

Cromarty Fisheries



THE CROMARTY FIRTH FISHERY BOARD MINUTES OF PROPRIETORS' MEETING

Held at Torr Achilty on Friday 29th June 2018 at 11.00am

Present		In Attendance	
Ian Duncan (Chairman)	ID	Simon McKelvey (Director)	SM
The Earl of Aylesford (Scatwell Estate)	EA	Edward Rush (Head Bailiff)	ER
Andrew Matheson (Cromarty Firth Fishery Trust Chairman)	AM	Troels Bavnhøj (Strathconon Estate)	TB
Okain McLennan (Loch Achonachie Angling Club)	OM	Chris Blake (Alness Angling Club)	CB
Ian Paterson (Netsman)	IP	Hugh Cushnie (Dingwall & District Angling Club)	HC
Christina Pirie (Alness Angling Club)	CP	Alex Duncan (Kildermorie Estate)	AD
Dave Smith (Evanton Angling Club)	DS	Sandra Skinner (Netsman)	SS
Dr. Alistair Stephen (SSE)	AS	William Skinner (Netsman)	WS
John Urquhart (Dingwall & District Angling Club)	JU		
Roddy d' Anyers Willis (Conon Fishing Syndicate)	RW		
Neil Wright (Clerk)	NW		

1	APOLOGIES	Action
	Keith Beaton (SEPA) Alastair Campbell (Vice Chairman) Saunders Campbell (Netsman) Patrick Creasey (Strathvaich Estate) William Paterson (Netsman) James Ross (Netsman) George Skinner (Netsman)	
2	MINUTES OF THE MEETING, 16TH FEBRUARY 2018	
	ID opened the meeting noting that the minutes of the previous meeting were available on the web-site and enquired if there were any comments or questions from those minutes. There were no amendments and the minutes were proposed by OM and seconded by IP.	
3	MATTERS ARISING	
	To be dealt with during the meeting.	
3	FINANCIAL UPDATE	
	<p>a) Results for the Year Ended 30 April 2018</p> <p>ID ran through the accounts and commented that they are straightforward and are really just the statutory presentation of the management accounts previously circulated. The accounts show that the Board declared a trading profit of just under £20,000. However in the prior year there was a late request for £20,000 from the Trust, which resulted in that income having to be reported this year. In reality the Board ran within £32 of break-even. ID commended SM for controlling expenditure tightly against that budgeted.</p> <p>The balance sheet shows the Board has net assets valued at £183,000, which is fairly consistent with previous years. The accounts will be available for viewing on the website and if anyone has any subsequent questions, please direct them to the Clerk.</p> <p>b) Budget for the Year to 30 April 2019</p> <p>ID commented that the budget shows a small deficient of under £9,000 this year, in the hope that there will be small savings on things such as vehicle repairs, fuel, etc. and that we will again run our affairs close to break-even.</p> <p>OM enquired how the budget compares with the previous year. ID responded that the assessment figure remains the same but the Board has to be slightly cautious as none of the assessment appeals with the Assessor have yet been heard and any successful appeals will affect the income to the Board.</p> <p>A significant part of the Board's income comes from SSE. The basis for the SSE payment (which is reimbursement at cost for work done on behalf of SSE) was agreed 15 years ago and then updated 10 years ago. The annual payment is index-linked, but it was felt that using a general measure of inflation may not properly reflect changes in the actual cost to the Board of the work being done. A meeting has been organised with SSE to re-examine the attributable hours and cost bases of the agreement and it is hoped that this will result</p>	

