**CAITHNESS DISTRICT SALMON FISHERY BOARD**

**ANNUAL REPORT**

**2022**

**BOARD MEMBERSHIP AS AT 31 DECEMBER 2022**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **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**

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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 2022 and plans for the current year (2023), with particular regard to the Board’s statutory functions and responsibilities.

2022 saw a return to almost normality with board activities running as usual. We continue to adapt and use zoom calls as well in person meetings.

**1. ACTIVITY IN 2022**

**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 2021 shown in brackets. The second set of figures shows the total number salmon and grilse released 2022 with comparative figures for 2021 shown in brackets.

Total Catch of Salmon and Grilse Number Released

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Rod Catch | 2022 2021 | 2022 2020 |
| Berriedale | 116 (127) | 111 (120) |
| Dunbeath | 42 (10) | 42 (10) |
| Wick | 190 (109) | 93 (41) |
| Thurso | 956 (769) | 897 (711) |
| Forss | 41 (22) | 40 (18) |
|  |  |  |

**Conservation and Regulatory Measures**

River gradings

The river gradings for the 2023 salmon fishing season have been published. The gradings issued by Marine Scotland for 2023 show Forss being downgraded from 1 to 3 (meaning compulsory catch-and-release) and Dunbeath being downgraded from 1 to 2. Otherwise, Berriedale/ Langwell, Wick and Thurso retain Grade 1 status.

Fish Surveys

The 2022 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 |
| West of Orkney | Offshore Wind Power Ltd |
| Watten Wind Farm | EDF Renewables |
|  |
| **Forestry**  Helshetter | Tree story forestry |
| Strathnore & Altnabreac | Scottish woodlands |

**Bailiff Report**

The Bailiff reported it had been a fairly quiet year, with nothing major to report, but hoped to continue as last year with their oversights of the coast. Later in the year, a few intelligence reports had been sent from Marine Scotland and on inspection of the sites, the Bailiff was confident that there was no cause for concern. Overall, it had been a strange year with fish laying off but no poachers bothering them, so this was noted as good news.

**Incidents**

Red Skin Disease (RSD) - RSD that was present in some rivers in 2019 returned in 2020, 2021 and again in 2022. Despite a substantial amount of work being carried out by MS Fish Health Inspectorate over the past years, MS had 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. FMS produced a data collection app for those wishing to report diseased fish at (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 was called by AST in Edinburgh (28th June) to discuss RSD and other emerging issues (including pink salmon).

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. The Board were in touch with SEPA about. Shurrery Dam and a site visit by their ecological specialist to assess the situation was to follow. It was thought that Shurrery Dam is likely to be a problem for salmon. The Boards consultant hosted CBEC representative re. easing Forss Falls within constraints of what might be acceptable; matter remained on hold.

**Tormsdale Wind Farm**

The boards consultant made formal representation to nature Scotland. John Thurso and Simon Laird withdrew themselves from any engagement with the board to do with the matter. The application is still with the Scottish Ministers and it is expected a determination will be made later in the year.

**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 2022 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 2023 was set at £5,900 an increase from £5,339 in 2022

**3. COMPLAINTS**

No complaints were received during the year.

**4. FLOW COUNTRY RIVERS TRUST**

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

The Trust had 10 representative people selected from various rivers to do insect recognition training, which was reported to be very interesting.

The Trust collected samples for their invertebrate project, which had been analysed and the results came back with lots of different species identified across all rivers.

River Surveys - All 10 Rivers in the FCRT area flowing to the Caithness and North Sutherland coast had juvenile salmon surveys completed to the same exacting standards.

The Caithness rivers from Berriedale/Langwell to Forss were surveyed by CDSFB. The Halladale and Naver were surveyed by trained members of staff and the Borgie and Kinloch by The Trust.

The database will be beneficial in interactions with on-Shore and off-Shore wind Farm Developers increasingly setting up in the area.

**5. 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 9th June. The Annual Public Meeting of the Board is scheduled for August and a final board meeting is expected to be scheduled for November/December.

**2022 Electrofishing Programme**

The boards own annual electrofishing programme is planned to go ahead as normal. Its understood there wont be a NEPS programme in the coming year

**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. The Falls of Forss was inspected by Hamish Moir of CBEC Eco-engineering to assess whether it might be possible to ease fish passage using a minimalist approach, thereby preserving the falls aesthetic qualities. SEPA’s 2022 electric-fishing survey of Forss confirmed the Boards finding of poor juvenile salmon status. Marine Scotland downgraded Forss from Grade 1 to Grade 3 for 2023. A recovery planwas to be drafted with the view to positively move forward.

**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