

**THE CONON DISTRICT SALMON FISHERY BOARD  
T/A CROMARTY FIRTH FISHERY BOARD  
PROPRIETORS MEETING**

**Thursday 25th March 2021  
Video Conference, 10:00am**

<b>Present</b>		<b>In Attendance</b>	
Col Alastair Campbell (Chairman & Fairburn Fishing Syndicate)	AC	Ross Glover (Fisheries Manager)	RG
Ronald Munro Ferguson (Vice Chairman & Novar Estate)	RMF	Ben Seaman (Fisheries Biologist)	BS
Troels Bavnhoj (Kirkbi Estates)	TB	Edward Rush (Operations Manager)	ER
The Earl of Aylesford (Scatwell Estate)	EA	Andrew Easton (Alness Angling Club)	AE
Keith Beaton (SEPA)	KB	Charlotte Hingston (Fairburn Estate)	CH
Ian Duncan (Kildermorie Estate)	ID	Claire Macdonald (Galbraith)	CM
Peter Graham (Conon Fishing Syndicate)	PG	Rachel Urquhart (Galbraith)	RU
Okain McLennan (Loch Achonachie Angling Club)	OM		
William Paterson (Netsman)	WP		
Christina Pirie (Alness Angling Club)	CP		
Dave Smith (Evanton Angling Club)	DS		
Dr. Alastair Stephen (SSE)	AS		
John Urquhart (Dingwall & District Angling Club)	JU		
Neil Wright (Galbraith Clerk)	NW		

<b>1</b>	<b>APOLOGIES/ WELCOME</b>	<b>Action</b>
	<p>The following apologies were made:</p> <p>Piers Cumberlege Andrew Matheson</p> <p>AC welcomed the Board to the second video conference meeting and ran over some video call etiquette for the meeting.</p>	
<b>2</b>	<b>CONFLICT OF INTEREST DECLARATIONS</b>	
	<p>AC noted that Conflict of Interest declarations had been issued to Board members and these should be completed and returned to the clerk. AC asked NW to run through what a conflict of interest was in terms of the Board. NW outlined the main points that had been provided to Board members in the accompanying guidance for the Conflict of Interest form and noted that gifts was also an area Board members needed to be aware of, and the implications of bribery.</p>	

<b>3</b>	<b>MINUTES OF THE MEETING, 22nd OCTOBER 2020</b>	
	There were no amendments to the minutes and they were proposed by OM and seconded by ID.	
<b>4</b>	<b>MATTERS ARISING</b>	
	<p>AC noted the following items as matters arising.</p> <p>Item 6 in the previous minutes mentioned the legal agreement with SSE for the Boards contract work. AS commented that the SSE legal team had outsourced this work and progress was being made and it was hoped a draft could be circulated shortly.</p> <p>Item 11 mentioned that PG would share research information on predation with the Board and AC wished to thank him again for this offer.</p>	
<b>5</b>	<b>FINANCE UPDATE</b>	
	<p>a. <u>Management accounts to the 28<sup>th</sup> February 2020</u></p> <p>NW ran through the latest monthly accounts and noted that the Board should break-even for the year. This is the ideal scenario, because unlike a normal trading business, there is no requirement for a surplus.</p> <p>There have been changes over the course of the year as a result of the reduced assessment. As reported at the October Meeting a new pickup truck was purchased due to careful planning, savings on items that could not be purchased because of COVID, and an increase in contract work.</p> <p>The £50,000 Reserve which the Board retains as an overdraft will be intact for the Financial Year.</p> <p>b. <u>Budget &amp; Assessment rate for the year to 30<sup>th</sup> March 2021</u></p> <p>AC wished to highlight some changes to expenditure from previous years. The Galbraith management fee will be increasing from its position 3 years ago. The Galbraith fee has actually reduced for the coming year as a result of the increased work over the last two year, although it is up on 3 years ago.</p> <p>Capital expenditure for the year includes new drone equipment and a new vehicle to continue the renewal programme of vehicles. ID enquired if drone training has been budgeted. NW confirmed that there was a provision for training.</p> <p>CP enquired about council tax being paid for Loch na Croic. NW responded that the bothy was a Board owned asset and as it was suitable for accommodation it has not been possible to change it to non-domestic rates.</p> <p>EA enquired about the level of contract work as it seemed high. RG responded that the figures in the budget were middle of the road and it was likely the Board would do better than this, however, the other funding sources were too unknown at this time to be relied upon for the budget.</p>	

