

Cromarty Fisheries



THE CROMARTY FIRTH FISHERY BOARD MINUTES OF THE PROPRIETORS MEETING

Held at Torr Achilty on Friday 17th February 2017 at 11am

Present		In Attendance	
Ian Duncan (Convener)	ID	Simon McKelvey (Director)	SM
Col. Alastair Campbell (Vice Convener)	AC	Edward Rush (Head Bailiff)	ER
Okain McLennan (Loch Achonachie Angling Club)	OM	Troels Barnhoi (Strathconon Estate)	TB
Dave Smith (Evanton Angling Club)	DS	John Cameron (Alness Angling Club)	JC
Dr. Alastair Stephen (SSE)	AS	Hugh Cushnie (Dingwall & District Angling Club)	HC
Neil Wright (Clerk)	NW (C)	Stephen Dowds (Loch Achonachie Angling Club)	SD
		Ronald Munro Ferguson (Novar Estate)	RF
		Colin MacDonald (Dingwall & District Angling Club)	CM
		James Mutch (Dingwall & District Angling Club)	JM
		Rick Page (Dingwall & District Angling Club)	RP
		Ian Paterson (Netsman)	IP
		William Paterson (Netsman)	WP
		Christina Pirie (Alness Angling Club)	CP
		George Skinner (Netsman)	GS
		John Urquhart (Dingwall & District Angling Club)	JU
		Roddy d' Anyers Willis (Conon Fishing Syndicate - Brahan Beat)	RW

1	APOLOGIES	Action
	The Earl of Aylesford (Scatwell Estate)	
2	2015/16 ACCOUNTS AND FINANCE UPDATE	
	<p>The Convenor opened the meeting and welcomed everyone. ID asked if there were any comments or criticism of the October minutes. The minutes were agreed as being an accurate reflection of the meeting.</p> <p>OM commented that he had not received a copy and NW undertook to email them to him.</p> <p>ID went on to discuss the finances of the Board. To the end of December the income side of the budget is very close to budget with no money being requested from the Trust in the year to date. SM has done well generating contract work for the Board.</p> <p>On the expense side, there is one error with the insurance within the accounts; general insurance seems high but this is only as a result of motor insurance not being split out and this will be corrected for the next set of accounts.</p> <p>The bank balance for the Board is £81,000 as at 16th February</p> <p>ID mentioned that the assessments for 2017 may be delayed while we wait for the Assessor to complete his re-valuation, as he has a back log resulting from other areas, such as appeals by hotels.</p> <p>There were no questions and the meeting moved on to the Director's report.</p>	
3	DIRECTOR'S REPORT	
	<p>SM proceeded to run through the Director's report and described recent research by Ron Campbell on cycles of grilse and salmon abundance. The research suggests that a pattern of declining grilse runs and an increase in MSW salmon numbers is being repeated and this has certainly been happening on the Conon. We are moving out of a period of high Grilse abundance which lasted from the 1970's to the early 2000's. In the past this has then been followed by an increase in MSW salmon stocks but there has been a time lag between the reduction in grilse numbers and increase in salmon numbers.</p> <p>There is work being carried out to the hatchery water supply as an airlock has been forming in the pipeline when filters are cleaned. This year has proven difficult for brood stock collection with a lack of rainfall throughout the trapping period to attract fish into the trap. Many fish dropped downstream and spawned lower down the system.</p> <p>SM commented that the wild spawning in the Bran, Meig and Orrin is looking good for this year, even though the hatchery is short at 970,000 eggs, this will allow re-stocking of the</p>	

