**CAITHNESS DISTRICT SALMON FISHERY BOARD**

**MINUTES OF BOARD MEETING: 7 March 2025**

**Present**

Chairman: Lord Thurso (LT)

Members: R Dunbar(RD), M Newton(MN), SWD Laird(SL), ), I Cormack(IC), J Mackay(JM)

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**

A Macauslan (AM), D Mackay(DM

**3.Minutes of the last meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on 22 November were adjusted and are still to be approved. All actions are ongoing.

**4. Matters arising**

Hybrid meetings to be trialled over the next two meetings.

**5.Finance and Admin**

a.Consider draft Accounts for year ended 31 December 2024

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 2024

The draft Estimates were considered and approved in principle. It was recommended that the assessment rate should remain the same as last year at 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. 2024 Electric-fishing Report**

The 2024 survey was curtailed by the poor autumn weather but sufficient to give an adequate oversight of all the Caithness rivers. The survey data have produced new insight into the effects of extreme winter floods on parr numbers. The survey findings are generally favourable and no issues arise that need management action. The report itself was delayed by illness but will be completed shortly.

**b. West of Orkney Windfarm (WoW)**

AY attended a meeting with team from the WoW windfarm, with a positive outcome. The board had not previously been consulted. A letter was sent to MD Lot but had not been passed on to the WoW windfarm developers. Both parties apologized for this and know to consult the board going forward. A Summary of the meeting was provided, and the clerk can forward this on to any board members that would like to see it.

**c. Smolt tracking in northern rivers**

The Chairman has been pursuing the Board’s case for smolt tracking to be extended to the northern Caithness rivers (and the other northern rivers) in relation to the WoW windfarm array. The absence of smolt tracking data for any of the swathe of rivers between the River Laxford and Wick (including the 3 SACs) is a crucial gap. In 2025, however, smolt tracking is planned only for the Rivers Laxford and Torridon with monitoring in place at the WoW site.

Any work in coming years will be reliant on additional finance. This finance is not currently lined up - as disclosed by the speakers at the SCOTMER online conference on 27th February. Indeed, judging from comments made by speakers MD-LOT’s attention may be turning now to the southeastern Scottish rivers – which can make a compelling (and possibly competing?) case for new tracking studies to provide local information on smolt v windfarm interactions.

**Action: Chairman to do letter to Alan Wells at FMS. And another letter to MD Lot.**

**d. Update on smolt tracking in Wick River in 2023 and 2024**

The talk from last year is extremely informative, well worth viewing and now easily available on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tWdWEIk0YtI&list=PLTVd_Cz6dRYbP_94koQIEP3A8zbwQAFXp&index=6> . The Wick talk starts at 16 minutes into the sequence of talks on the video. The Wick smolt tracking work was repeated in 2024 but the results will not become accessible until May this year when the listening stations are recovered from the Beatrice/ Moray East windfarm sites. Adam Piper has also done a talk for this year on dropbox and the clerk can send this to board members.

**e. Tormsdale**

In December, 2024, Fairhurst - a firm of consulting engineers appointed by Lomond Energy - approached the Board for authority to carry out an extensive riverbed survey in February around Dalemore. This relates to the now-preferred option of spanning the river above the existing pipe-bridge location and the Fairhurst survey relates to feasibility. The target area for survey centres on the existing pipe-bridge. It was pointed out by the Board that the proposed survey was not legally permissible at the proposed date due to the presence of salmon eggs in the substrate. Fairhurst have therefore deferred work until June, 2025.

**f. Battery Storage Sites (BESS)**

BESS facilities are proposed separately for Glengolly, Geise, Buckies and Geiselittle (the latter being adjacent north of the existing Geiselittle Switching Station and they are all grouped around Thurso Beats 1 and 2. All are close to the river and all will be surprisingly extensive. All will likely be highly illuminated for security and surveillance. When the opportunity arises, the Board must (1) try to ensure that any leakage of light from sites to river is minimized because fish will not run at night under intense illumination and (2) review site drainage arrangements which will ultimately be to the river.

**g. *Saprolegnia***

The bi-weekly water sampling of Wick, Thurso and Forss rivers for the Aberdeen University *Saprolegnia* project has now been completed as was agreed. Around 80 water samples have been delivered over the last 12 months. In addition, 24 eDNA filters from river water obtained on a monthly basis from Thurso and Forss have been supplied. The University have asked if we will continue to supply the latter until this summer in order to repeat their detective work over a second summer season. This is a good idea and relatively undemanding and AY will support it by visiting the rivers once a month.

**7.Flow Country Rivers Trust**

Nothing to report

**8.Bailiff’s Report**

The Bailiff reported that things had been quiet with presence being maintained.

**9.Any other business**

Nothing to note.

**10.Meeting dates**

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

Friday 6th June 2025 in The Ulbster at 2pm (proprietors)

Wednesday 13th August 2025 in The Ulbster at 2pm (public)

Friday 21st November 2025 via zoom