**CAITHNESS DISTRICT SALMON FISHERY BOARD**

**MINUTES OF BOARD MEETING: 17 June 2022**

**Present**

Chairman: Lord Thurso (LT)

Members: SWM Threipland (TT), M Newton(MN), J Mackay(JM), D Mackay(DM)

 SWD Laird(SL),

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

Observer:

**1.Register of Interests**

No new interests to be registered.

**2.Apologies**

I Cormack(IC),, A Macauslan (AM), R Dunbar(RD).

**3.Minutes of the last meeting**

 The minutes of the meeting held on 11 March were approved. All actions are ongoing.

4. **Matters arising**

There were no new matters arising

**5.Finance and Admin**

1. Approve final Estimates 2022 - Agreed
2. Confirm Assessment Rate 2022 (agreed to stay the same as previous year) - Agreed
3. Annual Report 2021 -Agreed
4. Admin and correspondence – table of correspondence circulated to members prior to meeting
5. Proprietors AGM - meeting was held prior to board meeting.

**6.Consultant’s Report**

a. **Red Skin Disease** - (RSD) and/or Saprolegnia infection is again present in some of the Caithness rivers. FMS has produced a data collection app for those wishing to report diseased fish (https://fms.scot/we-need-your-help-information-wanted-on-salmon/) and, more recently, a copiously illustrated leaflet explaining how to recognise RSD and how to assess its severity. The leaflet is available at https://fms.scot/fish-health-and-disease/. A two-day meeting has been called by AST in Edinburgh (28th June) to discuss RSD and other emerging issues (including pink salmon); at the time of writing, programme details are not available.

**Action: SL may attend meeting and will let board know of outcome. Consultant will see if there will be a recording to circulate to board members.**

b. **Electric fishing** - As was previously agreed by the Board, it is intended to carry out an emergency mini-survey of four sites on Wick River to urgently check the status of salmon juveniles, given the extremely poor results evident in 2021. It is proposed to sample single sites on the Scouthal, Strath, Haster and Newton Burns in early July. It is also proposed to carry out the Board’s standard electric fishing programme at the beginning of September. Given the widespread issues detected in 2021 a relatively intensive programme will be necessary involving around 20 sites. More generally, it is proposed to increase the Board’s e/f team by one member (ie. to four persons) for 2022 in order to bring new participants up to speed with the Board’s procedures and ease the transition to a new core e/f team for 2023. This will temporarily increase costs.

**Action: Board Approved of the above**

c. **West of Orkney Windfarm** - Plans are already being developed for the so-called West of Orkney Windfarm on an offshore site was recently leased in the Scottish Government’s ScotWind round. The development is to be located in the western approaches to the Pentland Firth. Generation is planned to start in 2028. The proposed development is extremely large and its location probably straddles the route by which salmon make their ways to and from some, or all, of the Caithness rivers. The consultant has already (1) attended an on-line meeting with Xodus, the developer’s ecological consulting company, and (2) commented on the Scoping Report on behalf of the NDSFB - and also CDSFB. (Initially, there was a lack of contact between Xodus and CDSFB but this problem has probably now been resolved.) Three documents are appended; these summarise the detail for the Board - the Scoping Report is 800 pages long! – and establish a record of the Board’s initial involvement in discussions with the developer that are likely to be protracted. The appended documents are as follows – (1) summary Briefing Note on the contents of the Scoping Report, (2) a report of the consultant’s on-line meeting with Xodus and (3) the formal NDSFB (CDSFB) response to the Scoping Report. On 9th June, the Board was advised of further details of the investigative works regarding the onshore cabling route from Crosskirk to Spital. Among other matters, this will involve sinking boreholes 20 – 40m deep at potential railway/ river crossings (2 at Aimster + 2 south of Halkirk), river crossings (Lythmore) and road crossings near rivers (Forss Bridge) using any of a number of techniques as required (including percussive drilling).

**Action: AY to liaise with river users about bore holes and come back to board.**

**Chairman (JT) to write to Crown Estate and Directors of proposed project.**

d. . **Marine Scotland initiatives** - As the Board is aware, the National Electrofishing programme for Scotland (NEPS) has been suspended for 2022 but is expected to resume in 2023. However, the Adult Sampling Programme first carried out in 2021 (although CDSFB did not participate) will be repeated in 2022 and substantial finance is available for this through FMS. Since the sampling procedures involve substantial handling of fish, many or all of which will be returned to the river in catch and release, and because of the prevalence of disease in the Caithness rivers this year, the consultant again advises against taking part in the scheme. The development of Fishery Management Plans is also proposed. This will likely be worthwhile and the Board may wish to participate once the objectives and format become clearer.

**Action: Board agreed with consultants advice**

**7.Flow Country Rivers Trust**

 JM reported that their newsletter is being prepared and would be published in due course with some good articles included in it.

FCRT have also had 10 representative people selected from various rivers doing insect recognition training, which was very interesting.

**8.Bailiff’s Report**

The Bailiff reported that a few intelligence reports had been sent from Marine Scotland and that on inspection of the sites, he is confident that there is no cause for concern.

**9.Any other business**

SEPA re Dam at Shurrery, this has been referred to Ecology

**10.Meeting dates**

The next meetings of the board will take place as stated below;

Annual Public meeting followed by board meeting Thursday 18th August 2022 at 2pm - Ulbster

Board meeting Friday 9th December at 2pm via Zoom