<p>Blackwater.</p> <p>The artificial salmon carcass nutrition research carried out by the University of Glasgow is now being written up. The results have been very similar to the previous study which used real salmon carcasses. The biomass of salmon fry and invertebrates was significantly increased as a result; this method has the potential to be a very good management tool.</p> <p>SM explained that the acoustic tracking data has now been received and it showed that the smolts headed East along the South shore of the Moray Firth rather than heading directly North. It may be that they are using the Dooley current, which runs in only one direction. Most of the smolt losses were in the river and survival in the Firth and sea was very good.</p> <p>Further pit tagging has been proposed for this coming year for which Marine Scotland will start trawling to pick up tags at sea to investigate their movement out of the Moray Firth and into the North Sea. There is funding available for the pit tagging works again this year.</p> <p>The Conon is now an index river and this has been further enhanced, by the research being carried out regarding migration to sea which sets the CFFB apart from other Boards.</p> <p>SM proceeded to demonstrate the electro fishing sites on the Alness using a marked up plan. SM commented that the electro fishing pattern on the River Alness was very similar to the late 1990's when there was a drought period.</p> <p>The Meig and Bran are as expected and there have not been any shocks with the figures. The Rivers Spey and Dee are reporting a big decline in freshwater stocks and this is possibly due to flooding.</p> <p>The schools project has been very successful with 10 schools signed up; we are in discussions with Roger Dowset for a safe still water in which the children can fish.</p> <p>OM & SD enquired why clubs can't take this type of school work on as it would allow school children to be in touch with their local clubs, rather than setting up a new club. SM responded that the project provided class room work and practical fishing. It was a way in which to introduce children to fishing and Roger would assist with initial training and provide a safe environment to fish. All certificates and disclosure Scotland clearance was needed.</p> <p>SD commented that the LAAC already provides competitions and training. ID explained that we are trying to capture a new audience through schools rather than the traditional father/son approach. The children who go to the training established by the Board would then be put in touch with their local clubs.</p> <p>AS mentioned that the average age of anglers was 50 and the project is trying to encourage baby steps.</p>	
---	--

<p>HC explained that the D&DAC used to take kids every week to two different locations, but the funding then ran out. OM expanded that there were 10 coaches with disclosures in the LAAC.</p> <p>CP mentioned that it is not always safe to be on the River Alness as it is a spate river. The AAC does not let anyone under the age of 12 on to the river without supervision.</p> <p>SM further explained that we have a good relationship with 10 schools and we are trying to take this onto the next step, in a safe piece of still water where the children will catch fish. There may be funding available for training.</p> <p>OM, SD, ID & SM agreed that there needs to be dialogue and co-ordination between the clubs and the Board.</p> <p>RW asked what was happening with Sawbills to protect fish stock numbers. SM explained that the licence to scare and shoot occasional Sawbills has been applied for but the Board must adhere to the terms of the licence. As the critical time is during the smolt run, Ghillies will need to spend time during the smolt run scaring Sawbills away. There will not be any shot at the moment as the Board does not want to use up the licence numbers before the smolt run.</p> <p>WP enquired as to why the hatchery eggs were so few. SM responded that there are fewer Grilse and they are smaller. WP continued and asked if the Grilse had travelled up earlier and why can't brood stock be caught and held. AS responded that Malachite fungicide can no longer be used and so salmon cannot be kept for sustained periods of time. IP believed that the Grilse figures were not correct.</p> <p>RW enquired if the Board had records that go back far enough to see when the Grilse runs decreased and the egg numbers in the hatchery were down. SM responded that the records started when the Grilse numbers were on the rise but there are no records from the previous trough in the cycle.</p> <p>TB wished to know where the main stocking was taking place. SM responded that the main stocking was in the Blackwater above Garve and that there was natural spawning above the Meig.</p> <p>AS commented that the Orrin had not been stocked for a few years and they were not going to release any freshits as there are no or few smolts above the dam. Releasing a freshit of cold water will affect parr and fry adversely. There is still to be a decision made on the Borland lift.</p> <p>SM explained that successfully getting smolts out of the reservoir remains a concern and we are looking at options, including flow rates.</p> <p>AS mentioned that Marine Scotland have not yet carried out research on how smolts get out of Dams or lochs; naturally only 40% of smolts might get out of a loch. SSE are looking at tagging in Loch Garve which is not a Hydro reservoir. OM</p>	
--	--