	<p>in the payment being increased to reflect actual costs being incurred by the Board but ID cautioned that the Board should not get its hopes up yet.</p> <p>AS noted that John Macdonald (SSE) recognises that there is a review required and SSE have been assessing other Boards' payments. They wish to base the payment on work done with a report produced at the end of the year on work carried out. SM has produced hours and numbers for discussion. The meeting with SSE has been set for the 17th of July and it is hoped that progress can be reported back at the October meeting.</p> <p>SM commented that there has also been an increase in grant funding for the year with a 4 year project being funded through the Heritage Lottery Fund and SNH which will provide just over £20,000 a year to help with the removal of invasive species, the project is called the Scottish Invasive Species Initiative. There will also be a grant of just over £12,000 from the Scottish Government for electro fishing surveys.</p> <p>ID noted that the Board has £120,000 in the bank after cleared cheques, which is ahead of budget, but is simply a timing issue as a result of the SSE money being received a month earlier than budgeted and receipt of promptly paid half year assessments.</p>	
4	DIRECTOR'S REPORT	
	<p>SM ran through his report and noted that there is now a twitter feed for the Board; this is updated weekly and the link is listed in the Director's report. During the last school term the Board and Trust have had dealings with 18 primary schools and Lynn had 24 school visits and a number of angling days were organised. This has led to a junior angling club being set up which is run every last Saturday of the month and there are about 20 children who attend. There are also requests from adults wanting to have a go at angling. An organisation called Countryside Learning will provide coaching and will help draw up an angling development plan.</p> <p>SM presented a list of all the research papers that have been produced due to the Board and Trust's involvement and SM commented on how this work can influence the management of the river system.</p> <p>As an example, SM explained that there has been a programme of nutrient research which has been ongoing for a number of years and this is ground-breaking work. Nutrients can be considered as pollution if excessive, but there is an optimum level. In the upper catchments of the CFFB there are very few trees and a depletion of nutrients. Hydro dams have also reduced the area that salmon can naturally return to and spawn. The study started with kelt carcasses being placed in the river and examining the increase in invertebrates. The second study looked at different densities of carcasses and it was found that there was a benefit, which resulted in a doubling of juvenile weights. Salmon production in the head waters is being limited due to lack of nutrients. Through tagging, the Board was able to tell that a third of salmon returning from sea died in the Brahan system, which is less than other salmon species, and so less nutrient being left in the system. The proportion of kelts which die and are</p>	

	<p>retained in the River gives a basis for calculating what weight of nutrient would be appropriate to restore the natural balance in areas where salmon have been unable to access because of barriers.</p> <p>With the help of Glasgow University the study has expanded to look at genetics of fry and parr. Instead of salmon carcasses, feed pellets were used, which mimic the minerals and nutrients from kelts. Looking at the levels of invertebrates, there was an increase, with some areas doubling and others even tripling. There was an increase in weight but not density from this study, but results were compromised by a large flood event in the research area which may have washed some of the juvenile fish downstream.</p> <p>One of the biggest factors for returning smolts to the Brahan is their size; by providing more food size increases and they have a greater chance of returning to the river. This method may be more effective than stocking the rivers and could be a very useful management tool. Trees can do the same but if planted now, it may take twenty years before there is the same benefit.</p> <p>SM explained that the Board is looking at planting small blocks of trees along river banks to help in the long term with both nutrients and shade.</p> <p>CB enquired if there would a watering down of ... nutrients from the bags filled with feed, especially in a spate. SM responded that as the nutrients breakdown they are taken up by the invertebrates and they are not nutrients in solution in the river, the invertebrates feed on the algae immediately around the carcase or feed bag. CB asked if this could go too far with too many nutrients being added. SM noted that this could happen and they are looking at how far the nutrient benefit travels downstream through sampling of algae downstream.</p> <p>AS suggested that this method could be rolled out on a national scale, especially while there is a wait for areas to be re-forested. Certainly in the Highlands of Scotland this could be very effective.</p> <p>SM commented that the Board has developed a project for the planting up of areas that have been identified as being high priority. The Moray Firth Partnership are helping with a grant application for the project.</p>	
5	HYDRO REPORT	
	<p>AS explained that SSE, the CFFT and Strathconon Estate are looking into a Meig smolt trap. A company has been identified which claims to be able to divert fish by using a non-physical barrier which needs to be in place only for the short period of the smolt run. The fish would then be diverted into a weir. This non-physical barrier uses a bubble curtain, lights and also acoustics. In ideal conditions it has a 90% success rate but the Meig does not always have ideal conditions. The cost of the curtain is substantial and SSE is looking into a working partnership with the company to see if the equipment can be trialled ahead of possible purchase. If this works for the Meig it could also be used at locations where SSE are required to provide mitigation.</p>	

