

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

Held at Torr Achilty on Friday 28th June 2019 at 11.00am

Present		In Attendance	
Ian Duncan (Chairman)	ID	Antony Donnelly (Director Designate)	TD
Lord Aylesford (Scatwell)	CA	Edward Rush (Head Bailiff)	ER
Keith Beaton (SEPA)	KB	Troels Bavnhøj (Strathconon Estate)	TB
Ronald Munro Ferguson (Novar Estate)	RF	Chris Blake (Aness Angling Club)	CB
William Paterson (Netsman)	WP	Alex Duncan (Cromarty Firth Fishery Trust Chairman)	AD
Christina Pirie (Aness Angling Club)	CP	Andrew Matheson (Brahan)	AM
Dave Smith (Evanton Angling Club)	DS		
Dr Alistair Stephen (SSE)	AS		
John Urquhart (Dingwall & District Angling Club)	JU		
Roddy d'Anyers Willis (Conon Fishing Syndicate & Mandated for Scatwell Fishings)	RW		
Neil Wright (Clerk)	NW		

1	APOLOGIES	Action
	Alastair Campbell (Vice Chairman) Saunders Campbell (Netsman) Patrick Creasey (Strathvaich) David Flux (Coul Fishings) Callum Macdonald (Contin Glebe)	
2	CONFLICT OF INTEREST	
	No conflicts noted.	
3	Welcome to Tony Donnelly, appointed Fishery Director	
	ID wished to welcome Tony Donnelly to the Board as the new Director and commented on his previous experience.	
4	MINUTES OF THE MEETING, 29th March 2019	
	Minutes of the meeting were agreed as being a true and accurate reflection of the previous meeting and were approved.	
5	MATTERS ARISING	
	All matters arising will be covered during the meeting.	

6	BOARD RE-ORGANISATION	
	<p>ID discussed the reorganisation of the Board which was provisionally discussed at the previous meeting in March. Two of the Water Bailiffs applied for the new posts of Fishery Officers, which better reflect the roles they now perform. Bailiff Peter McAlister took voluntary redundancy. The Head Bailiff is now the Operations Manager for the Board.</p> <p>The Board has also now employed a new Fishery Director and a new position (Biologist) is being created and will be advertised later in the year for a start early next year.</p>	
7	FINANCIAL UPDATE	
	<p>ID ran through the finances to date and noted that the funds are in good order with almost £240,000 in the bank which is a mixture of the SSE contribution of £165,000 and assessments. AS commented that there is still not yet a legal agreement in place for the SSE funding (a draft is awaited from SSE) and a review is being undertaken across all Boards regarding SSE funding levels and work being carried out for SSE, including health and safety and protocols. SSE will review its options and the money available this year may not be the same again next year.</p> <p>ID commented that the statutory accounts have been prepared and copies are available, there had been a loss for the year of almost £15,000 (reflecting the one-off donation made to Simon's McKelvey family). The coming year should see a balanced budget with a nominal surplus budgeted.</p> <p>Preliminary figures for the month of May are available and there is little to report due to it being the first month of the new fiscal year, but all appears to be in order.</p>	
8	ACTIVITIES UPDATE	
	<p>ER commented that the hatchery had now been closed down for the season. He noted that growth on the trees has been very slow with a cold spring. Patrols have continued as usual and there have been close ties with Police Scotland regarding anti-poaching and illegal netting.</p> <p>The smolt run was very poor on the Bran, possibly due to low water and predation while the smolts were slowed down.</p> <p>NW ran through the monthly report and commented that the SISI project was continuing this year but without a project officer. The Missing Salmon project run by the Atlantic Salmon Trust has been completed for this year and the acoustic receivers have now been lifted. SSE contributed £10,000 towards tags for night-time released smolts, the intention was to release smolts at night to see if they have a greater survival rate leaving the river compared with day time released smolts.</p> <p>A report of a 'diseased' fish was noted on the Conon but test results found there to be no disease. NW responded to a query from RW as to why this may be happening.</p>	

