

Cromarty Fisheries



THE CROMARTY FIRTH FISHERY BOARD MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PUBLIC MEETING

Held at Torr Achilty on Friday 26th October 2018 at 11.00am

Present		In Attendance	
Ian Duncan (Chairman)	ID	Simon McKelvey (Director)	SM
Alastair Campbell (Vice Chairman)	AC	Edward Rush (Head Bailiff)	ER
Keith Beaton (SEPA)	KB	Chris Blake (Alness Angling Club)	CB
Okain McLennan (Loch Achonachie Angling Club)	OM	Hugh Cushnie (Dingwall & District Angling Club)	HC
Ian Paterson (Netsman)	IP	Stephen Dowds (Loch Achonachie Angling Club)	SD
Christina Pirie (Alness Angling Club)	CP	Lynn Mckelvey (CFFB)	LM
Dave Smith (Evanton Angling Club)	DS	Max Mckinstrie (Fairburn Estate)	MM
Dr Alistair Stephen (SSE)	AS		
John Urquhart (Dingwall & District Angling Club)	JU		
Roddy d'Anyers Willis (Conon Fishing Syndicate)	RW		
Neil Wright (Clerk)	NW		

1	APOLOGIES	Action
	The Earl of Aylesford (Scatwell Estate) Sanders Campbell (Netsman - Docharty) Patrick Creasey (Strathvaich/Lower Blackwater) Susan Dolby (Forestry Commission Scotland) Alex Duncan (CFFT) David Flux (Coul) Ben Leyshon (SNH)	
2	MINUTES OF THE MEETING 29TH June 2018	
	ID opened the meeting and asked, as there were no suggested amendments, if the Board would approve the minutes. RW proposed and AC seconded the minutes, which were adopted as being an accurate record of that meeting.	

3	MATTERS ARISING	
	These were to be dealt with during the meeting.	
4	FINANCIAL UPDATE	
	<p>ID summarised that SM had run a tight budget over the last 5 months and that the Board was running close to pro-rated budget. As of 25th October there was £58,000 in the bank account.</p> <p>ID noted that there had been a Ratings Revaluation and that some proprietors had appealed the proposed values with the District Valuer. Some appeals had proven to be successful and, as a result there would need to be an adjustment to the rate in the £ for 2018/2019 assessments.</p> <p>ID ran through a list of the proprietors who were successful in their appeals and what this meant to the aggregate rateable value for the Board. It resulted in a reduction of £15,400 for the aggregate value, which is 12% of the total for the Board and he cautioned that this shortfall cannot be made up by income from extra contract work. The original aggregate budgeted income had been £116,000 of assessment income, SSE contract work was £93,000 and other contract work was a further £45,000; added together with the Trust-funded work, this equates to £278,000. It would be hard to generate extra income and the Board operates a tight control over costs with very little fat to trim.</p> <p>If assessing the new aggregate value of £114,000 at the original rate in the £ of 90p, the Board's income would drop by £13,860 pa. However, the new assessment values became effective from the 1st of May 2017 and the successful appeals would therefore have to be backdated to that date. This results in a total shortfall for the two years of £27,700, which together with a budgeted deficit of £10,000 for this year would result in a shortfall of £37,700. At a rateable value of £114,000 the Board will need to raise the rate in the £ to £1.20, which will collect £136,800 to cover the shortfall and come close to balancing the budget. This means that many of the successful appellants will not see a large net reduction in assessment this year but they will benefit next year.</p> <p>CB queried why clubs were encouraged to appeal if there was going to be no benefit. ID explained that there will be a net benefit to those that successfully appealed, but as a result of the backdated assessments, all proprietors' need to contribute pro-rata to the shortfall. The Board simply needs to collect the same amount of assessment income, but on a lower base. CB enquired if there could be austerity measures; ID responded that the Board will need to spend more money next year which will be explained later in the meeting but the Board operates a very tight control over costs and SSE have commented that we are one of the most efficient Boards that they deal with. There may be further funds available from SSE for the next fiscal year but until negotiations have been concluded and the budget finalised for next year, it will not be known what level of assessment needs to be set.</p> <p>ID commented that SM has been able to find some extra contract work for this year which should mean the Board is reasonably confident of breaking even with the increased assessment.</p>	

