

THE CROMARTY FIRTH FISHERY BOARD MINUTES OF THE PROPRIETORS MEETING

Held at Torr Achilty on Friday 17th June 2016 at 11am

Present		In Attendance	
Ian Duncan (Convener)	ID	Simon McKelvey (Director)	SM
Peter Hingston (Lower Fairburn)	PH	Edward Rush (Head Bailiff)	ER
Okain MacLennan (Loch Achonachie Angling Club)	ОМ	Troels Barnhoi (Strathconon Estate)	ТВ
Neil Wright (Clerk)	NW (C)	Alex Duncan (Kildermorie Estate)	AD
		Andrew Matheson (Conon Fishing Syndicate)	АМ
		Rick Page (Dingwall & District Angling Club)	RP
		Christine Pirie (Alness Angling Club)	СР
		John Urquhart (Dingwall & District Angling Club)	JU
		Lucinda Whitrow (Upper Fairburn Fishings)	LW
		Roddy d' Anyers Willis (Conon Fishing Syndicate – Brahan Beat)	RW

1	APOLOGIES	Action
	The Earl of Aylesford (Scatwell Estate) Keith Beaton – SEPA Col. Alastair Campbell (Vice Convenor) Patrick Creasey – Strathvaich Ben Leyshon (SNH) Callum Macdonald (Lower Blackwater) Dave Smith (Evanton Angling Club) Dr Alastair Stephen (SSE) Finnian Munro Younger (Foulis)	

2	2015/16 ACCOUNTS AND FINANCE UPDATE	
	The Convenor discussed the merits of the decision previously taken of going from assessments collected in arrears to collection in advance. Although this will look to be a net $\pounds100,000$ hole in the accounts as shown on the ledger, there will be no cash flow change. Payment in advance makes the books show the income that the Board then spends in the same year.	
	This change in basis also protects members from the risk of being called upon to pay twice for the same year, should any successor organisation to the Board wish to collect both any outstanding assessment in arrears along with a current call. There was a theoretical vulnerability to member being called upon to pay both an assessment in arrears and a current year assessment at the same time. The change means that the risk has been eliminated	
	JU raised concerns that his club would not be able to raise this money and it would have an impact on its cash flow. ID responded that there should be no change as no extra money is being requested, simply that the funds collected by the club to pay for the assessment in arrears should just be used for the payment in advance.	
	JU cautioned that if the funds are paid out in April then the funds will not tally until next year. ID clarified that there would be no cash flow difference, as the money collected for what would have previously been labelled as payment in arrears will simply be renamed as being payment for the current year.	
	OM commented that the clubs were not being asked to pay out twice.	
	ID proceeded to go through the accounts noting that the Income part of the Actual column shows that there were no assessments raised/waived in arrears for the year 2015/16.	
	Looking at the cash position, the Board had £109,000 in the bank which is increasing by the collection of the £99,600 (net) assessments for the current year. Add the Gilts maturing in July and bringing in £50,000 plus interest and approximately £90,000 to come from SSE (even before we bring into account any contract income or Trust Funded projects) and this demonstrates that the Board has more than enough money to finance the costs of around £250,000 anticipated by the budget for the 2016/17 year. The surplus cash of greater than £100,000 looks unlikely to be spent before the Board ceases to exist; to be replaced by an FMO.	
	Asset revaluations carried out in recent years meant that the balance sheet values of fixed assets are current, with a value of £275,000, all showing on the asset register.	
	There is around £400,000 available to the Board with expenditure of around £250,000 / £260,000 budgeted, even with a reserve of £40,000 this leaves £100,000 surplus that	

cannot be spent before an FMO is created. The Trust funded work has been carefully limited in order to preserve the Trusts funds.

ID proposed that $\pounds100,000$ be donated to the Trust, which would be protected by Trust Law and be available for use within the purposes of the Trust, to assist with fishing and fisheries within the Board area. The Trust would be able to filter funds back to the Board (or the succeeding FMO) in support of project work agreed to be relevant to activities within the Board's current area (possibly including even the costs of the formation of an FMO itself).

