

Cromarty Fisheries



THE CROMARTY FIRTH FISHERY BOARD MINUTES OF PROPRIATORS MEETING

Held at Torr Achilty on Friday 16th February 2018 at 11.00am

Present		In Attendance	
Ian Duncan (Chairman)	ID	Simon McKelvey (Director)	SM
Alastair Campbell (Vice Chairman)	AC	Edward Rush (Head Bailiff)	ER
Ronald Munro Ferguson (Novar Estate)	RMF	Troels Bavnøj (Strathconon Estate)	TB
Okain McLennan (Loch Achanachie Angling Club)	OM	Hugh Cushnie (Dingwall & District Angling Club)	HC
Ian Paterson (Netsman)	IP	Iain McMyn (SSE)	IM
Christina Pirie (Alness Angling Club)	CP	James Ross (Netsman)	JR
George Skinner (Netsman)	GS	William Skinner (Netsman)	WS
Dave Smith (Evanton Angling Club)	DS	R. Kotschujen (Head Ghillie Brahan)	RK
Dr. Alistair Stephen (SSE)	AS		
John Urquhart (Dingwall & District Angling Club)	JU		
Roddy d' Anyers Willis (Conon Fishing Syndicate)	RW		
Neil Wright (Clerk)	NW		

1	APOLOGIES	Action
	The Earl of Aylesford (Scatwell Estate) Keith Beaton (SEPA) Saunders Campbell (Netsman) Patrick Creasey (Strathvaich Estate) Andrew Matheson (Cromarty Firth Fishery Trust Chairman)	
2	MATTERS ARISING/ MINUTES OF THE MEETING, 27TH OCTOBER 2017	
	ID opened the meeting and enquired if there were any comments from the minutes of the last meeting. There were no amendments and the minutes were adopted.	

3	FINANCIAL UPDATE & BOOKKEEPING FUNCTION	
	<p>ID ran through the financial report for January and noted that income appears to be down as assessments were only raised for the first half of the year to allow rating appeals to be heard. However, as a result of the District Valuer's backlog of appeals for sporting and commercial premises, the appeals have not yet been looked at, let alone resolved. As a result identical assessments will be issued for the second half and they will be going out in the next few days. Looking ahead there might be a small surplus at the year end but everything looks to be under control. Regarding the individual headings, the only item needing explanation is that one salary had been budgeted twice and therefore shows a saving in wages but a deficit in river bank maintenance; they effectively cancel each other out.</p> <p>ID noted that at the last meeting the bank account would be transferring from the Clydesdale to the Royal Bank of Scotland and this is still in the process of being set up. As a fall back, the Clydesdale account may have to be moved over to the new accounting firm. This has resulted in Galbraith continuing to do the payroll but it is hoped the transfer will happen to MacKay & Co in the near future.</p> <p>[Post meeting note: the RBS account has been activated and the accountancy service moved over to Mackay & Co for March.]</p>	
4	DIRECTOR'S REPORT	
	<p>SM wished to remember Derick Mills, who died earlier in the month; he had been a big influence on fishery management in Scotland and much of the work on the Conon. He was the chief scientist while the hydro dams were being constructed and he was ahead of his time with many of his ideas now being implemented, such as the smolt trap on the river Bran and fish pass at Corriefoel.</p> <p>SM commented that the Scottish Government has published a response to the categorisation consultation which was circulated with the Board papers.</p> <p>SM explained that the situation with salmon stocks may be worse than the Scottish Government have calculated because their model is based on a 50/50 "normal" sex ratio. Due to the trapping at Loch na Croic, it is now known that there are only half as many females returning. Looking back to 2000 there were around 50/50 female and male grilse returning; that has now changed twice in the last 4 years with the ratio moving to around 70/30 males versus females. There is greater mortality at sea as a result of multi sea wintered females. This is happening across the country with fewer grilse and more spring fish which, in the case of the Board results in insufficient eggs for the hatchery. In light of the new evidence, the Conservation Policy for 2018 must take this change into account.</p> <p>AS enquired if SM felt the Scottish Government calculation was incorrect and SM responded that the new data was not a model but actual figures and hence, more accurate.</p>	

	<p>ID responded that the rod catch data used by Marine Scotland is fundamentally flawed and they published a question and answer document that effectively acknowledged this. The Government should have admitted that the calculation was not ideal and they should not have targeted rod catch and angling effort as it has been very divisive. A perfect example is the Alness Angling Club, which could lose members to clubs whose members are able to fish on category 1 or 2 rivers.</p> <p>IP commented that it appeared that there is general concern that angling will be stopped yet there was not the same concern when the same happened to netting. ID responded that the netting moratorium was supposed to be time limited as a trial, whereas the differing categorisation of rivers for angling is immediately divisive.</p> <p>ID and SM ran through several answers published in the Marine Scotland response.</p> <p>SM noted that Marine Scotland agree that the use of rod catch alone is flawed and they are looking at using a combination of electro fishing data which will be more robust. The Alness River has been offered as a test river.</p> <p>ID commented that once the Conon categorisation becomes fact based, it will be likely to become category 3 and not the present category 1, but this is still unknown. SM responded that it is only the Blackwater that has been able to identify this change in sex ratio for an entire river run of grilse. AS commented that, as a result, all female fish should be protected to maximise egg deposition. RW enquired if once the multi sea winter fish start to come back, the number in the river will increase? SM agreed that it is possible but it could take many years before the change has been completed. ID added that although there might be more females returning, there could still be a greater predation on multi sea winter fish; there is potentially a downward helix.</p>	
5	<p>CONSERVATION STATUS UPDATE</p> <p>SM explained that the Scottish Government are now looking at other issues affecting survival of fish and they are considering seals and other predation. A merganser can take 9 fish per day during the smolt run. AS commented that this predation can also occur outside of the smolt run, especially during dry spells when the river is low. ID agreed.</p> <p>SM noted that the NASCO agreement means the Greenland fishery can only catch salmon for their own use and this agreement was why the categorisation was brought in as it was felt that the UK was not meeting its contractual obligations.</p> <p>SM commented that the key is to improve habitat and expand it, for example there is an issue with access to the head water of the Alness that will hopefully have access restored with a hydro scheme. The scheme will also provide freshets. ID responded that if the habitat can be opened up it will have a dramatic impact on the number of fish returning to the Alness. SM agreed and noted that the same will hopefully be happening on the Meig with the help of Strathconon</p>	

