**CAITHNESS DISTRICT SALMON FISHERY BOARD**

**ANNUAL REPORT**

**2021**

**BOARD MEMBERSHIP AS AT 31 DECEMBER 2021**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Chairman** | The Viscount Thurso |
|  |  |
| **Upper Proprietor**  **Representatives** | Sir Richard Dunbar – Wick River  S W M Threipland – Dunbeath River  A MacAuslan – Berriedale/Langwell  M R Newton – Forss |
|  |  |
| **Lower Proprietor**  **Representatives** | J Mackay – Wick Angling Association  S W D Laird – Thurso River Ltd  The Viscount Thurso – Thurso Fisheries Ltd |
|  |  |
| **Co-opted Salmon Angler**  **Representatives** | I Cormack – Wick Angling Association  D Mackay – Thurso Angling Association |
|  |  |
| **Co-opted Tenant Netsmen**  **Representative** | - |
|  |  |
| **Scientific Advisor** | A Youngson |
|  |  |
| **Inspector/Head Bailiff** | E McCarthy |
|  |  |
| **Clerk** | Miss M Blackwood |

**CONTACT DETAILS**

The Clerk, 4 Braal Terrace, Halkirk, Caithness, KW12 6YN 07387360030

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Website http://caithness.dsfb.org.uk

The purpose of the report is to summarise the work undertaken by the Caithness District Salmon Fishery Board (CDSFB) during 2021 and plans for the current year (2022), with particular regard to the Board’s statutory functions and responsibilities.

2021 was again largely dominated by the COVID-19 pandemic which curtailed fishing efforts, and had implications for all the Board’s work which created difficulties in many areas of the board’s activities. However, like many other organisations, the board adapted. Meetings were held by Zoom tele conferences, and bailiff work and the electro fishing programme were carried out with social distancing and in a manner compliant with COVID-19 with whatever restrictions were in place at any time.

**1. ACTIVITY IN 2021**

**Rod Catch Data**

The Board is required to publish catch data for Caithness District. Rod catch figures for salmon and grilse caught during the year by each river together with numbers released are shown below. The first two sets of figures show the total catch of salmon and grilse, combined, for 2022 with comparative figures for 2020 shown in brackets. The second set of figures shows the total number salmon and grilse released 2021 with comparative figures for 2020 shown in brackets.

Total Catch of Salmon and Grilse Number Released

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Rod Catch | 2021 2020 | 2021 2020 |
| Berriedale | 127 (207) | 120 (170) |
| Dunbeath | 10 (115) | 10 (92) |
| Wick | 109 (583) | 41 (298) |
| Thurso | 769 (804) | 711 (668) |
| Forss | 22 (53) | 18 (50) |
|  |  |  |

**Conservation and Regulatory Measures**

Hatcheries

In December2021, the consultant attended an on-line meeting hosted by Marine Scotland (MS) to discuss hatchery policy. MS had, following representations, amended their original 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 was promised before the stocking/ hatchery policy is finalised.

River gradings

Proposed river gradings for the 2022 salmon fishing season have been published and there are no changes for the rivers within the Caithness District.

Fish Surveys

The 2021 NEPS programme and the Board’s own electric-fishing programme were successfully completed, with results and report being published and uploaded onto the boards website.

**External Consultations**

Formal responses were issued in respect of the following works and planned infrastructure:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Wind farms** |  |
| Pentland Floating Offshore Wind Farm | Scot Gov/ Xodus Group – seeking comments |
| Limekiln Wind Farm Extension | Infinergy - requesting comments and responses |
| Hollandmey Wind Renewable Energy Development proposal | Scot Gov - consultation request |
| Tormsdale Wind Farm | Lomond Energy Ltd |
|  |
| **Water** |  |
| National Marine Plan Review 2021 | Scot Gov – requesting comments of review |
| Loch Calder | Nature Scotand – requesting samples re looking at genetic variability within Arctic charr |
| Loch Calder Dam Maintenance Work | Scottish Water – requesting response |
| **Forestry**  LTFP & UKWAS Consultation | TilHill – request of responses for scoping document |
| **Roadworks** |  |
| NA |  |

**Bailiff Report**

The Bailiff reported it had been a fairly quiet year, although with a couple of suspicious boats which had been investigated. Later in the year there had been a difficult few weeks with fish stuck at mouths of several rivers due to low water. This resolved itself when rain came.

