**CAITHNESS DISTRICT SALMON FISHERY BOARD**

**ANNUAL REPORT**

**2024**

**BOARD MEMBERSHIP AS AT 31 DECEMBER 2024**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Chairman** | The Viscount Thurso |
|  |  |
| **Upper Proprietor**  **Representatives** | Sir Richard Dunbar – Wick 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**

The Clerk, 4 Braal Terrace, Halkirk, Caithness, KW12 6YN 07387360030

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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 2024 and plans for the current year (2025), with particular regard to the Board’s statutory functions and responsibilities.

**1. ACTIVITY IN 2024**

**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 2024 with comparative figures for 2023 shown in brackets. The second set of figures shows the total number salmon and grilse released 2024 with comparative figures for 2023 shown in brackets.

Total Catch of Salmon and Grilse Number Released

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Rod Catch | 2024 2023 | 2024 2023 |
| Berriedale | 156 (236) | 156 (236) |
| Dunbeath | 96 (179) | 84 (179) |
| Wick | 242 (210) | 206 (169) |
| Thurso | 1269 (1127) | 1186 (1010) |
| Forss | 4 (37) | 4 (37) |
|  |  |  |

**Conservation and Regulatory Measures**

River gradings

Proposed river gradings for 2025.The Grade 1, 2 and 3 designations have been changed to Good, Moderate and Poor, respectively, for clarity. The consequences of the various designations remain the same.

The rivers Thurso, Wick and Berriedale/ Langwell are proposed to remain at Good (ie. Grade 1) for 2025. The Forss remains at Poor (ie. Grade 3).

The Dunbeath River is downgraded from Moderate (Grade 2) to Poor (Grade 3) meaning that catch and release will become mandatory there in 2025.

These are the designations proposed by SG for 2025 in a consultation launched on 7th August and any representations can be made via the consultation

Fish Surveys

The 2024 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 |
| Tormsdale Wind Farm | Lomond Energy Ltd |
| West of Orkney | Offshore Wind Power Ltd |
| Ouglassy Wind Farm |  |
| Slickly Wind Farm | Request comments |
| Blackhills wind Farm | Request comments |
| Ayre offshore wind farm | Request comments |
| Baledigle wind farm | Request comments |
| Limekiln wind farm | Request comments |
| Causemire wind farm | Request comments |
| Stromar offshore wind farm | Request comments |
|  |  |
|  |  |
| **Forestry** |  |
| **Other**  Charleston energy park | Request comments |
| SSE – Strathy south spawning | Request comments |
| Cogglemoss | Request comments |
| Spittal to Loch Buidhe | Request comments |
| ERM – ASN project | Request comments |

**Bailiff Report**

The Bailiff reported it had been a very quiet year.

**Incidents**

Red Skin Disease (RSD) - The University of Aberdeen project on Saprolegnia which is being led by Prof van West got underway. On behalf of the Board, the consultant committed to obtaining bi-weekly water samples and supporting environmental information from the Rivers Wick, Thurso and Forss for a period of one year. Sampling was carried out on a regular basis and went well, with minor issues this year in comparison to previous years

**Roach in Wick River -** Roach were reported in the Wick catchment. eDNA samples had been obtained to pinpoint where the roach are and if they are the only exotic species present. The samples were analysed by UHI in Inverness

**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. A subcommittee met a few times during the year to discuss how the Board should proceed, putting any discussion points forward to the board for approval.

**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 2024 the board held its customary 4 meetings in March, June, August and November. 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 2025 was set at £6,505 an increase from £6,195 in 2024

**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. John Mackay stood down as Chairman and Anson Macauslan was to be standing in his place.

**5. PROPOSALS FOR 2025**

**Meetings**

The first meeting of the year was held in March. The Proprietors AGM and next Board meeting will be held on 6th June. The Annual Public Meeting of the Board is scheduled for August, and a final board meeting is scheduled for November.

**2025 Electrofishing Programme**

The boards own annual electrofishing programme is planned to go ahead as normal, as is the NEPS programme in the coming year

**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