	<p>SM commented that there are 9 options for the bubble curtain at differing levels of cost and getting an agreement to lease a curtain will be key.</p> <p>AS commented on an incident on the Beaulieu where around ten thousand smolts were trapped in the sluice gates going into the dam. It is estimated that they were able to release eight and a half thousand smolts. The reason the smolts got trapped was due the extended cold spell resulting in smolts travelling downstream later when the water level was lower. Due to the low water the smolts were able to get into the gate slot and were then unable to get out. The incident was reported to SEPA as a major incident. SSE are looking at mitigation to prevent this from happening again. There was a concern that this might also happen at Torr Achilty but the intake is much smaller and so the velocity of water across the intake gate is higher and should prevent smolts getting into the gate slot. SSE are investigating the dams.</p> <p>SSE have recently installed the Mark 12 fish counter in dams but there is a problem with the software and how it converts the data into a spreadsheet and graphs compatible with previous output. SSE is looking at resolving this glitch but the counters are working and once the spreadsheet has been resolved SSE is examining the possibility of responsibility for storing and converting data being passed to the Board.</p>	
6	TRUST REPORT	
	<p>AM report that the fund is presently at £402,000 whereas at the beginning of the year it was £388,000. The fund has been producing income of around £20,000 a year which has been available to the Board to spend on various projects. There are around 20 or more projects that the Trust has been able to assist with in the past. AM announced his retirement as Chairman of the Trust, to become effective at the end of the Trust meeting, which was to be held following the Board meeting. There are also a number of new Trustees that need to be appointed.</p> <p>Post-meeting note - AD was elected Chairman with CP and DS elected as Trustees.</p>	
7	NETTING	
	<p>ID enquired if there was anything to report on netting. IP noted that there was a meeting held on the 27th June with Marine Scotland but there is nothing to report. IP read out a letter submitted to a newspaper.</p>	
8	SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT PIKE CONSULTATION	
	<p>SM commented that the Scottish Government have invited a consultation on pike conservation. The basis for the consultation is the suggestion of a bag limit on the number of pike to be killed and a size limit so that large specimen pike will be left. From a salmon conservation view the proposals are sound; large pike will predate on smaller pike. Where pike have been controlled by netting it results in larger numbers of small pike which predate on smolts moving through. AS commented that there should be no bag limit on small pike to help smolts. SM noted the size limit is important and the Board's response should emphasise that pike, which is an invasive</p>	

	<p>non-native species, should not be allowed to spread, which is already law but worth repeating. Bailiffs would also need additional powers in order to enforce any conservation policy as they have no powers to deal with pike at present.</p>	
6	BEST PRACTICE FOR CATCH & RELEASE	
	<p>SM commented that there has been more research done on catch and release and it has shown that it is very important not to play fish too hard, not to remove fish from the water and to release them correctly. This has been known for some time but the new research reinforces the need for best practice. Fish should be kept in the water at all times, barbless hooks should be used, no treble hooks and fish landed only in knotless nets. If these precautions are taken survival rate is healthy, but as soon as fish are lifted out of the water their survival is compromised. Leaflets are available from the Board for circulation to all clubs and guests. OM noted that each member of the LAAC gets a copy of the Best Practice.</p> <p>SM also wished to thank the angling clubs for their assistance with the junior angling club days. There are proposals to set up an angling training course in September for volunteer anglers and SM will be in touch with the various clubs in due course.</p>	
7	GENERAL DATA PROTECTION REGULATION (GDPR)	
	<p>ID noted that this is a European law and the common practice adopted of simply sending an email stating you hold a person's details is not sufficient for compliance. The Board complies fully and both the policy and privacy statement are on the website. There is some information the Board has to hold to exercise its statutory duties, such as the issuing of assessments and maintaining a roll of fisheries. Any data that may be outwith this statutory requirement can be deleted at the request of the person whose data the Board holds. ID thanked NW for his work in preparing the GDPR policy.</p>	
8	AOCB	
	<p>RW noted his support for the Meig barrier.</p> <p>CP commented that the AAC's membership is down from 150 members with a waiting list to just 82 since the start of the tagging scheme. Even if everyone was able to kill one fish per person it would make a big difference. The Crown Estate is the only landlord to compensate for the category three designation. CP enquired whether the Government or the Board would support the AAC in some way. The assessments alone are almost £9,000 per annum and there are rents to be paid. CB reiterated that the financial viability of the AAC is at serious risk in its current form and will not exist in 5 years if support is not forthcoming. ID responded that the Board cannot change the assessment rate for individuals or segments of the Board. NW commented that when clubs come to their appeals they must stress the grade three categorisation as the District Valuer is aware of the grading and he is the only one who has the authority to alter the rateable value and therefore the assessment. ID noted that the Government is aware that the calculation for grading is not ideal. The Government is looking at changing the way the calculation is produced with the use of electro fishing surveys.</p> <p>AS suggested that angling clubs should remind their MSPs and the</p>	

