

**THE CROMARTY FIRTH FISHERY BOARD
MINUTES OF PROPRIETORS MEETING**

Held at Torr Achilty on Friday 29th March 2019 at 10.00am

Present		In Attendance	
Ian Duncan (Chairman)	ID		
Alastair Campbell (Vice Chairman)	AC	Edward Rush (Head Bailiff)	ER
Keith Beaton (SEPA)	KB	Troels Bavnhøj (Strathconon Estate)	TB
Christina Pirie (Alness Angling Club)	CP	Chris Blake (Alness Angling Club)	CB
Dave Smith (Evanton Angling Club)	DS	Hugh Cushnie (Loch Achonachie Angling Club)	HC
George Skinner (Netsman)	GS	Nigel Fraser (Novar Estate)	NF
Dr Alistair Stephen (SSE)	AS	Jim Ross (Netsman)	JR
John Urquhart (Dingwall & District Angling Club)	JU	William Skinner (Netsman)	WS
Roddy d'Anyers Willis (Conon Fishing Syndicate & Mandated for Scatwell Fishings)	RW		
Neil Wright (Clerk)	NW		

1	APOLOGIES	Action
	Saunders Campbell (Netsman) Alex Duncan (Cromarty Firth Fishery Trust Chairman) Suzanne Dolby (Forestry Commission Scotland) Ronald Munro Ferguson (Novar Estate) David Flux (Coul Fishings) Callum Macdonald (Contin Glebe) Okain McLennan (Loch Achonachie Angling Club)	
2	CONFLICT OF INTEREST	
	No conflicts noted.	
3	MINUTES OF THE MEETING, 9th January 2019	
	Minutes of the meeting were agreed as being a true and accurate reflection of the previous meeting and were approved.	
4	MATTERS ARISING	
	ID noted that Peter Hingston passed away on the 22 nd of January following a short illness; the Boards thoughts are with his family. Lynn Mckelvey has also written to the Board to thank the proprietors for funds that were donated to her earlier this year on the passing of Simon Mckelvey. All other matters arising to be covered within the meeting.	

5	FINANCIAL UPDATE	
6	ACTIVITIES UPDATE	

ID commented that the budget is running on track with the income ahead by £16,000, however, this apparent surplus is due to money received from SSE to pay for pit tags. Once these have been paid for the actual figures will be within £500 of budget. Expenditure continues to be tightly controlled since Simon's passing.

There will be some expenses and savings made as a result of the ongoing Board restructuring but these will fall into the next financial year.

ID ran through the proposed budget and noted that the resulting assessment for 2019/2020 is recommended to be set at £1 in the £ which would generate assessment income of £114,000. This will ensure the income is fixed and there will not be any fluctuations such as affected last year and the current year as a consequence of rating appeals. The assessment rate was approved by the meeting. The increase in income from SSE to £165,000 (an increase from £93,000) is based on a joint review factual evidence and hours performed undertaking work for SSE.

The Board is unlikely to handle as much contract work as previous years and there is an anticipation that contract work was going to dwindle in any case.

Over £200,000 has been allocated to wages, pensions and taxes, outwith which it is vehicles and property costs which dominate. A proposed surplus of £11 for the year has been budgeted.

There are some one off costs such as a Health and Safety review and some concerns regarding protocols brought to the Board's attention by SSE..

Assessments will be issued in April for payment and are due for payment on the 1st of May.

ID wished to thank NW, AS and ER for the work that has been done to keep the Board operating following the passing of Simon.

Interviews for the new Directors position are being carried out later that day (29th) and tomorrow (30th).

ER commented that the Bailiffing team has completed egg planting and will move on to fry once they are ready. There are around six hundred thousand fry to plant out into the Blackwater. The Achanalt smolt trap will be opened on the 3rd of April.

Around twenty thousand eggs have been planted in the Bran and those eggs were taken from a fish rescue below the dam in November.

The radio receivers for the missing salmon project have been put out in the estuary and smolts over 130mm will be tagged from Achanalt.

	<p>AS ran through the Atlantic Salmon Trust's project on the missing salmon. The intention is to tag one hundred smolts from each river involved; they will also be installing receivers in the estuary and further out into the Moray Firth. They hope to study the routes the smolts travel. In addition to the fixed receivers they have one robotic roaming receiver that can detect tags further out at sea.</p> <p>ER noted that around five thousand trees have been planted along burns within Forestry Commission ground. The team have also collected native, locally sourced seeds for sowing later this year.</p> <p>AS explained that the University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI) are very keen to look at supporting tree planting and study the benefits of tree planting along water courses.</p> <p>RW enquired about the tree planting and whether there was any way of measuring shade and water temperature. AS responded that there is very little ongoing monitoring and this would be the intention of getting the UHI involved.</p>	
7	HYDRO REPORT	
	<p>AS reported that the water supply to the hatchery has been intermittent recently and SSE intent to undertake several tests once the fry are out of the hatchery. SSE do not wish to rely on a backup diesel generator and they want to get the system corrected.</p> <p>SSE will be operating the Meig smolt trap and assisting where required with other operations.</p>	
8	TRUST REPORT	
	<p>ID noted in the absence of AD that the Trust accounts for the year ended 31st December 2018 have been produced and will be approved at the next Trust meeting. During the year three new Trustees appointed.</p> <p>The income for the year was around £25,000. Expenditure was slightly higher than normal, partly for support of junior angling. There was £39,000 donated to the Board and £2,000 paid for membership subscriptions. Investments at the end of the year were £364,000, which is slightly down on the prior year's figure of £383,000.</p> <p>The Board will be requesting funds from the Trust in the next week or two for work done. Payment for some contract work is paid to the Trust which then flows through to the Board. In future contract income will go directly to the Board and not go through the Trust.</p>	
9	MEIG SMOLT TRAP	
	<p>AS explained that the Meig smolt trap has been constructed this year as it had been identified that only 30% of smolts were getting through the dam, probably due to predation by trout. SSE is not required to do anything on the Meig at present as SEPA consider there to be adequate migration of fish. However, this is not the case on the Orrin, where a "Meig-type" might be a future solution.</p> <p>SSE instructed Fish Guidance to produce a non-physical barrier that could divert smolts into a trap just before they reach the reservoir;</p>	

