**CAITHNESS DISTRICT SALMON FISHERY BOARD**

**MINUTES OF BOARD MEETING: 12 March 2021**

**Present**

Chairman: Lord Thurso (LT)

Members: SWM Threipland (TT), SWD Laird(SL), M Newton(MN), I Cormack(IC), J Mackay(JM),

A Macauslan (AM)

Officers: EC McCarthy(EM), A Youngson(AY), M Blackwood (MB)

Observer:

**1.Register of Interests**

Tormsdale Windfarm – Lord Thurso reconfirmed his interest as before and declared he would not take part in that section of the agenda which would be chaired by John Mackay.

SL stated that for the record he would like to restate that he is a director & shareholder of Thurso River Ltd. He has considered his position in regard to being a member of the CDSFB & the Tormsdale Wind Farm agenda item. He believes he has no conflict of interest and unless anyone has an objection intends to participate in the full meeting. JM, in his capacity as chair of the meeting with regard to Tormsdale matters indicated that he felt there was a potential conflict. Notwithstanding the advice he had received, SL agreed to withdraw if there was a substantive discussion.

**2.Apologies**

D Mackay(DM),R Dunbar(RD).

**3.Minutes of the last meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 November were approved. All actions are ongoing.

4. **Minutes of the meeting of 21st January and matters arising**

**A)** **Tormsdale**

Minutes of meeting held 21 January.

Chairman asked if they could be approved. TT stated a previous draft noted the board supported the windfarm proposal which the members did not agree with and asked for the minutes to state that the board could not support the windfarm proposal at this stage especially with the information provided by AY. Chairman advised that the board had not been asked to support or oppose anything and that the board’s view was to examine the project. TT requested the point be noted. Which was agreed.As the meeting wished to discuss matters arising out of the minutes of 21st January LT and SL left the meeting. JM did not anticipate that there would be much need for a discussion as there were no further actions due until application had gone in and that the main points of discussions for Tormsdale would be to agree all actions that had previously taken place and to formally constitute the sub-committee which will monitor and report on the matter.

The Board formally agreed the minutes of the meeting of 21st January; agreed the actions of the sub-committee as set out in the letters attached to the minutes; and agreed that the sub-committee remain in place to monitor and discuss events

The board discussed developments at Tormsdale. AY felt the developers were not being straight with the board but that the board should show willing if a meeting was requested by the developer. He also stated that papers were being commissioned which showed that Nature Scot were listening. He further noted that the board would be guided be the science. It was felt that legal advice might be required and MN offered to supply contacts.

LT and SL rejoined the meeting.

b) **Forss**

LT was to write to Forss owners which was done.

LT and AY was to write to contact SEPA and Scottish water – held off as onsite meeting required so not sure when restrictions will allow that. But have written a letter in draft which will be sent in next few days.

**5.Finance and Admin**

**a)** Consider draft Accounts for year ended 31 December 2020

The draft Expenditure & Income accounts and the Balance Sheet were approved and are to be formally presented at the Proprietors’ AGM in June.

b) Consider Expenditure Estimates for 2021

The draft Estimates were considered and approved in principle. It was recommended that the assessment rate remain at 17p in the £, as per previous year.

c) Consultation activity

A table of correspondence was circulated to and viewed by the board, there was nothing urgent arising or to be questioned.

**6.Consultant’s Report**

a)The 2020 electric-fishing survey report

The 2020 report had been completed and circulated to the Board members. No comments had been received and the Board is content, it was agreed the report would be finalised and posted on the Board’s website. Board agreed. MN said edited edition to be sent to Forss owners but it was decided they would see full report sent to them via email link by the clerk and that it is also available publicly on the board’s website.

b)Proposed 2021 EF Programme

The Board’s 2021 survey should address questions raised in 2020. Given the ongoing problems on Forss, all four Forss sites should be repeated to keep track of the salmon situation and to check on the development of the trout populations that emerged for the first time in 2020. Several sites should be included on Thurso in order to track the development of the exceptionally strong year-class of fry established in 2020. Work should be temporarily expanded on Berriedale/ Langwell given the marginal status of the sites surveyed in 2020. Otherwise, the key sites should be repeated as usual on Dunbeath Water and on Wick River where the Acharole1 site should also be surveyed with a view to switching the Wick key site in 2022 from the existing key site at Clow to a new key site at Acharole1.

In all, survey of about 15-17 sites should be surveyed, roughly equivalent in scale and cost to the same exercise in 2020.

c) Additional electric-fishing commitments

1.It is possible that the NEPS programme run by Marine Scotland will recommence in 2021 after a Covid-related hiatus in 2020. There may be a range of ways of dealing with any request that may come from MS depending on how matters stand at the time. It will be in the Board’s interests to be supportive because of the grading by juvenile population status in the Board area that will result. NEPS is fully funded.

2.If the Lomond Energy survey of 2020 is sub-standard, the Board my wish to consider obtaining its own survey information ahead of any development. The Board will have to wait for the Tormsdale application (including the Environment Statement) to be submitted to the Energy Consents Unit before any decision can be made.

d)The hatchery policy

In December, I attended on on-line meeting hosted by MS to discuss hatchery policy. A briefing document was prepared for the Board and it is also attached here. MS have retreated from the original, draconian version of their new policy towards a more considered version that takes more account of the needs of their stakeholders. Further to this, a public consultation by the Scottish Government is promised before their stocking/ hatchery policy is finalised.

e)The seal policy

It now seems that a seal control is still a management option if wild populations of salmon are considered to be at risk due to predation. Details can be found at <https://www.gov.scot/publications/seal-licensing-form-and-guidance/>. Control is to be a measure of last resort considered only for Grade 3 rivers or for other rivers with an effective catch-and-release policy. It should be noted that Forss will not qualify as matters stand because there is not a catch-and-release policy in place and because Marine Scotland considers Forss to be Grade 1. Because of the way the MS grading system operates, Forss will remain Grade 1 for several more years at least even if the fishery performs as expected in the wake of the recent decline in juvenile densities.

**6.Flow Country Rivers Trust**

The FCRT annual report had been circulated to the board members prior to the meeting

Chairman of FCRT confirmed Halladale and insect survey has had a positive result over the 5 sites can hopefully get going in spring providing restrictions allow.

**7.Bailiff’s Report**

The Bailiff had very little to report and confirmed that he would have his usual presence.

John Speirs of Forss passed his water bailiff exam and asked the clerk to order a warrant card from FMS on his behalf

**8.Any other business**

SL raised Red Skin Disease – talked about looking to see if possible, to have holding tank facility as last year and previous year when the problem was identified the issue seemed to be that that FMS couldn’t get live specimens. There is a chance it will appear again this year, starting in May. Board agreed for AY to think this through and suggest how we may enable it to happen. AY to reenergise MS and send them the CDSFB EF Report.

**9.Meeting dates**

The next meeting of the board will take place as stated below possibly still to be held by tele conference via zoom.

Annual Proprietors meeting followed by board meeting Friday 18th June 2021

Annual Public meeting followed by board meeting Wednesday 18th August 2021

The board meeting was formally closed by the chairman and the consultant presented a slideshow which he had prepared in respect of Tormsdale.