

Cromarty Fisheries



THE CROMARTY FIRTH FISHERY BOARD MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PUBLIC MEETING

Held at Torr Achilty on Friday 25th October 2019 at 11.00am

Present		In Attendance	
Ian Duncan (Chairman)	ID	Troels Bavnhøj (Strathconon)	TB
Alastair Campbell (Vice Chairman)	AC	Chris Blake (Alness Angling Club)	CB
Keith Beaton (SEPA)	KB	Charlotte Hingston (Fairburn Estate)	CH
Okain McLennan (Loch Achonachie Angling Club)	OM	Andrew Matheson (Brahan Estate)	AM
Ronald Munro Fergusson (Novar Estate)	RM	John Macdonald (Member of the Public)	JM
William Patterson (Netsman)	WP	Iain McMyn (SSE)	IM
Christina Pirie (Alness Angling Club)	CP	Edward Rush (CFFB)	ER
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) Dave Smith (Evanton Angling Club) Rob Whitson (Fairburn Estate)	
2	CONFLICT OF INTEREST DECLARATION	Action
	ID ran through the general premise of "conflict" and noted that a conflict is not simply a financial interest but there also exists the potential for conflict where a Board member is also a Trustee of the CFFT. Whilst there is no justification for any immediate changes, when future Trustee vacancies arise, consideration should be given to identifying suitable candidates who are not on the Board. Keith Beaton noted a conflict as he was processing Kildermorie Estate's peatland restoration application, submitted by ID.	
2	MINUTES OF THE MEETING 29TH JUNE 2018	
	OM queried item 7 under the minutes and noted that there had been a statement regarding a loss of £15,000 due to an ex-gratia payment. He considered that there should have been no loss on that payment as it was to come out of unpaid salary and the sale of the Balintore Bothy. ID responded that as the Bothy had been sold at its book value, there was neither profit nor loss. Regarding the ex-gratia payment, the savings in salary and related costs were largely offset by incremental payments for the extra services provided by the Clerk; the one-off payment was highlighted as it was the one exceptional payment during the year. RW noted that under item 11, he would suggest a change in wording to state that the Meig project had been successful. AS responded that there are two separate elements; one being the acoustic barrier and the other the trapping and trucking. Only the latter proved to be successful with 5,500 smolts captured. The minutes of the previous meeting were then approved.	
3	MATTERS ARISING	
	ID wished to express his sadness at the unexpected and premature passing of Tony Donnelly. Although Tony had only been Director of the Board for a short time, he had settled in well and was full of enthusiasm and ideas. It will be very hard to replace him. Death in Service insurance had been introduced after the passing of Simon McKelvey and this insurance policy will provide some financial comfort to Tony's family.	
4	FINANCIAL UPDATE	
	ID summarised the accounts to the end of September. Even though it would appear that the Board is running at a surplus, this is a function of timing as the Board collects the majority of its income at the start of the year and draws it down to cover expenditure over the course of the fiscal year. There is just over £200,000 in the bank as at 25 th October. There have been savings against the salary budget as we had planned that there should by now be a biologist in place, plus it is unlikely that there will be a new Director until next year. However, there will be greater expenditure on professional fees to continue to run the Board and to hire-in expertise from the Kyle of Sutherland Board who will assist with broodstock collection.	