OM enquired if this would leave a sufficient buffer for the Board if £100,000 was transferred. ID suggested that \pounds 40,000 should be a sufficient buffer. Should further funds be required a request could be made to the Trust. SM explained that extra funds might be needed to meet costs for the creation of an FMO and it would be important that the Trust was understanding of this situation.

ID emphasised that his proposal was primarily to keep the money safe and available for projects in the Board's area; it was akin to an insurance policy. The Trust is in a good position to keep the funds safe and utilise them wisely.

AM commented that the proposals make sense and that the Trust had considered this previously. There have been concerns that some Boards have been running down their funds prior to an FMO being created which has not been viewed well by the Government.

OM raised concerns that the Trust and Board members have to be clear as to the purpose. There must be a clear separation between the two. The principle needs to be considered and conflict of interest clearly declared or reviewed. SM stressed that the money was to be available to be used and not simply hidden away. ID stated that some Boards had cancelled assessments or set a zero rate in the pound, in order to use up surplus funds and it was felt that this might cause issues in the future with the management of a succeeding FMO.

RW enquired if SSE will still contribute to an FMO rather than a Board. ID understands that the commitment is to the proprietors and not to the Board. The view within SSE appears to be that it would not be politically acceptable to stop payment even though legally it may not be obligated to continue. SM explained that the SSE cost is part of the mitigation works on a day rate, not just a lump sum. SSE requires this as part of its CAR licence and so the Board is in a strong position to maintain the funding even if circumstances were to change.

ID concluded his run through the accounts, commending SM for his efficient control of costs.

	ID then turned to the budget for the year to 30 th April 2017, noting that assessment income reappeared, but on a current basis, but that no other elements of income or expenditure were anticipated to experience material change save that compliance with the regulations to establish an auto enrolment pension plan to be made available to all Board employees will increase costs in that area. SM explained that the budget incorporated an average pay increase of 1.4%. ID stated that if anyone had any question on the accounts or budget they should come back to him.	
3	DIRECTORS REPORT	
	SM ran through the highlights of his Directors report.	
	It looks as if there will be 15 FMOs, there is a draft bill in preparation and the consultation previously submitted will be used for the draft bill. The Bill will go before Parliament at the end of the year or early next year. Boards will be abolished, to be succeeded by a smaller number of FMOs, whose roles will be to promote all fish species and angling. They would be more answerable to the centre, but each river system would remain fairly autonomous.	
	The key aims are very positive but there remains some negotiating as to the boundaries. The Scottish Government has a suggested map of desired FMO boundaries, but is allowing boards to work out for themselves possible groupings to form FMOs, at least for the time being. If the Board joined with another contiguous board, especially to the West, SM believes that the new partnership would be invited to form an FMO. In order to bring this about, a draft fishery management plan would be need to be created.	
	There have been a couple of young angling days to promote fishing. It was suggested that local angling clubs might also wish to get involved.	
	RW asked if there has been anything said about the funding of FMOs. SM responded that it will include assessments for salmon fishing and these will likely be raised by each FMO. There may also be other sources of funding from SNH and SEPA. Funding available to boards at present will still be there, but there will be a hole in the aggregate budget that might be filled with a rod licence. However, this would not be at the same level of pricing as you see in England.	
	OM stated that he is part of the technical working group which is looking at funding options other than rod licences.	
	SM emphasised that all sources of funding need to be looked at, including direct funding from Government.	
	ID stated that the FMO could not be called the CFFB as there will be other former boards in the FMO and it may mean getting involved with salmon farming issues on the West	