ID commented that due to an AS initiative and working with SM, it was considered likely that the Board may be undercharging SSE for the rechargeable work done on their behalf. A full review took place of the tasks undertaken, the staff involved and the hours required and revised costings were developed. These were reviewed at a meeting ID and SM had with SSE. SSE noted that SM was spending a lot of time engaged on SSE work and part of the resulting negotiations led to SSE requiring an assistant biologist be taken on; this will help SM and reduce the blended hourly charge out rate to SSE. A junior biologist would also assist the Board with succession planning. The revised SSE payment will be designed to more than cover this extra cost. Documentation is yet to be agreed and signed. This will be reported on at the next Board meeting, along with the proposed budget for 2019/2020.

CP enquired why the clubs were having to cover the cost of the rebate. ID responded that the Board can only set one rate in the £ and if a club, or indeed any other ratepayer appealed and their rateable value was reduced, they will pay less but the effective cost of the rebate has to be spread across all proprietors based on their rateable values.

NW ran through an example of the rates for the AAC. CB commented that he understands the need to balance the books but asked why the rates had not reverted to the pre revaluation figures of 2017? ID commented that periodic revaluations are required but this time they were two years late and therefore the club will have benefited from this delay. Each valuation is set based on the catch record from the annual returns made. If the Board had collected too much each year in past years, there might be some fat to trim but the Board has not done this and looking at inflation, the Board has managed to keep within this over the years.

ID noted that SM has been very successful in winning contract work. This year alone SM has been able to find £51,000. This generates income but takes staff away from their normal work. This level of contract wins are not sustainable as contract work can be hard to come by and the Board cannot rely on it going forward.

DS commented that his concern was the ability of his club to pay the assessment, that the appeal has not resulted in a significant reduction and that it has not reduced to the levels prior to the 2017 appeal.

ID reported that, as of the 26th October the provisional river categorisations for 2019 had been released and both the River Conon and the River Alness are category 1 but the River Glass and River Balnagown remain category 3. Hopefully this will help the angling clubs and reverse their falling memberships.

SM commented that for many years the assessment was the main source of income for the Board with SSE matching it; that has now changed and with increased SSE funding and contract work, the assessment is no longer the main element of income. The Board is in the process of looking at applying for funding for angling clubs. AS further commented that SSE has funding available which is community based and which will help rural communities.

	<p>JU enquired if the £100,000 previously put into the Trust could be used to avoid assessment increases. ID responded that the money had been transferred to the Trust and cannot be removed but it will be used for Board projects that meet the Trust's objectives. In recent years the Trust has been paying out more money to the Board than it generates. OM noted that the Trust monies are used for protection of the fish species.</p>	
5	NETTING	
	<p>ID commented that the Scottish Government were committed to reviewing the present coastal netting moratorium by the end of March 2019.</p> <p>IP responded that he has found it difficult to get information from the Scottish Government but it looks likely there will not be coastal netting for at least the next seven years. Compensation will be paid but the levels are likely to be low.</p>	
6	DIRECTOR'S REPORT	
	<p>SM ran through his Director's report and commented that if anyone is not receiving a monthly report, could they please respond in writing to the Clerk. An email was circulated in May to cover the new GDPR rules and if a response was not received, the Board could no longer circulate marketing or monthly reports to the individual concerned.</p> <p>SM mentioned that the Board now has a Twitter feed and the Board's activities can be followed on there.</p> <p>SM continued his summary; there has been a prolonged drought this year and the Spey noted that it was their driest since their records began in the 1930s. Beats dependent on water flow have done very badly this year and it has been a very poor year in general with low grilse numbers combined with a dry summer and this may result in low numbers of fish available for brood stock. SM does not anticipate a good year.</p> <p>The bailiffs have had a very busy summer with 28 people removed from the river for river related offences and a couple of arrests. There has also been further training on the boat to facilitate increased sea patrols.</p> <p>It has been a very busy year for electro-fishing with the Scottish Government's new model for calculating river classifications using electro fishing data. 30 random sites had been chosen for the study which has been implemented across the country. The River Alness has proven to be healthy; however the sites chosen on the Conon are on the Meig as the regulations insisted on electro-fishing sites which were not affected by stocking.</p> <p>The Meig smolt trap project is progressing and SSE have provided the first stage of funding. Strathconon Estate have been seeking quotes for ground works which should be received shortly in order to allow preparatory work to commence. It is hoped that the main installation will be started in February/March.</p>	