	<p>agreed that smolt figures in rivers appear to be low and they may not be able to get into the rivers easily.</p> <p>AS agreed transporting smolts has been working so far.</p>	
4	WILD FISHERIES REFORM	
	<p>SM commented that a lot of time and effort had gone into the proposed Wild Fisheries Reform by Civil Servants and Working Groups. There has now been a big U-turn in policy by the Scottish Government. The all species fishery management objectives will no longer go ahead and the present structures will remain in place.</p> <p>ID asked why there had been such a major change in policy. SM explained that generating a funding source from anglers, in other words a Rod Licence was rejected and the proposals could not otherwise be funded. SM further explained that the CFFB is in a good position financially and the reversal will not affect the Board adversely in isolation. This type of reform has been proposed previously in the Hunter Report and the Nickson Report with both suggesting similar ideas, but these did not go ahead either.</p> <p>RAFTS & ASFB had been disbanded and Fishery Management Scotland has been established; this organisation was intended to be time limited to help with the transition of River Boards and angling to the now-cancelled proposed structure. This organisation has to re-structure itself to become a longer term management organisation rather than a transitional body.</p> <p>Some items within the Wild Fisheries Bill will still go ahead, (such as training for example) which are not too costly. The CFFB can concentrate its own resources in the local area and so there will be no obvious adverse affect. Unfortunately for the wider country it will not see the benefits that were being proposed.</p>	
5	CONSERVATION POLICY - 2017	
	<p>ID suggested that the conservation policy should be amended for 2017 to include a reduction of tags from 6 to 3. This should have been discussed at the October meeting but was missed.</p> <p>SD recalled that there was a discussion at the 2016 March Board meeting but a separate discussion would be needed regarding the conservation policy for 2017 and carcass tagging.</p> <p>ID explained that all Scottish rivers are now categorised under 3 headings and that tagging is a way in which the Board and rivers can demonstrate commitment to conservation, should a river be threatened with being downgraded. All of the rivers in the CFFB area have been classified as category 1, with the exception of the Balnagown, which is category 3.</p> <p>OM explained that there will be no mandatory tagging across</p>	

<p>Scotland. The LAAC trialled it and it worked but it was bureaucratic. There is no point in tagging now that the proposed reform is not happening.</p> <p>ID asked if it should be implemented in any event to demonstrate conservation commitment. SD responded that it was a philosophical argument and the best way forward is not to create more rules and tagging. There should be a move away from tagging to demonstrate trust in anglers.</p> <p>JU stated that no salmon can be retained before 1st April throughout Scotland and more rules are reducing the numbers of fish being caught and kept, in any event.</p> <p>IP commented that every fish will have to be tagged by the Netsman, if netting is to be permitted again.</p> <p>OM stated that if mandatory tagging came back the LAAC would adhere to it, but they cannot see any point in it now.</p> <p>ID believed that he did not like bureaucracy for the sake of it but the CFFB must understand that should tagging not be continued rivers could be downgraded as far as category 3, which is full catch and release.</p> <p>JU explained that members eventually do the right thing if other members do it. If a cap is imposed on them they will resent it.</p> <p>IP stated that netsmen cannot take any fish at present.</p> <p>RF commented that in the early days of conservation Novar Estate had a different conservation policy. Up to 70% of fish were being put back voluntarily but there is no supporting evidence.</p> <p>DS stated that he could not make a decision on behalf of the EAC as discussions have only ever been about tagging numbers and not about abolishing tagging altogether, CP agreed on behalf of the AAC.</p> <p>SD felt that most members are proactive and tags are unnecessary.</p> <p>AC mentioned that without the tagging you cannot demonstrate the returns and conservation policy. OM responded that fishing returns will demonstrate voluntarily returns of fish, augmented by the checks that the bailiffs make.</p> <p>ID summarised that sanctions against untagged fish are now gone and the justification for tags is to protect against a down grade in river categories. OM responded that he did not believe it would affect downgrading. ID further responded that it could only help demonstrate conservation and numbers.</p> <p>SD commented that members would not want the tagging system but instead they would like clear rules and measures in place in the conservation policy. SM stated that the</p>	
--	--