	coast, if the FMO was to extend from the West through to our current Eastern March.	
	SM commented that the underlying process is sound and the ndustry is being listened to.	
j t t	RP enquired if any of the possible boards that the CFFB might join with have been running their funds down or cancelling their assessments for the year. SM responded that none of the possible merger Boards have been running their funds down.	
r	SM continued to go through the highlights in the Directors report and reported that the year had been busy to date and they were well through the Smolt trapping.	
2 0 1 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2	Another project which has been carried out this year is acoustic tagging. 150 Smolts have been tagged and a series of acoustic buoys deployed in the Firth. The buoys will be ifted in July, so that data can be retrieved and analysed. That analysis should give a good indication as to how many smolts are surviving the outgoing passage to the open sea. Each acoustic tag costs £300 with the buoys themselves costing around £3,500. SM added that 3,500 PIT tags have been used.	
a i r f	RW asked if the tags still worked if a smolt was eaten by another fish. SM responded that the tags do still work and it s possible to tell if the smelt has been eaten and by what. This can be established through the differing temperatures of potential predators. OM stated that they were monitoring catches and no fish had been found with signs of smolts in them.	
 1	Other project work includes revisiting research carried out by Keith Williamson 10 years ago. The original research put 10- 12 Salmon carcases in the river. The carcases provided key nutrients and a doubling of smolts was recorded.	
t t c r	This time a fish feed firm has made up a replica of the chemical structure of a dead carcase with pellets which mirror the nutrients from a carcase. The project will identify the penefits pellets have but also monitor water quality downstream. If the project is successful it could be used as a management tool but it will be important to demonstrate to SEPA that there is no change in the water quality.	
	CP suggested that if there is to be more angling for children that they should speak to the guidance teachers in schools. SM responded that they have been going with Primary Schools first but will move to Secondary Schools. ID commented that the Board provides transport and that fishing will be in ponds rather than large waters or rivers.	
t	OM enquired about Sea Trout numbers this year. SM stated that the numbers had been good, with around 80 caught to date. RW stated that their 10 year average was 58.	

	SM moved on to the Hydro report usually presented by Dr. Alistair Stephen of SSE.	
	The hatchery at Contin has been demolished and the new hatchery should be complete by September.	
	Work will be carried out to the Tor Achilty dam this summer; if anyone has keys to view the counter they are requested to call into the office first due to the work. The work will be starting in July and will not affect flows.	
	A new fish pass is being built at Orrin Dam and the fish pass at Achanalt is being repaired.	
	RW enquired as to how many fish are being taken by netsman. SM responded that only coble netting in the estuary is allowed and netting in the Firth beyond the estuary is banned for 3 years.	
4	TRUST REPORT	
	AM proceeded to run through the Trust report.	
	The Trust was originally set up by David Nickson and currently holds around $\pounds 150,000$ of funds.	
	The value of the funds has been maintained despite turbulent markets, with the income from the investments being $\pm 10,000$. This money is available to the Board if required.	
	Donations are up this year to \pounds 34,000 compared with \pounds 30,000 last year. The main difference has been the increased income from Scottish Government project work.	
	The outcome is a deficit of around $\pounds4,000$ this year compared with $\pounds22,000$ surplus last year.	
	SM requested volunteers to help clear up Himalayan balsam over the summer; supervision and kit will be provided. There will be one person employed this summer to work with volunteers, particularly in the Dingwall, Alness and Evanton areas.	
5	RIVERS & LOCHS INSTITUTE TALK – MARK COULSON	
	SM introduced Mark Coulson from the River and Lochs Institute from the University of the Highlands and Islands.	
	The work being carried out by Mark and his team is potentially very important as a way of gathering data on fish numbers within a river system. This is a possible alternative to relying on rod catch especially where there is no fish counter.	
	The Alness is in danger of failing for a third year running which would put it into being a category 3 river. This would mean full catch and release. The only data available for the Alness is rod catch data as there is no fish counter.	
	All tags have now been issued for 2016 and it is 6 tags per angler as agreed this year but a tighter conservation plan will	

be needed going forward. ID added that the Board would need to consider lower tag numbers and this should be discussed and agreement reached for the 2017 Season at the October meeting. A limit of three tags per angler has previously been mooted.	
SM stated that all the rivers around the CFFB are category 3, which is 100% catch and release.	
CP expressed concern that contractors for the distillery have again been in the River Alness, this time for 10 days. The new pipe is not functioning properly and the pipe has been flushed for 10 days and the water is being filtered through a bale of straw, which may not be adequate. SM commented that a straw bale is widely used in such circumstances. He noted that we have to accept that the distillery is there to stay and it has a legal right to abstract water from the river. The Board has limited powers, but can endeavour to persuade SEPA what is in the best interests of the river. Following consultation, this work had been started after the smolt run and the distillery had agreed to get the work done as quickly as possible.	
CP commented that fishing had been down for the last 2 or 3 years and the distillery have been working on this for 2 years, SEPA don't understand the impact. SM responded that the CAR licence sets out the abstraction rate and he confirmed that SEPA do understand the difficulties. The pipe works do not necessarily correlate with the lower fish numbers as it is really the water levels that will determine the run.	
RP enquired if there was an update on the possible merger with the Wester Ross Fishery Board. SM added that the WRFB is merging with Skye and we should await the outcome of that merger.	
ID stated that the 2017 Valuation Returns had been sent out and should have been completed and returned to the District Valuer by now. He requested that any stragglers get their Returns submitted as soon as possible. OM cautioned the Board that his club's valuation assessment may take a little longer as the treasurer's work load is being shared by other members since his stroke. (It was noted that not all Valuation Returns had been received, but that copies has been requested from the District Valuer).	

