**CAITHNESS DISTRICT SALMON FISHERY BOARD**

**MINUTES OF BOARD MEETING: 24 March 2023**

**Present**

Chairman: Lord Thurso (LT)

Members: J Mackay(JM), R Dunbar(RD), M Newton(MN), SWD Laird(SL), A Macauslan (AM)

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

Observer:

**1.Register of Interests**

Nothing new to register – current to date enclosed

**2.Apologies**

SWM Threipland (TT), D Mackay(DM), I Cormack(IC)

**3.Minutes of the last meeting**

 The minutes of the meeting held on 19 December were approved. All actions are ongoing.

**4. Matters arising**

All on going

**5.Finance and Admin**

a.Consider draft Accounts for year ended 31 December 2022

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 2023

The draft Estimates were considered and approved in principle. It was recommended that the assessment rate should be reduced by 1p to 16p in the £, board agreed.

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. National Electrofishing Programme for Scotland (NEPS)

The NEPS report for 2021 was published in February and is available online.

b. National Report on Assessment of the pressures Impacting Wild Salmon

The report targets pressure and, in particular, their effects on juvenile salmon densities on a number of spatial scales - regions, rivers and reaches. The analysis is based on information compiled in 2019 and updated in 2021.The findings are available in a text report published in February.

c. Forss Recovery Plan

A recovery plan for the River Forss, to be enacted before 2025, has been prepared by the consultant under the guidance of Mark Newton. A copy of the current draft of the plan was circulated to the boards members and the Forss river owners. **Action: Forss river owners to form a committee and meet with a plan of how to move forward and come back to the board.**

d.Caithness Electric-fishing Survey Report for 2022

The survey report was slightly delayed this year by competing pressures but was to be completed by the end of March. The section on the River Forss was almost complete and, given the need to quickly advance the Forss Recovery Plan, and if the Board agrees, the completed Forss textwill be passed on to Mark Newton for information ahead of the full Caithness report. **Action: Board agreed**

e. Caithness Management Plan

The new Fisheries Management Plan for Caithness is partly completed and due to be finalised in its first form by the end of March. In this first phase a list of potential management tasks have been compiled in an Excel file to be integrated into an interactive StoryMap document like that used for the Salmon Pressures map described above. An Excel file was circulated to the board members. It is intended to be a working document and the Board can add to or edit it at any time. In the second phase of development the StoryMap will be populated with data similar to that produced several years ago for the proposed FCFMO (which is still available on the Board’s website.

f. Wick Smolt Tracking project

Around 100 smolts will be tagged with acoustic transmitters in April as they leave Wick River. The project leader is Adam Piper of the Zoological Society of London to whom the work has been contracted by Marine Scotland. Funding is from the ScotMer fund to which Marine renewables companies contribute. The aim of the project is to determine whether Wick Smolts pass through, or near to, the marine turbine array to the southeast of Wick.

g. Stream Invertebrates

Three of the six SmartRivers monitoring sites for stream invertebrates that are currently located at the Halladale river are being relocated to Wick River. Stream invertebrates will be identified to species level twice-yearly (spring and autumn). The aim is to test whether Watten village and/ or Watten Loch affect water quality in Wick River, particularly in view of the extremely low summer flows of recent years. Funding for the analyses is being sought by the FCRT.

**7.Flow Country Rivers Trust**

Marine Scotland Science has contacted the Trust to assist with a smolt tracking project on the Wick River in Spring 2023. The project is part of the work being carried out around the coast of track the migration routes of our juvenile salmon and sea-Trout. Detection units will be placed in Wick Bay and further out to sea on the Beatrice Wind Farm.

**8.Bailiff’s Report**

The Bailiff reported that things had been quiet for the last few years and the tendencies to poach seem to be less but it would do no harm to still have a presence.

**9.Any other business**

Nothing to note.

**10.Meeting dates**

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

Wednesday 16th August 2023 2pm AGM followed by board in the Ulbster

November/December – to be agreed in the June meeting