	<p>AS commented that SSE have paid over the contracted funds to the Board but some aspects of the agreed workload were not being carried out as, for instance, there was no biologist in place. AS cautioned that the money so released should be spent wisely and preferably on SSE mitigations such as smolt tagging and trapping.</p> <p>CB enquired about the assessment refund noted in the forecast. NW responded that it was the result of late, successful appeals of rateable revaluations and subsequent partial refunds.</p> <p>ID stated that the Board operates an April financial year-end for no identifiable reason. He noted that SSE operates to the end of March. If the Board were to change to the same year-end date it would assist SSE in ensuring the £165,000 annual payment to the Board was received in a timely manner.</p> <p>It was agreed that the Board should change its fiscal year-end from the extant 30th April to a new annual date of 31st March, with this being effected by operating an eleven-month year to 31st March 2020.</p>	
5	PRIORITISATION OF WORK AND BOARD STRUCTURE	
	<p>ID noted that at the time of advertising for Tony's position as Director there was a very small pool of people who had both the expertise to do the job and willingness to move to the Highlands, meaning that very few applications were received. We therefore have to accept that it may not be possible to find a Director in the same mould as Simon and Tony. ID suggested that neighbouring Boards could co-operate to greater effect; for instance, the Board itself does not have sufficient qualified staff in the short-term to safely manage and undertake such tasks as broodstock collection.</p> <p>CP enquired if the collaboration could lead to stocking of fish on the Alness. ID responded that it would not, as the collaboration would not mean any changes in Board policies – contracted staff would provide advice where sought.</p> <p>OM suggested that undertaking a study to ascertain the number of smolts coming out of the Alness might be a worthwhile exercise. AS noted that Sunny Bradbury, a PHD student, had been looking at tracking smolts in the Alness and how different sections fared, but extreme circumstances (unusually low water and then spate conditions) caused the project to be abandoned this year, but he hopes to look at it again in 2020. RM noted that there have been various studies on the Alness over the years and they have shown that there are healthy populations of fry and parr but he would welcome a smolt study.</p> <p>ID commented that FMS are requesting information on possible fish counter locations and if anyone has any suggested locations they should to let the Clerk know.</p> <p>NW comment that the Board is about to enter a very busy period with broodstock collection at Loch na Croic and hatchery operations. Loch na Croic is due to receive some investment from SSE and the Board. The water supply requires attention and the Board is looking at a remote alarm and camera system should the water supply fail through blockages etc.</p>	

	<p>The Kyle of Sutherland Board has agreed to provide 2 people a day for 4 days a week to assist with the trap at Loch na Croic; this will allow a rotation so that everyone gets their days off.</p> <p>AS noted that Loch na Croic has had its annual health and safety audit. NW commented that the Board is reviewing its own health and safety procedures for Loch na Croic.</p> <p>There followed a general discussion about employment and trying to source another Director.</p>	
6	ACTIVITIES UPDATE	
	<p>NW ran through the activities report and noted that junior angling days were carried out again this year with an average of 15 children per session. The Board wished to thank the local angling clubs for their assistance. There were less junior angling days this summer due to poor weather.</p> <p>The Board again carried out work for the Scottish Government by electrofishing 30 sites. This was on a contract basis which generated £14,000. This involved a considerable amount of work as most of the sites are not easily accessible.</p> <p>The Missing Salmon Project has completed its work for the year on the Conon and the receivers have now been retrieved. The receivers in the Conon were retrieved later than other rivers and so preliminary data is not yet available but hopefully an update can be circulated by January.</p> <p>A successful meeting with Dalmore Distillery was organised by the Clerk and the weir on the Alness is going to be surveyed and proposals put forward to improve conditions for fish passage.</p> <p>A riparian planting project is being carried out by UHI and they hope to make an application to the SSE Sustainable Development Fund by January. This would provide funding for a project officer.</p> <p>TB enquired if the Meig counter was working. AS responded that he is investigating, however he noted that Luichart and Torr Achilty are working but cautioned that Torr Achilty may need attention. TB also enquired about previous discussions regarding hot water from the distilleries being discharged into the Alness. CB noted that there was no major breach in the CAR licences and it all seems to be within allowable limits.</p> <p>ER noted that there is a sawbill licence for the CFFB district but the number allowed to be controlled is low.</p> <p>There have been a few local issues with illegal fishing but on the whole it has been relatively quiet.</p>	
7	HYDRO REPORT	
	<p>AS commented that the majority of the work had been commented on earlier in the meeting but he highlighted that the hatchery water supply continues to cause problems. However, a solution may have been found which might result in the need for a new pipe. An acceptable flow has been calculated for the hatchery this year which should prevent the pipe from air locking. Diesel generators will also be on standby.</p>	