	<p>Government that they claimed to be supportive of angling clubs but this seems to have slipped by.</p> <p>There was a general discussion between the angling clubs and an enquiry if the Trust could fund the angling clubs while they seek new membership. ID responded that this would not be possible as the Trust can only spend money on a defined, qualifying project. DS noted that their rates were calculated on £50 per salmon and this is regarded as excessive. If things carry on as they are then clubs will need to look at amalgamation. ID responded that the combined assessments would still have to be paid. SM noted that the new river grading model may increase hypothetical eggs in the river which may help to move the categorisation in the right direction but this is not yet known.</p> <p>AS suggested that there may be funds that could be made available to local clubs through SSE wind farm funding. It is being looked into at the moment and AS will report back to the Board once more is known. NW commented that the District Valuer may have valued each salmon at £50 for the Evanton club and that this rises for other parts of the system. The DV is looking to find a hypothetical rent that a willing tenant would pay tomorrow. These figures are based on leases and rent payable. It is recommend that the clubs present local evidence to the DV to show what actual rents are being paid locally and also stress the grading and any other matters that may affect the hypothetical rent. ID agreed and suggested that clubs continue to chase the DV.</p> <p>IP noted that his grandfather bought their netting stations in 1908 for £9,000. After a meeting with Simon Dryden, it appears that they have no value in the present market; the netsmen have lost their value and their ability to net. Some Conon anglers can keep up to 6 fish per season but the netsmen with a heritable title cannot catch any.</p> <p>JU suggested that if proprietors had un-let days or weeks, this might be offered to angling clubs and could encourage more members as they might be able to fish parts of the river system that they would normally not be able to afford. DS responded that one riparian owner does offer this and the club member could book the week for half price if it was un-let, however, this is no longer as effective as Fishpal aids last minute commercial bookings.</p> <p>The DDAC and EAC discussed the issue of catching one salmon multiple times and it being recorded several times which results in a higher assessment. Tagging could record multiple-caught fish but the DV does not take this into account.</p> <p>ID summarised that pressure needs to be kept on the DV and a better basis for categorisation of the rivers developed, in which SM is participating.</p> <p>WS suggested that the coastal netting stations could catch Pacific salmon in order to remove them. ID responded that anyone doing so would run the risk of catching Atlantic salmon. SM noted that Pacific salmon are not expected this year or at least not in great numbers.</p>	
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	<p>SS commented that there is a lot of effort being put into the conservation policy and angling clubs but it still results in the killing of fish. There is very little being done to support the netsmen and if it is all about conservation, all fishing should be stopped.</p> <p>CB wished to record the disappointment of the AAC that, at this critical and politically sensitive time in efforts to conserve dwindling stocks of salmon, that the LAAC felt unable to adopt the Board's conservation policy for a Category 1 river. ID acknowledged CB's comments and noted his own previously stated personal opinion that, even though allowable within the rules, he was disappointed that the 6 fish limit of salmon able to be killed was retained for 2018. However, he noted that the LAAC did alter its policy to require the release all hen fish. The Chairman and the Director of the Board had previously offered to talk to the LAAC members but this had not been taken up.</p> <p>NW noted that if members had not responded to the GDPR email regarding the Director's report then they would not be receiving copies of future editions of the Director's monthly reports, as the Board needs written approval in order to send marketing or other material to individuals.</p>	
8	DATE OF NEXT MEETING	
	Friday the 26 th of October 2018.	