	<p>SM commented that LM has done a lot of work with the schools project and he wished to thank the angling clubs for their help with running the angling days. The Scottish Government have provided funding for junior angling, which is being channelled through FMS and will help create angling development plans. This will also help to open up greater funding for angling and it is hoped that some of these funds will filter back to the clubs.</p> <p>Woodland restoration project fishery management is a long term process and, if there was ever a need for shade from riparian planting it was this year. The Board has been working for a number of years to increase riparian planting and there is permission to continue this work within the Forestry Commission estate. A funding bid has been put together that will be submitted to the Woodland Trust and SNH would also be interested in helping with funding. The Forestry Commission has provided a polytunnel for small scale planting.</p> <p>The Board is one of six chosen to trial a new fishery management plan template and map all the pressures on fisheries in the region. This has now been completed.</p> <p>The nutrient project is continuing and the latest analysis has shown that there is a fivefold increase in the treated areas where salmon cannot get to or do not die naturally. There is a fivefold increase in biomass in invertebrates available to salmon, a doubling in biomass in salmon fry and a doubling in the biomass of salmon parr the following year. Compared with untreated areas, the juveniles are bigger and more parr are likely to smolt and earlier.</p> <p>Looking ahead to next year, there is a PHD student who is going to be comparing the migration of smolts through two branches of the Alness system and this will be carried out across three years. A second PHD student will be looking at the effects of catch and release on salmon and fry produced by those salmon.</p> <p>SM noted that the Board is coming to the end of the first year of the Scottish Invasive Species Initiative and this allowed the Board to take on an additional member of staff; the funding is over £20,000 a year. LM has done a lot of work to recruit a network of volunteers.</p> <p>The Atlantic Salmon Trust smolt tracking project in the Moray Firth is progressing and they have raised £853,000 towards the aim of reaching £1,000,000. This project will start next March. The Board has a specific part to play as the release of smolts will be studied to see if releasing them at night or during the day makes a difference to their survival. Smolts migrate naturally at night.</p>	
7	HYDRO REPORT	
	<p>AS commented that SSE does not have an obligation to assist with financing for the Meig smolt trapping project because the rivers are achieving required levels, however other areas are not and this project is an experiment which could be rolled out more generally. It is a large investment for SSE and there is a good relationship with the Estate and the Board. As a one-off the equipment alone would cost £180,000 but AS has managed to negotiate that the costs will be reduced to £45,000 due to it being a trial site that could have far wider management implications, plus the survey work which was a</p>	

