**CAITHNESS DISTRICT SALMON FISHERY BOARD**

**MINUTES OF BOARD MEETING: 9 December 2022**

**Present**

Chairman: Lord Thurso (LT)

Members: SWM Threipland (TT), J Mackay(JM), D Mackay(DM), I Cormack(IC),R Dunbar(RD), M Newton(MN)

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

Observer:

**1.Register of Interests**

Nothing new to register

**2.Apologies**

SWD Laird(SL), A Macauslan (AM)

**3.Minutes of the last meeting**

 The minutes of the meeting held on 18 August were approved. All actions are ongoing.

**4.Finance and Admin**

1. Clerk Activity – table of correspondence was circulated.
2. Revaluation – request for revaluation has submitted to assessor.

**5.Consultant’s Report**

**a. 2022 Electric-fishing survey** - Data now worked up and report will follow. Results for Caithness rivers are again mixed but better than anticipated based on spawning as observed in 2021. Thurso is once again saturated, or nearly-saturated, with fry and parr. Wick River is still showing signs of stress. Forss River shows further exceptionally severe decline in fry densities.

**Action: Consultant to prepare report in due course**

**b. Forss -** SEPA’s 2022 electric-fishing survey of Forss confirms Board finding of poor juvenile salmon status. Also, informal confirmation from SEPA that Shurrery Dam is likely to be a problem for salmon. Board consultant hosted CBEC representative re. easing Forss Falls within constraints of what might be acceptable; matter remains on hold. Marine Scotland has downgraded Forss from Grade 1 to Grade 3 for 2023. Forss needs a recovery plan.

**Action: Forss needs recovery plan, Chairman and Consultant to liaise and write to SEPA**

**c**. **Windfarms -** Dialogues ongoing with Dounreay Floating Windfarm, West of Orkney Windfarm (both onshore and offshore components). Watten Windfarm now proposed for land adjacent to Scouthal Burn near Shielton farm.Caledonia Offshore Windfarm proposed for area adjacent to existing Beatrice site east of Wick.

**Action: Consultant attending meetings, All ongoing**

**d. Pink Salmon -** Scheduled for possible return in 2023. Videos of talks from AST meeting in Edinburgh are now posted on-line. AST proposes Scotland-wide checks for pinks in 2023 using eDNA. Michal Skora of Queen Mary University, London is currently considering possible ways to extend last year’s fieldwork on Thurso River. Michal has a scientific paper on the capture of pink smolts in Thurso River under peer review. The paper provides the first evidence of successful completion of the freshwater phase of the life cycle by pink salmon in Great Britain.

**Action: SL attended meeting and videos are online. Develop a plan depending on what happens this year.**

**e. Smolt Tracking -** Marine Scotland Science has obtained support from SCOTMER to carry out tracking of smolts tagged in Wick/ Wester in April/ May 2023 in order to examine possible interaction with the Beatrice Windfarm array. Also, the Board’s consultant is encouraging AST to track smolts leaving Forss (particularly because the smolts will be uniquely large) targeting their possible passage through the Stormy Bank/ Whiten Bank area (future site of West of Orkney windfarm). This work would be an adjunct to the on-going West Coast tracking project. The AST may come back to the Board on this.

**Action: Wait for proposal from AST. Consultant to keep board informed of developments.**

f. **Management Plan** - As previously, FMS/ MS are proposing management plans for all rivers in Scotland and the Board’s consultant will attend an on-line meeting to hear more about the subject on 7th Dec.

**Action: Board noted the proposal and agreed for consultant to take this forward.**

**6.Flow Country Rivers Trust**

**River Surveys** - All 10 Rivers in the FCRT area flowing to the Caithness and North Sutherland coast have now 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 FCRT.

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

**7.Bailiff’s Report**

The Bailiff had nothing to report.

**8.Any other business**

Nothing to note.

**9.Meeting dates**

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

 Friday 9th June 2023 2pm proprietors meeting followed by board in the Ulbster

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