	<p>Smolt trapping is a major mitigation exercise on the Achanalt and smolt numbers are diminishing, therefore the Meig project has become more important.</p> <p>The Orrin is also an area of concern and needs consideration. In previous years, when there were sufficient eggs in the hatchery, the excess would be planted above the Orrin reservoir, but fish are not able to easily get back up and large numbers of smolts were lost migrating out of the reservoir. This cycle is not sustainable. AS noted SSE is wishing to look at creating improved spawning habitat in the river below the Orrin dam. Upstream would require trapping and trucking but a run of fish would have to be kick started again as there are no juveniles present.</p> <p>SSE needs to review all rivers within the Conon catchment and look at how the hatchery is used, what is working, what issues are seen for fish migration and what can be done to improve matters. AS intends to set up a working group to review.</p> <p>A general discussion was had regarding the Orrin and smolt passage through the district and WP suggested that a tour of the Conon hydro catchment would be helpful to understand the issues. There was general approval of the idea but it was accepted that this would take two days to do.</p> <p>RW enquired about the Borland lift on the Orrin. AS commented that 3 of the lifts pass water but do not lift as the bypass valves do not work and it would potentially cost a million pounds to refurbish them, It was accepted that, in any event at present there are no fish to go up the lift.</p>	
8	TRUST REPORT	
	<p>ID noted that the Trust Chairman was unable to attend the meeting but he had prepared a report to be read out.</p> <p>The Trust was revalued as at 16th October and the capital value at that time was £406,000. The investments are chosen to be insulated against market volatility in order to protect the value of the fund.</p> <p>The income for the year was forecast to be up to £12,500.</p> <p>ID then suggested that this year the Board might itself take on the outstanding cost of the Meig project of £16,000 and also absorb the budgeted staff costs for the junior angling and riparian project of £5,000 in order to both usefully use the available surplus funds previously discussed but also to not make a call this year on the investable funds protected within the Trust..</p> <p>There was a general discussion regarding the Board taking on specific Trust commitments this year and it was decided that a final decision should be taken before the year-end as the Board's surplus may be required for SSE mitigation work and funds required for net capital items.</p> <p>The Board generally discussed the possibility of buying a new rotary screw trap instead of paying for Trust projects which would put money to good use, even though this would not impact the P&L. This will form part of the ongoing review of the future of the Meig project.</p>	

	<p>OM queried the letter written by the Chairman to all Proprietors suggesting that they might make gifts or leave bequests in wills in favour of the Trust and suggested that it should not have been signed by him as Chairman of the Board. A lively exchange ensued ending with RM summarising that the concept of endeavouring to generate funds for the Trust was a noble one and that it had been done with the best of intent. However it might have been better if the request had been made by ID as an individual and not as Chairman of the Board. ID did not agree, but accepted that, if that was the view of the majority of the Board, then he should apologise for the technical oversight.</p>	
9	NETTING	
	<p>WP noted that the original 3 year moratorium on coastal netting has now finished but the Scottish Government intends to increase the moratorium for another 7 years. The compensation proposed by the Government would be a tenth of what has been paid covering the last 3 years. The netsmen are worried about their livelihoods and loss of traditional skills, not to mention loss of value for the heritable assets involved.</p> <p>ID noted that come November, the rents for the leased netting stations which are owned by the Board would be reinstated as netsmen will be receiving some compensation income. The Board, however agreed to delay implementing the rent demands to see if netsmen are able to negotiate more reasonable levels of compensation from the Scottish Government.</p>	
11	AOCB	
	<p>AM noted that he had been approached about a pike fishing study whereby the density of pike could be recorded by catching and fly tagging the fish. ID suggested that a written proposal to the proprietors who own the sections of river being proposed would be sensible. AS did not have any concerns. The Board generally discussed the use of dead bait as there was a differing opinion on its use and the accidental capture of salmon. The Board suggested that this proposed project might use dead bait cautiously during the closed season for salmon.</p> <p>ID noted that this was RW's last meeting and thanked him for all his input over the years. RW commented that he enjoyed his involvement with the Board, which started back in 1985.</p> <p>JM presented findings from his observations on the River Glass and the loss of gravel which has washed down the river and the impact this has on salmon spawning grounds and laid eggs. He suggested that this may have been caused by hydrolisation on the river. JM further discussed the practicalities of spawning salmon in larger cobbles and the issues of large spates on egg loss. KB responded that SEPA are investigating the hydro schemes on the River Glass and noted that Loch Glass has a big impact on the available water. ID enquired if the Board could assist, KB suggested that work is being done on this and the two parties speak to each other but a formal request could be made. ID suggested that if SEPA were investigating, there was no need to formalise it from the Board's point of view.</p> <p>There followed a general discussion regarding spate rivers and loss of habitat and eggs.</p>	

	<p>ID suggested an earlier meeting for next year to reflect the change of year-end previously agreed, to go over year-end accounts and budgets.</p> <p>He also announced that there are no changes proposed to the Conservation Policies for 2020 from those operative for 2019.</p>	
12	DATE OF NEXT MEETINGS	
	Friday 1 st May 2020 at Torr Achilty Power Station.	