	<p>Estate.</p> <p>CP commented that the Alness Club have gone along with all the conservation measures suggested by the Board over the years, but none have helped the club; this has led to resentment by club members. ID responded that the Alness is an example of where the categorisation has clearly gone wrong. An appeal was submitted by the Board on behalf of the Alness and the evidence supported category 2. SM commented that the appeal was to allow a small number of salmon to be taken over the whole Cromarty area rather than having a divide between rivers.</p> <p>JU enquired why was there no funding to help the angling clubs. ID agreed that there should be, as there has been with netting.</p> <p>RW enquired if any of the clubs have tried to get wind farm funding. OM responded that the grants are for capital works and not for ongoing funding. AS commented that the SSE wind farm funding has been split in two, one of which will be more strategic rather than capital. It is all based on societal benefit. DS commented that some of the funds are administered through the community council and not the windfarm developer.</p> <p>IP wished to clarify the sex ratio of the fish returning. SM responded that the male grilse were programmed to come back as grilse but the females were now staying out to sea for longer and returning in the spring. They are staying out at sea to gain their target weight and this will likely result in higher mortality. In a multi sea wintered stock you have the females returning earlier in the season, followed by a run of male grilse; they are all part of the same stock. ID summarised that about 50/50 male and female are leaving the river with a big drop off of returning females but because they are staying out to sea for longer, they are getting predated and therefore less fish are returning to the river. SM commented that they can help get more smolts out to sea by looking at predation in the river and improving habitat.</p> <p>AS commented that there is an issue with the electro fishing data that will replace the rod catch data. Without DNA sampling you cannot determine how many parents are responsible for the juvenile fish; it could be very few.</p>	
6	<p>2018 CONSERVATION POLICIES (CATEGORY 1 & 3)</p> <p>Category 3 policy will be 100% catch and release....</p> <p>CP wished to clarify the sea trout policy as the AAC are not able to kill sea trout under 1.5lb. SM responded that it is not a Board policy but a Club policy. Finnock are not going to spawn and taking a couple of them will not do as much damage. AS thought that the restriction was probably down to exploitation in the past.</p> <p>RMF commented that there was very little that could be done about category 3 and it will have to be accepted. It has not been completely disastrous commercially.</p> <p>DS enquired as to how the bailiffs will police the number of sea trout being taken by members. ID responded that the Board cannot</p>	

	<p>mandate members to follow the Board's policy, it is a recommendation.</p> <p>ID clarified that no salmon can be kept on a category 3 river under any circumstances. This includes pit tagged fish, even though they are important for scientific research.</p> <p><u>Category 1 Policy</u></p> <p>ID explained that the Board will have a policy that will be published on the website and it will be what the outside world will see of the Board. However, the Board has no power to mandate individual members to adhere to the Board's policy. ID proposed that the category 1 policy should be no fish being kept or, as a backup, only one or two males being kept.</p> <p>RW commented that his syndicate is entirely supportive of the proposed conservation policy.</p> <p>OM commented that LAAC has had a policy of 6 fish per full member. The total catch for last year was 59 fish, with 19 being kept and 40 being returned. The information regarding the hen fish was not known at the time of the AGM and it was decided to stay with the 6 fish limit as the members were carrying out good conservation measures. As a result, he believed the proposed conservation policy would be detrimental to the LAAC and is of more benefit to the proprietors of the lower river.</p> <p>OM calculated that the lower proprietors could catch and keep around 800 fish per year compared with the LAAC. SM noted that the number for the lower proprietors will be less in the new policy. ID enquired as to how many members kept more than 2 fish. OM confirmed that it was only 2 or 3 members. ID suggested, for public image, would there be a problem with reducing the number? OM could only comment on the Committee and AGM decision which was based on information to hand at the time of the decision, which was SM's September report. There were 9 fish kept on the Conon and 7 returned; on the Blackwater there were 10 fish kept and 13 returned. ID asked if OM would be able to go back to his Committee regarding the hen fish. OM confirmed that they would go to their members and Committee. ID enquired if the Committee would allow SM and ID to attend a Committee meeting? OM would enquire with the Committee.</p> <p>[Post meeting note: The Committee of the LAAC decided to adopt within the LAAC conservation policy for 2018 that no hen fish should be kept. They also determined to retain the number of fish that could be kept by each member at six. The offer by SM and ID to attend a meeting of the LAAC to elaborate to the members the Board's belief that a precautionary approach to the killing of salmon, remains open]</p> <p>ID commented that subject to clubs' and proprietors' individual policy amendments, would the members accept the Board's policy as presented at this meeting? The Board accepted the policy as being the recommended policy, subject to individual club and proprietor alterations.</p>	
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	RW commented that over the last season there were 689 fish caught on the Bran beats, with 8% retained (55 fish retained), or an average of 1.5 fish per week. If it was not for the ghillies' encouragement, the conservation of stocks would not be as impressive.	
7	AOCB	
	No matters were raised.	
8	DATE OF NEXT MEETINGS	
	Friday 29 th June, at Torr Achilty Power Station.	