Mark Coulson Talk	
MC introduced his colleagues; Dara Vaughan (PhD student) and Evan Roderick (Masters Research Student).	
MC explained that there are various methods of capturing data but genetics has not been an accepted tool on rivers to date.	
The research is designed to look at the genetics of breeding pairs. From genotyping the juvenile fish it is possible to determine the number of breeding fish and see how they are related within the sample area. An example could be 10 Smolts sampled and you may find that there are 4 male and 4 female parents across the 10.	
Work has been done with the Tweed where data was plotted on to a map. Bad Rivers had less breeding pairs. Rivers in good condition had more breeding pairs and it is possible to identify those in specific areas.	
Other projects include the River Carron, where the river was re-stocked over a number of years. 300 fish were sampled from electro fishing. 10 different genetic groups were found, many of which were expected. It was possible to see stocked and wild fish genetics.	
If sample sites are visited regularly it can give an indication as to whether stocks are going up or down. It is possible to use counter data to compare results.	
The proposed case study would be both on the Conon and the Alness; some of the questions/answers being looked at include: breeding population size, comparisons with rod catch and on other rivers comparison with counter data.	
ID asked MC how many years before this data can be rolled out in a usable format so that the Government can review. MC commented that it is very close and the PHD student will be working on this over the next 3 years. ID enquired if this could be a platform for the whole country. MC responded that many rivers are being sampled, for example the Evelix and Alness should be able to determine variances and how best to look at different types of rivers.	
UHI should have something within 5 years which would give a good genetic data base.	
OM asked how the genetic sample was taken. MC responded that each sample was taken from a dorsal fin and the smolt then returned to the water.	
OM wished to know what the likely sample size was to be. MC commented that it would depend on the spawning habitats but around 50 per site. Going for a larger sample may not statistically provide more accuracy.	

	Friday 7 th October at Torr Achilty Power Station.	
6	DATE OF NEXT MEETING	
	MC will provide a summary document on the case study for the members.	
	ID suggested that, once we have a costed proposal, the Board make a proposal to the Trust for financial assistance. In practice, the mechanics would be dealt with by the Management Committee reaching agreement using emails in place of a physical meeting, in order to be able to move swiftly.	
	OM wished to know what the rough cost would be for the study per year. MC commented that it would be around $\pounds 9,000$ to $\pounds 10,000$. This could be less if the Board carried out the field work as part of their electro fishing.	
	SM stated that the Board would carry out the field work and sampling to reduce the cost. SM and MC agreed that September is the best time to do this. MC stated that he is waiting on a couple of other boards to decide whether or not to proceed with proposals made to them and he could have further proposals in a couple of weeks.	
	MC continued to explain that he wanted to generate interest from the Trust and it would ideally be a 3 year plan. Analysis of actual data may bring up amendments to the case study to fine tune it.	
	RW asked how much will the government take into account the individual rivers and age demographics of anglers. SM responded that the government knows there are flaws with the rod catch data at present and they are looking at inter alia, counter data and how to asses it.	
	Secondly, an alternative means of assessing stocks. The Alness is very susceptible to low levels of rainfall and the rod catch may be low when the stock is fine. There is no other viable option at present for gathering this data for the Alness as a counter system would be too costly.	
	SM stated that he could see two potentials, one as a management tool which would give you a traffic light system for the health of the river, with the stock levels going up or down, which would allow management of the stock.	