9	HYDRO REPORT	
	<p>AS commented that the unreliable water supply to the hatchery is being reviewed and a working group has been established to identify and resolve the issues. If the water supply cut off at the wrong time of year and could not be re-started quickly enough, it may prove impossible to save the fry. ID enquired if a castell switch (which kick starts within 5 seconds) could be used to automatically start the backup supply. AS noted that this could be an option but there is a priority to get the primary supply fixed.</p> <p>AS noted that the ownership of the Rogie falls fish pass is under question; SSE had believed that they owned it and have been maintaining it in order to get fish up to Loch na Croic and therefore needed to maintain the falls. NW will carry out a landownership search to identify the true ownership.</p> <p>The fish counters have been installed and are working but there has been some issues with dialling into them remotely which is causing SSE some frustration. The new counter data cannot be imputed into the old data and will have to be kept separately or be input manually.</p> <p>There have been reports of discrepancies within the Torr Achilty counter which has been showing higher and lower readings on the two dials. The team have had to manually alter the external counter as it was not recording the same numbers as the internal counter, which was identified as showing the correct reading This has led to reports of a reduction in numbers but they haven't fallen in reality.</p>	
10	TRUST REPORT	
	<p>AD commented that the Trust's net asset were valued at £403,000 and for the last 12 months the investment growth was 7.1% with the bench mark being 2.8%.</p> <p>The Trust no longer gets funding through from RAFTS and so the income will only be around £10,000 to £12,000 a year going forward. This is the sum available, on average, each year to support Trust projects.</p>	
11	MEIG SMOLT TRAP	
	<p>AS explained that it had been a very interesting exercise, even if not eventually successful. An acoustic barrier was fitted to assist with overcoming the results of research carried out previously by the Board, which suggested that only 30% of smolts were leaving the dam.</p> <p>Originally a louvered screen was mooted but a non-physical screen or barrier was chosen and a site was selected on the River Meig just before the river flows into the loch and Hydroplan surveyed and agreed the proposed site. It was proposed that it would be a joint project between SSE, the Trust and Strathconon Estate. SSE had no requirement to be involved but wished to experiment with the technology for potential application on other sites such as the Orrin which has been downgraded by SEPA.</p> <p>The barrier was installed by the end of March and the bypass channel is looking to be stable. The barrier had to be altered part way through the project to direct the flashing lights downwards as there was a lot of light pollution adversely affecting neighbouring properties.</p>	

	<p>Various experiments were carried out to see what numbers of fish went down the main stem and what numbers went down the new channel. A rotary screw trap was placed in each of the channels, capture and re-release was carried out (placing smolts back above the barrier) to identify if smolts always chose the same channel, which showed that it was not always the case.</p> <p>The results have been inconclusive as both screw traps were catching around the same number of smolts. However what was revealed was the large number of smolts traveling downstream. Around 5,500 smolts were captured in total (the screw traps are only around 25 to 30% efficient) and this would equate to around 20,000 to 25,000 smolts in the Meig which would mean it is at carrying capacity.</p> <p>1500 smolts were pit tagged to see what happens to them in the next couple of years.</p> <p>A working group now needs to be established to look at a project for next year, using a different method other than the barrier.</p> <p>A general discussion was had regarding the stocking of Loch Meig and whether stocked the trout can be released after the smolt run has been completed, which may increase the survival rate of smolts.</p>	
12	NETTING	
	<p>ID noted that NW wrote to the Scottish Government outlining the issues surrounding compensation being paid to the netsmen and that this failed to compensate for the devaluation of their heritable assets and equipment.</p>	
13	AOCB	
	<p>ID warned that more pink salmon might be seen this year as this is the peak year within their two year cycle and he requested anglers to be vigilant.</p> <p>ER and WP discussed the prohibition on netting and the requirement to release salmon from nets immediately. Marine Science Scotland have advised that any salmon caught in a net need to be released immediately, which effectively makes netting for sea trout virtually impossible, in practice.</p> <p>WP noted that there were very few seals within the Firth and queried whether that indicates a lack of fish.</p> <p>CP enquired about the Alness Weir and whether there has been any progress. NW advised that SEPA and Diageo have offered time for a meeting but we are waiting on Dalmore coming back with dates for a meeting. The intention would be to invite all proprietors affected by the weir to the meeting.</p> <p>CB expressed concern over the assessment level as the AAC is financially constrained and requested that their assessment is paid in two instalments to ease cash flow. This was accepted by the Board.</p>	

	<p>CB also enquired about the assessments going down in the longer term. NW advised that the Board is looking at slimming down large costs and modernising, such as vehicles and rates on buildings. The Board also has one less member of staff and although no reduction can be committed to until the SSE funding is known we will always run a tight ship and set the lowest assessments consistent with satisfying the Boards obligations.</p> <p>AM wished to express his gratitude to the management committee and Board staff for continuing to operate in an efficient manner in difficult circumstances, this has undoubtedly doubled the work load of many members.</p> <p>RF wished to review the culvert on the Alness and it would be good to now push once again for a resolution, hopefully this year. NW advised that the Board would look at this again.</p> <p>AD noted that he was excited to start work and get to know everyone, and he hoped to meet all proprietors individually over the next 6 months.</p>	
14	DATE OF NEXT MEETINGS	
	11.00am on Friday 25 th October 2019 at Torr Achilty Power Station.	