	<p>further £10,000.</p> <p>There was a general discussion regarding the Orrin and why the Meig had been chosen. The main reason is that the Meig has better access to support a trial. AS noted that the Orrin has been downgraded to red on the SEPA map and they are giving SSE time to look at this project as a way of improving the Orrin, along with best technologies for trapping smolts.</p> <p>AS commented that angling clubs might be able to secure funding through the sustainable development fund which has been set up by SSE's onshore wind development unit with some offshore funding. This fund has come about to provide a strategic fund outside the community wind farm funding structure which is very location based.</p> <p>AS noted that SSE has never counted as few fish going up the Conon as this year; the fish numbers are a third or a quarter of what they have been in the past with that average being around one thousand fish over the last few years. The number of fish going through Pitlochry dam has also been very poor. The Mark 12 counters have now been installed and are working, however there are some teething problems with the software and the raw data and this should change shortly.</p> <p>AS commented that some of the Conon CAR licences may need to be amended and AS will go over this with SM and KB.</p>	
8	TRUST REPORT	
	<p>ID noted that the Trust Chairman was unable to attend the meeting but he had provided a report to read out.</p> <p>Despite the volatility in the stock market which is being experienced primarily due to Brexit uncertainties, Trump and trade wars, etc, the shares have been relatively stable as the Trust looks for safe investments. The income to the Trust is around £12,000 a year and this equates to approximately a 4% yield. As of the 8th of October the market value of the fund was just under £400,000 against an original cost of investment of just under £300,000 which is a 34% increase over the life of the investments.</p> <p>At the last meeting it was noted that there were two vacancies on the Trust due to the death of Ken Howie and George Cameron wishing to retire from his position as a Trustee. At the Trustees meeting in June, Andrew Matheson retired as Chairman but remains a Trustee and Alex Duncan became Chairman. From that meeting invitations were made to two people to become Trustees and DS and CP agreed to be Trustees. There is a third invitation out to Scott Ramsay but he has been proving difficult to contact.</p> <p>POST MEETING NOTE. Scott Ramsay has agreed to become a Trustee, meaning that there will be a balance between Conon and Alness interests</p>	
9	RIVER CATEGORISATION	
	<p>Covered earlier in the meeting.</p>	

10	CONSERVATION POLICY	
	<p>ID explained that there will still be two conservation policies as the rivers Glass and Balnagown remain category 3 but the Conon and Alness are both Category 1.</p> <p>ID proposed that the conservation policies remain the same from 2018 and members of category 1 rivers only catch 2 fish in the season, with the same restrictions on the weekly tickets. It is hoped that all proprietors would adopt the Board's conservation policies. A draft policy will be circulated shortly after the Board meeting.</p> <p>CP enquired if tags would be required again. ID responded that if the Board's conservation policy is adopted by all, then there would be no proposal for tagging this year.</p> <p>OM noted that the proposals will need to be taken back to the respective angling club committee meetings. ID responded that the offer still stands for ID and SM to attend angling club AGMs to explain the conservation policy and the need for a reduced number of fish being kept. SM further commented that it may be very beneficial if he could explain the status of the salmon stocks to the memberships. If the Board has another year like 2018 then there will be no surplus fish to be killed. The Board and its proprietors have a moral obligation to look after the fish stocks and the proprietors should not rely upon Government to impose catch and release.</p>	
11	JUNIOR ANGLING	
	<p>LM ran through a presentation on junior angling and commented that she has been to 23 schools out of 25 in the Board's catchment in the last six years. Funding was received from the Moray Firth Trout Initiative for the mayfly project set up by LM; this funding enabled equipment to be purchased and LM uses the wild trout education resources to deliver the mayfly project into the classroom. Out of the 23 schools covered, there are 15 that are visited on a regular basis.</p> <p>Some areas covered by LM include salmon life cycle, tree planting, non-native invasive species, litter picking and the John Muir Award, a national conservation award, and LM has worked with three schools to achieve their John Muir Awards. Also included is bush craft and this is used during the angling experience days.</p> <p>Part of the mayfly project includes taking children to their local river or burn and some schools have now adopted their local burns or stretches of their rivers. Risk assessments and pre-site visits are all carried out prior to a school visit; if the river is in spate then the visit is postponed until a safer time.</p> <p>The children learn about invertebrates and river flies when out on site visits and how the interaction between all the species works, such as the food chain and habitats. The invertebrates are taken back to the classroom, separated out into their different groups and aquariums are made from plastic bottles so that the children can monitor the invertebrates. When the invertebrates hatch they are released back into the local burn.</p>	