**Incidents**

Red Skin Disease (RSD) - RSD that was present in some rivers in 2019 returned in 2020 and 2021. Despite a substantial amount of work being carried out by MS Fish Health Inspectorate over the past year, MS has not yet identified the cause of these problems. The Board noted that some rivers are more affected than others and it is thought likely that there are a range of contributory factors which give rise to the symptoms seen as RSD. The Fish Health Inspectorate together with Fisheries Management Scotland continue to explore the issue.

Forss/Shurrery Dam - The Impact of RSD on the Forss River seemed to be particularly severe. Discussions with Scottish Water continued over the supply of compensation flow to the lower River Forss from Shurrery Dam. Due to the on-going drought and the low level of Loch Shurrery, there have been intermittent problems in ensuring that minimum compensation levels are maintained but the difficulties have, so far, been overcome by the operators.

**Tormsdale Wind Farm**

The developers of the Tormsdale wind farm which is a site immediately adjacent to beats 9 & 10 on the Thurso River submitted a planning application to the Scottish Government. The Board’s consultant advised that there were potentially significant issues with the proximity of the turbines to the river and the potential for shadow flicker, as well as possible issues with access. The Board therefore decided to make formal representations to NatureScot who are a statutory consultee and to lodge an objection.

As the Chairman of the Board is also the landowner he ruled himself conflicted and took no part in any discussions. In addition Mr Laird judged there was potential for conflict as tenant of the river and so equally ruled himself out. The Vice Chair therefore led discussions on this issue with all other board members. It is expected the issue will be determined during 2022 by Scottish Ministers at which point the board will consider its position.

**2. GOVERNANCE**

**The Board**

The Board seeks to follow best practice in good governance and in particular to adhere to the Code of Conduct for District Fishery boards in addition to the requirements of statute.

In 2021 the board held its customary 4 meetings in March, June, August and December. All meetings are publicised on the website and open to the public. Minutes are published on the website as soon as practicable after the meetings.

The board conducts its meetings in accordance with best practice and in particular asks its members to adhere to the code of good conduct for board members in public life. A register of interests is maintained and reviewed regularly.

As required by statute the board holds an annual proprietors’ meeting and an annual public meeting which is advertised and whose minutes are published.

The board publishes all data from its research activities on its website as soon as it is practicable to do so and in particular data regarding its electrofishing programmes of juvenile stocks.

**Data Protection**

The board is registered with the Information Commissioner’s Office under the Data Protection Act (Ref. No ZA427263). Our Privacy Statement and Data Handling Policy are set out on the website and will be kept under annual review. The Clerk is the nominated Data Protection Officer and first point of contact in the event of enquiries.

**Membership of Fisheries Management Scotland (FMS, formerly ASFB)**

The Boards fee for 2022 was set at £5,339

**3. Education and Publicity**

Due to Covid restrictions no educational activity was possible during the year.

**4. COMPLAINTS**

No complaints were received during the year.

**5. FLOW COUNTRY RIVERS TRUST**

The Trust’s annual report had been circulated to inform board members about recent activities and future plans.

Smart rivers project– the Trust’s chairman confirmed the project had very good results. Training for smart rivers had been done via zoom. The consultant had done a proposal for new funding to do surveys supported by foundation Scotland for wild fisheries.

Insect Survey–the Trust’s Chairman confirmed good news that the trust had secured a grant for the Insect Surveys.

**6. PROPOSALS FOR 2022**

**Meetings**

The first meeting of the year was held in March. The Proprietors AGM and next Board meeting will be held on 17 June. The Annual Public Meeting of the Board is scheduled for August and a final board meeting is expected to be scheduled for November.

**2022 Electrofishing Programme**

Marine Scotland’s NEPS programme was completed in 2021 but it is understood it will not go ahead in 2022.

The boards own annual electrofishing programme is planned to go ahead as normal.

**Forss River**

The Board is pleased to note that the various owners of the Forss have formed an owner’s committee to help combat the decline in observed juvenile stocks. The board will continue to monitor the situation and assist wherever it can

**Other scientific studies**

The Board will continue to look at other potential projects with the ERI and FCRT

**Bailiffs**

Bailiff will continue to keep a visual lookout