	AC asked for members to propose the budget, RMF proposed and OM seconded.	
<b>6</b>	<b>FISHERIES MANAGER UPDATE</b>	
	<p>RG noted that a fishery manager's report had been circulated prior to the meeting and only a high level summary would be provided today.</p> <p>The Loch na Croic trap opened earlier than normal and a second trap was recommissioned after 40 year. As a result of a combination of factors the number of fish caught was significantly up on previous years. As the fish were being caught earlier they were also being treated to reduce any fungal infection.</p> <p>The Ghillies from the River Conon were a great help and the Board wished to thank them and their employers for allowing them the time to help.</p> <p>1.5 million eggs were eventually laid down in the hatchery. Some processes changed for the fertilisation to follow best practice, all eggs were put out into the river as eyed ova.</p> <p>The historic Blackwater egg target has been 1 million eggs, however, a reassessment is underway and it might be that a quarter less eggs are needed.</p> <p>For the coming year the Meig smolt capture will proceed again and the aim is to capture, tag and release 3,500 with some being released at night and some during the date, this will hopefully determine if there is an increase in survival rates for either group.</p> <p>There is a proposed project to re-meander the River Peffery in parts, the Board has been consulted and there may be extra contract work available for fish capture.</p> <p>Bailiffing has been relatively quiet over the last period, although the teams have been out with patrols and liaison with Police Scotland. There have been two fiscal fines for two separate individuals.</p> <p>OM enquired if there was funding available for predation. RG responded that he was aware of funding via DSFB and Trusts, there is a Moray Firth group looking specifically at this. OM commented that there are large numbers of perch in Loch Meig and they may be taking large numbers of smolts. RG and OM agreed to continue discussions after the meeting.</p> <p>DS enquired if the electrofishing program for the Allt Graad would proceed this year as planned. RG noted that the programme would proceed and it was a large program of work which would give a very good indication of the health of the river and the stocking density.</p> <p>WP ask if electrofishing harmed the smolts navigational systems and would this affect the numbers going to sea or coming back. RG responded that no known research has been carried out and this was a very good point. RG further noted that the total number of juvenile fish being electro fished was very small in comparison to the rivers output.</p>	

	<p>PG suggested that the Board needs to consider the wider role of bailiffs and staff, most other Boards are considering this due to cost and changing remits. NW noted that the bailiffs were now fishery officers and their main work was supporting the Boards objectives. The Board proceeded to discuss the work of fishery officers and enforcement.</p>	
<b>7</b>	<b>HYDRO REPORT</b>	
	<p>AS noted that a report has already been circulated but it was worth highlighting a few points.</p> <p>Work is being carried out on the weir at Loch na Cran, this feeds the water supply to the hatchery. Work is programmed for the summer.</p> <p>SSE is very pleased with the result of the Loch na Croic trapping and hatchery work and would like to support the changes for coming year.</p> <p>As a result of the improved egg numbers in the hatchery it will now be possible to start stocking the lower Orrin to kick start a run of fish. Spawning fords are still being discussed and there is a time frame of 3 year to have them installed prior to fish returning. Around 250,000 eggs will be stocked out on the Orrin in 2021. The proposal would be to create a number of spawning fords between the falls and the Orrin dam. At present this area does not have any natural spawning beds. The water flows are controlled from the dam and artificial spawning fords should do well. It is hoped that gravel for these beds could be sourced on site or from the bottom of the River Orrin.</p> <p>DS enquired about the Orrin spawning fords and whether the gravel will be washed out and is there an ongoing cost. AS responded that the gravel will eventually wash down stream but as the Orrin dam does not spill and it releases a reasonably constant amount of water it would be rare for there to be a large event that would destroy the fords. There will be an ongoing cost to replace or top up the fords with gravel and SSE would meet this cost.</p> <p>Plans are still being prepared for a demountable wolf trap on the Upper Orrin and the River Meig, survey work had been postponed due to COVID but once restrictions are lifted this work will proceed</p> <p>The Mark 12 fish counters are still not working as well as would be expected and they appear to be undercounting by about 25%. The problem is being discussed and a solution is being sought. TB noted that the scientific work on the Meig is being hampered due to the poor performance of the counters. AS commented that SSE is try to resolve the issue.</p>	
<b>8</b>	<b>TRUST REPORT</b>	
	<p>OM noted that the Trust report had previously been circulated but there has been no activity in 2020, as at October the trust had 419,000 in holdings.</p> <p>OM commented that a Trustees meeting would be convened shortly and the Trust was open to investing in the Meig wolf trap.</p>	
<b>9</b>	<b>NETTING</b>	
	<p>WP noted that there is still no coastal netting permitted and the only way to gauge salmon numbers was by rod &amp; line and fish counters. WP made an open offer to the Management Committee to visit Balintore to be shown the netting</p>	

	stations and what used to happen. AC thanked WP for the offer and would like to take him up on it.	
<b>10</b>	<b>AOCB</b>	
	<p>AE commented on the Alness weir works from last year, boulders appear to have moved during winter spates and this should be monitored. The level of the pool appears to have lowered as a result. RG responded that he would have a look and if any members had photos of before the work that would be very helpful. RMF commented that Novar Estate used to build up the boulders in the past and it was a constant battle and it is very difficult to keep the level of the pool up. CP suggested that AAC members could be invited to any meeting with Dalmore Distillery.</p> <p>RMF noted that if the diseased fish come back to the River Alness this year then there is now a plan to deal with them and dispose of the fish.</p> <p>NW reminded all Board members to return their Conflicts of Interest forms.</p>	
<b>11</b>	<b>DATE OF NEXT MEETING</b>	
	Provisionally set for the 15 <sup>th</sup> of October 2021 but to be confirmed at a later date.	