	<p>The first school session is classroom based learning, the second session is a visit to the local burn or river and the third session is making a collage of their river and noting what pressures might be on the river from forestry to agriculture and other variables.</p> <p>LM noted that on going into the classroom it was apparent that not many children had ever gone to the river or played around it and when asked if they wished to go fishing they were all very enthusiastic. From the Fairburn Wind Farm Fund funding was secured to take school trips out for angling days and it allowed angling equipment to be purchased, including the hire of lochs and travel.</p> <p>During the angling day there are three sessions: angling, bait fishing and electro fishing, with bush craft at the end.</p> <p>For two years it was just primary school visit but Dingwall Academy had organised a sports fair at which LM was invited to take a stand. Due to the large support for the angling visits, it was decided to set up a junior angling club and at the Dingwall Academy sports fair 30 names were put down, although only a handful of these turned up to the first angling club day. The local angling clubs have been very helpful and hopefully children will become enthused by the club members and will eventually join their local clubs. Interestingly, many adults joined their children on the angling days and this may be another avenue to explore with adults getting back into angling.</p> <p>On behalf of the Board, ID wished to thank LM for setting up the project and getting the next generation out angling; it has been a great success.</p> <p>LM commented that over the last two years there have been over 200 children attending the junior angling club days. SM noted that they have been successful in getting funding for all the venue hires so the only cost to the Board is staff time.</p>	
12	MAPPING OF FISHING RIGHTS	
	<p>ID commented that NW and his team have been mapping the CFFB district ownership structure as it has never been fully understood as to who owns what, whether there are gaps or overlaps and if any Fishings are not being assessed.</p> <p>NW commented that the Board holds a valuation roll which the Board is obliged to hold as part of the legislation governing DSFBs. The list is updated with any sale of Fishings and the District Valuer is informed. The present roll is decades old and updated periodically, however, it is not map based and some of the descriptions could not easily be matched up physically with the sections of Fishings. There was also a worry that the roll may not be accurate if not map based.</p> <p>Late in 2017 a map book was issued to all proprietors and tenants who were asked to complete as much information as possible before returning it. This information, together with titles and information available to Galbraith were used to prepare an ownership map of the CFFB district. The mapping is around 80% - 90% complete but the last section will most likely be the hardest to identify the correct ownerships and therefore complete the project.</p> <p>As a result of the mapping there have been a number of proprietors identified who should be placed on the valuation roll. Historically they</p>	

	<p>will have been excluded as they mainly own spawning grounds but all fishing rights should be registered whether used or not. NW noted that even with a number of proprietors being added to the roll, this is unlikely to create significant additional assessment income for the Board.</p>	
11	AOCB	
	<p>ID noted that the Board depends on SM a great deal and the Board would not function without him. There is concern regarding SM's and ER's workload.</p> <p>SM notified the Board that he has recently been diagnosed with bowel cancer and will be undergoing surgery in mid-November. ID commented that more support will be required within the Board to assist and all members should aim to help where they can.</p> <p>CB responded that he spoke for all at the meeting and wished SM well.</p> <p>AS noted that SSE have a few staff who can assist while SM is recuperating.</p> <p>OM noted that the LAA are looking at installing some pontoons and also commented that five of the club's boats were recently washed over the dam during high levels of water, leading to an interesting insurance claim.</p> <p>CP suggested that the angling clubs should agree amongst themselves the number of fish to be retained. The AAC will likely agree two fish but the other clubs will need to agree similarly to be fair on all clubs and members. ID noted that the Board would support this process but noted that the Board has no power to mandate such matters and that the clubs would need to reach agreement between themselves. SM noted that the easiest option would be to agree the Board's policy.</p> <p>IP noted that due to the extension of the prohibition on coastal netting for a further seven years, there was no need for him to be on the Board and he wished to resign as a Board member. The Board cautioned against his resignation and commented generally that netting has been an important part of the Board for many years and IP brings a wealth of information and history. Despite this, IP resigned and the Board wished him well. SM noted that the Board meetings are always open should IP wish to attend in future.</p> <p>SM wished to thank the local angling clubs for all their help with the junior angling days and hoped that next year will be a similar success.</p> <p>NW reminded Board members to return their Declaration of Financial Interests as soon as they can.</p> <p>ID declared the meeting closed.</p>	
12	DATE OF NEXT MEETING	
	Friday 28 th June 2019 at Torr Achilty Power Station.	