	<p>conservation policy therefore needed to be reviewed.</p> <p>RP suggested that he would like to see one conservation policy with each clubs amendments appended to the back. ID suggested that he did not believe that such an approach would work.</p> <p>AS stated that tagging is usually brought in to deal with a minority group that have abused the system. AC responded that having a tag does help identify if a fisherman can take the fish.</p> <p>ID concluded that there would be no tagging system for 2017 across the CFFB area and a revised draft conservation policy would be circulated. Individual rivers/ owners would be able to retain tagging should they so wish.</p> <p>IP proceeded to read out a press release and an email response to him in regards to the Wild Fishery Review and netting rights.</p> <p>N.B. since the meeting all of the Alness Proprietors have agreed to retain carcass tagging for 2017, with a limit of four fish per angler.</p>	
6	HYDRO REPORT	
	<p>AS presented his Hydro report to the Board and explained that the number of fish caught has been poor but hoped that could be improved.</p> <p>There have been water supply issues at the hatchery but they are hopefully now resolved.</p> <p>There would be no freshit releases from the Orrin Dam, as previously discussed.</p> <p>There are going to be repairs to the Conon fish pass weir. The area below Lochluichart will be drained to allow repair work to proceed and the repairs are expected to last 3 weeks.</p> <p>SD enquired if there was an update on flow control. AS responded that the rate of rise project has identified 8 sites as being potentially dangerous to the public. The turbines will now come on in a stepped process. There is a point at which turbines need to ramp up quickly to stop vibrations inside the turbine. SSE will consider warning signs. OM commented that on the back of the LAAC's tickets there is a note on safety. OM to pass an example to AS.</p> <p>IP enquired if there would be any effect on fish due to the Beatrice field. AS responded that he thought there would be little effect as the tagging work has shown they miss this area by travelling East, hugging the coast. IP asked why the fish come along that coast. SM explained that the fish caught in the nets of the CFFB area are likely to be Kyle of Sutherland's fish. IP stated that he was referring to the North coast netting stations and AS confirmed SM's answer.</p>	

<p>7</p>	<p>RIVERS AND LOCHS INSTITUTE</p> <p>SM reminded the Board that the Rivers and Lochs Institute has started to develop a genetic tool to identify the potential number of fish in a river system, which could be beneficial for the likes of the Alness that does not have a fish counter. At present there is no alternative to rod and line catch data for calculating river grading.</p> <p>The Institute made a gold plated proposal to the CFFB and it was probably both too extensive and expensive. It should be possible to come to an arrangement on the River Bran as a pilot project, which if successful, could be implemented on the River Alness at a later date. The Board intends to go back to the Institute for a refined proposal. The Bran will be suitable as pit tagging and fin clipping can be done at the same time.</p> <p>AS mentioned that there is a benefit to this work as you will see the genetics and identify how many breeding salmon there are in a river, which electrofishing cannot show.</p> <p>RW asked if the smolts above the Orrin could be captured before they go into the reservoir. SM responded that it could work but it would be very expensive. RW suggested that it might be cheaper than repairing the Borland lift. AS stated that the cost analysis is still to be done.</p> <p>SM agreed that trapping works on the Bran but there will need to be ideas for trapping such as screw traps and temporary fencing above the Orrin. A small number of eggs will be put above the Orrin as an experiment this year. RW commented that this could have a great benefit downstream.</p> <p>AS responded that Trout are probably the biggest problem to smolt survival.</p>	
<p>8</p>	<p>ALNESS WEIR</p> <p>SM explained that the works carried out to the weir so far have created a lip that fish struggle to get over. There is also a thermal discharge from the right bank by the distillery above the weir. Dalmore Distillery own the weir and are on the left, Teaninich Distillery abstract and return warm water above the weir; they are on the right.</p> <p>An all-party meeting with SEPA chairing would be of benefit. An engineer's report will likely be needed. Richard Fife from SEPA will be approached to see if he will set up a meeting and get all parties around a table before commissioning the engineering report.</p> <p>AS mentioned that Marine Scotland Science are very keen to put fish passes at the bottom of rivers. The weir could be altered to take a counter. SM to investigate this option before setting up a meeting with SEPA and the distilleries.</p> <p>CP commented that a significant amount of abstracted water is being returned to the river and the temperature was 29 degrees centigrade when last checked, which is outside the agreed tolerance.</p>	

