Members: J Mackay, A MacAuslan, SWD Laird, M Newton, I Cormack, R Willis,
Officers: A Youngson, E McCarthy, E Constable

1. Register of Interests

Changes noted, Clerk to update records.

Action: Clerk

2. Apologies

Apologies received: Sir Richard Dunbar and SWM Threipland.

3. Minutes of the last meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 2 March were approved. FMS annual subscription: action to write to FMS regarding concerns over value for money and to consult with neighbouring DSFBs carried forward.

Action: Chairman

4. Finance and Admin

a) 2018 Estimates

A budget of £33,966 was approved. This included £10k for the expanded electro-fishing programme to meet board requirements (cf. para 5d) and £2k towards the LEADER Project (para 5e). Clerk to update.

Action: Clerk

b) Co-opted salmon angler representative

There was a vacant position following the retirement of Tom Stitt. It was agreed that a replacement should be sought from the Thurso Angling Association. Eddie McCarthy was asked to initiate enquiries.

Action: Inspector

c) Data Protection

Measures had been put in place to ensure compliance with the latest regulations relating to the processing of personal data (GDPR). The board was to register with the Information Commissioner's Office.

Action: Clerk

d) Correspondence/Consultations

Following requests for guidance the consultant had been in contact with contractors tendering for the A9 Berriedale Braes upgrade.

5. Consultant's Report

A report summarising recent research activity and recommendations for further strengthening the board's scientific database had been circulated to members prior to the meeting. The board expressed appreciation for the considerable work undertaken and the thoughtful approach adopted in pursuing concerns with the Scottish Government's river grading methodology. Findings were discussed and project plans approved.

a) Latitude effect on river grading

Following observations from John Mackay the consultant had identified an anomaly with the latitudinal correction factor applied by Marine Scotland Science (MSS) to rivers north of 58°. This had been brought to the attention of MSS, and if, as is hoped, the correctional factor is removed for 2019 there is a good chance that river grades will be restored to their previous levels.

b) EF survey data analysis

The consultant has begun work to re-interpret data from the Caithness surveys of the past 5 years in the context of MSS river grading methods and the board gave its approval to continue this work. Peripheral work by the Rivers Trust on water chemistry and water conductivity (see para 6) is expected to provide supplementary information to understand anomalies in abundance between and within rivers.

c) MSS National EF Survey Programme

The board plans to participate. Although only 1 pass is required for many of the MSS sites it was agreed that 3-pass fishing should be carried out where necessary so that the results are compatible with those from the board's own EF studies.

d) 2018 Electrofishing programme

The survey schedule proposed for July through to September was approved. A total of 43 sites are to be surveyed, including the 30 designated by MSS. Funds up to £32k were earmarked: £12k from MSS plus up to £10k from the board's budget. Staffing arrangements were in hand.

Action: Consultant

e) ERI LEADER Project

ERI is proposing to apply for LEADER funding for a project in partnership with East Mayo, Eire. It concerns the transmission of knowledge across generations and the community and would contribute to succession planning for the management of fisheries. ERI would manage the project and the board's consultant would be closely involved.

In order for the application to have a chance of success stakeholders are asked to demonstrate their commitment by providing some 5% of the total funding for the project. The Northern and Helmsdale DSFBs were also being invited to join and the FCRT had already signed up.

The chairman agreed to write a letter to ERI prior to the 25 June submission deadline expressing CDSFB support for the project and committing a contribution of £2000.

Action: Chairman

6. Flow Country Rivers Trust (FCRT) Update

- Temperature loggers, River Thurso: still being maintained and mileage costs covered by FCRT for MS.
- Water chemistry, Berriedale: 40 water samples obtained from SAC rivers and sent to Freshwater Fisheries Laboratory, Pitlochry where they are being tested free of charge. Report due idc.
- Water conductivity: new project, taking advantage of the current low water levels to measure in-river electrical conductivity. 40 Caithness sites already measured, 15+ sites scheduled for Northern DSFB rivers this weekend. Report due idc.
- Wick pilot study into smolt migration and genetics: 170 smolts tagged by ERI, results being analysed at present.
- Leader Project: FCRT contributing £1k towards the project.
- Atlantic Salmon Trust "Year of the Salmon": An education project aimed at schools across UK for 2019. The Trust is exploring possible collaboration with Farr School.
- Giant hogweed: FCRT alerted to presence of invasive species within in Thurso catchment by Andrew Heath (observer at March CDSFB meeting) and facilitated a link up with SNH Golspie. It is understood that SNH is arranging appropriate clearance before the plant spreads further.

7. Bailiff's Report

Fish had been present off the coast since June but there have been no concerns about illegal fishing..

8. Any other business

N/A

9. Meeting dates

The next board meeting was scheduled for August, date to be agreed.