	<p>this barrier is now in place.</p> <p>NW thanked TB and Strathconon Estate for all their assistance in getting the barrier and trap set up.</p> <p>The Meig project has been a challenge to get set up, a number of licencing conditions needed to be met plus there were archaeological remains found, all of which slowed the work. Once all agreements were in place the building of the channel was complicated due to an issues with water levels, the river bed and the composition of the excavated material. However, the barrier is now operational and the traps have been built. It is hoped that from next week the trap will be operational.</p> <p>It is expected that the total project might cost around £80,000 with SSE renting the barrier at a cost of £45,000 and the remaining costs being split with the Trust and Strathconon Estate.</p> <p>AS noted that the barrier itself costs around £175,000.</p> <p>TB wished to thank NW for getting the project to where it is now, without this it would not have happened this year.</p> <p>TB enquired if there would be any scientific write up of the project. AS responded that there would be at the end. TB commented that if this is to be implemented on the Orrin then the Board and SSE will need to start thinking about this now, there is very little to no smolt run on the Orrin and it will need to be stocked in order to capture any smolts in 2 to 3 years' time.</p>	
10	NETTING	
	<p>WS commented that netsmen were still fighting their case with the Scottish Government; the compensation offered has been very low and not considered to be adequate. The compensation does not cover the loss of value to the netting station or investment in equipment. Netsmen reported aggregate catches of less than 1% of fish returning to the east coast of Scotland.</p> <p>ID enquired if the netsmen were collaborating. WS responded that they were and the Netting Association is involved.</p> <p>ID explained that as the netsmen were receiving compensation the Board will start to charge rent for netting stations that are leased. This rent will not be backdated but rents will be charged as per the leases from November 2019. Netting tenants have the option to terminate their leases as an alternative to paying the rent. Assessments will also be charged if any netting is exercised, such as for sea trout.</p> <p>GS enquired if anyone keeping a salmon would be prosecuted? ER commented that this would be an offence as there is an Order in place to prevent the retention of salmon in coastal waters</p> <p>GS read out a prepared statement of intent to net for salmon, sea trout and other species for his own consumption and not for financial gain. The police will be notified prior to any nets being set. This being partly to force the Scottish Government to instigate court</p>	

	<p>action.</p> <p>ID enquired what the Board could do to assist the netsmen, GS asked the Board to write to the Scottish Government and support the netsmen. ID commented that one of the best things to do would be for each netsman to write to his MSP. He noted that the Board has previously written in support of the netsmen to the Scottish Government and would be happy to do so again, ID asked GS to provide some written comments summarising the arguments of the netsmen so that the Board could write again to the Scottish Government.</p> <p>AS enquired if Fishery Management Scotland could assist the Netting Association on behalf of the Board. NW commented that the Board has raised concerns with Marine Science Scotland previously about the loss of capital value for these netting stations.</p>	
11	Board re-organisation and interviews	
	<p>ID commented that interviews for the new Director were be held later that day and tomorrow (29th and 30th March). There is also to be a change in job responsibilities for Bailiffing staff. The role is less confrontational than historically and the emphasis is increasingly focused on habitat management. He also noted that a biologist will be employed later in the year. The Board will become a more modern functioning Board.</p>	
12	AOCB	
	<p>NF commented that they had received a formal complaint from a canoeist who got tangled in an acoustic reader; this was a lesson learned for the estate and the Board.</p> <p>GS enquired about the bothy being sold at Balintore and whether it was a Board decision. ID responded that the bothy has been sold and it was a committee decision, the sale price was £40,000. WS commented that the community wanted to turn it into a museum. ID responded that no one had approach the Board about any such proposal and the building was under a lease.</p> <p>CB commented that prospects of improvements to the weir at Alness appear to have been kicked into the long grass and the fish pass continues to be unsuitable. Various plans have been proposed but ACC is looking for a progress update. ID commented that the Clerk is going to arrange a meeting with both distilleries. All affected parties will be invited to that meeting.</p> <p>CB raised a second point of re-stocking on the Alness, using the Contin hatchery. ID commented that the use of hatcheries is increasingly frowned upon and, in any event, the hatchery is owned by SSE and not the Board. NW commented that furunculosis is one of the biggest risks in the River Alness and fish were being lost before they could be stripped. ER suggested that moving fish around the catchment is not a solution unless you can identify areas that do not have sufficient juveniles, and isolate the cause.</p> <p>.</p>	

	<p>AS asked if the query related to eggs or for smolt ranching, CB responded that it was for ranching. AS commented that ranching returns low numbers and costs a significant amount of money for each returning salmon.</p> <p>Further discussion was had regarding the river carrying capacity and the number of salmon surviving at sea.</p> <p>The Board discussed the benefits of stocking the Orrin and the pitfalls of getting this to work going forward. SSE are looking into to this and further discussion will be had with SEPA.</p> <p>CP commented that the water returning to the Alness from the distillery was steaming it was so warm. KB responded that the water temperature needs to be within 2.C of the water temperature at the intake, the temperate is then taken again at the weir, the water can be slightly warmer at the point of entry to the river. The temperature is checked daily at the site and the data reported to SEPA.</p>	
13	DATE OF NEXT MEETINGS	
	11.00am on Friday 28 th June 2019 at Torr Achilty Power Station.	