9	DINGWALL & DISTRICT ANGLING CLUB	
	<p>ID explained that he wished to keep the discussions factual and not emotional, but HC commented that this was a contentious issue.</p> <p>JU read out a statement of facts as understood by the D&DAC to the Board. The club had originally offered £1,000p.a. to the Board for the Conon estuary beat, this was to include rent and the rates assessment, but this has been rejected by the Board. The Board tried to find an alternative tenant who would pay rent and the rate assessment but they could not find one. The Board came back to the D&DAC to agree a rent which they did. The rent was to escalate over 5 years and the lease was signed at a busy AGM of the D&DAC where it was admitted, it was not read carefully; only the first 2 pages were checked which related to rent and the clause referring to assessments was missed.</p> <p>That lease has now expired and a new lease is being requested from the Board.</p> <p>The Highland Council own the Lower Conon and in 2008 they offered the club the choice of paying either a lower rent plus rates assessment or full rent only; historically the council had paid the assessment. The club decided to go with rent and assessment. This has resulted in the clubs funds being eroded over time as it was anticipated that the assessment would decrease with a revaluation in 2013. JU had spoken to the Assessor that morning and it is now understood that revaluation would not have been until 2015 even if there had not been a moratorium. This meant the Club agreed with the council a rent and assessment that it did not have the correct facts for. The Club now has new young blood coming in and they wish to see the Club succeed.</p> <p>ID explained that he was part of the original meetings and the following was explained at those meeting. The Assessor sets the rates and the Club could have undertaken an appeal at any time during the allowable period, but it did not make an appeal.</p> <p>ID commented that a general re-valuation was invited by CFFB after discussion with some of the members so as to have a fair current assessment for all CFFB owners across all those assessed. 2017 is the earliest that this revaluation could have happened.</p> <p>Rateable values are set by the Assessor and the Board is duty bound to collect the assessed amounts.</p> <p>ID confirmed that the separation of rent and rates was clearly explained at the original meetings and that they would have to be paid separately.</p> <p>JU feels that the D&DAC had been misled by the Highland Council and they now understand the rates were to have been re-valued in 2015 and not 2013 and were further postponed as a result of the moratorium. The D&DAC had budgeted for a reassessment in 2013. The D&DAC has therefore since only</p>	

	<p>paid to CFFB what they believe would have been the correct assessment for the last two years.</p> <p>HC explained that at the first meeting no agreement was made. The second meeting D&DAC believe it was just £500 rent and assessment combined for the year.</p> <p>ID stated that HC's summary was incorrect as why would the Board accept a proposed combined £500 when it previously rejected a combined figure of £1,000. He suggested that this discussion be continued between CFFB and the D&DAC after the main meeting, but wanted those present, the D&DAC and CFFB to be clear on the legal position.</p> <p>Post meeting note. It has been agreed that CFFB will in principal, grant the D&DAC a 10 year lease with an extension option of a further 5 years. The outstanding rent will be paid by the end of February 2017 and the arrears of assessment will be paid back at £1,000 per annum over a period of 3 years. The details remain to be agreed.</p>	
10	AOCB	
	<p>WP explained that there are seals in the river but you are unable to shoot common seals. They are causing too much damage in the river. WP suggested the Board should lobby the Government. AS commented that the Ness Board has the same problem.</p> <p>CM stated that predators need to be controlled if there are going to be any improvements.</p> <p>OM wished to discuss with SM the placing of acoustic bouys; SM to discuss with OM after the meeting.</p> <p>JM enquired as to who has the licence to shoot seals. SM responded that when there was a quota they were shot but the licence is difficult to get. ER stated that there is a safety issue having a high powered rifle at the river. It is difficult to get a safe shot.</p> <p>ID encouraged all members to complete the Beaver reintroduction survey. The survey is called Attitudes Towards Beaver Reintroduction.</p> <p>The meeting closed.</p>	
11	DATE OF NEXT MEETING	
	Friday 30th June at Torr Achilty Power Station.	