



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

**Thursday 15th October 2021
Contin Community Hall, 11:00am**

Present		In Attendance	
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
Peter Graham (Conon Fishing Syndicate)	PG	Andrew Matheson	AM
Okain McLennan (Loch Achonachie Angling Club)	OM	Rob Whitson (Fairburn Estate)	RW
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		

1	APOLOGIES/ WELCOME	Action
	<p>The following apologies were made:</p> <p>The Earl of Aylesford (Scatwell Estate) Keith Beaton (SEPA) Piers Cumberlage (Allt Graad) Ian Duncan (Kildermorie Estate) Andrew Easton (Alness Angling Club) David Flux (Coul) Charlotte Hingston (Fairburn Estate) William Paterson (Netsman) William Skinner (Netsman)</p>	
2	CONFLICT OF INTEREST DECLARATIONS	
	AC requested that any new conflicts of interest be declared which may have arisen since the last meeting. No interests were declared by the members.	
3	MINUTES OF THE MEETING, 22nd OCTOBER 2020	
	There were no amendments to the minutes and they were proposed by OM and seconded by RMF.	
4	MATTERS ARISING	
	AC noted that the matters arising would be dealt with during the meeting.	
	RW enquired about the Orrin project and how far along this was. AS responded	

	<p>that 200,000 eggs had been planted out in the lower Orrin in 2021 and they have until 2024 before these eggs Smolt and go to sea; the earliest fish will return is 2025. It is the intention of SSE for the artificial spawning beds to be created in 2022 or 2023 with SEPA consultation ongoing.</p>	
5	<p>FINANCE UPDATE</p> <p><u>Financial Year End 2021</u> NW ran over the financial statement for the year end. The Board managed to retain its reserve of £50,000.</p> <p>The assessment was reduced in 2020. As a result, the assessment income dropped to £57,000 compared with £101,000 the previous year.</p> <p>The Board's income for the year was £254,000 compared with £317,000 for the previous year. The Board collected more income than budgeted due to a larger contract work load than expected.</p> <p>Expenditure was in the region of £242,000 compared with £292,000 the previous year. This left the Board with almost £11,000 surplus. It must be noted that these are profit and loss accounts and depreciation has been taken into account.</p> <p><u>Year to date (October 2021)</u> The Board's finances are looking healthy as extra income is due to be received. This has been as a result of extra contract income which had not been budgeted. For example, the National Electrofishing Programme for Scotland (NEPS) was looking very unlikely due to COVID at the start of the financial year but it received funding late and the programme proceeded; this on its own amounted to £15,100. In total there will be around £26,000 of extra income from electrofishing work and fish rescues.</p> <p>The extra income will allow the Board to catch up on capital expenditure, which was delayed due to COVID, and there will be around £12,000 spent on tools, drones, binoculars, thermal imaging handsets and vehicle improvements. This will bring the Board's equipment up to date.</p> <p>Further funds will be used to progress with the Board's Voluntary Registration. This process captures all the land and property owned by the Board and registers it with Registers of Scotland. This will safeguard the Board's ownership from any boundary disputes or incorrect registration or sale of competing ownership titles.</p> <p>PG enquired about the assessment level for 2022 and whether it was likely to change. NW responded that it was too early to say at this stage but the intention was to keep the assessment level consistent rather than fluctuate.</p>	
6	<p>FISHERIES MANAGER UPDATE</p> <p>RG noted that a Fishery Manager's report had been circulated prior to the meeting and he would be happy to answer questions on it.</p> <p>The discussion moved on to the Allt Graad report.</p> <p>RG noted that the report identified that the Allt Graad is a very healthy river which has a higher density of juvenile fish compared with the national</p>	

	<p>benchmark for such rivers.</p> <p>DS commented that it was a good report and it was valuable in understanding the river but this report showed that the river should be classed as 1 rather than 3 by the Scottish Government. Although there are good juvenile stock levels, there are low numbers of fishing being caught and this is also down to water levels and fishing effort.</p> <p>There was a general discussion regarding river grading and the source of the data for the grades.</p> <p>AC noted that the Board would continue to monitor the Allt Graad along with the other rivers within the catchment.</p>	
7	HYDRO REPORT	
	<p>AS noted that a report has already been circulated but it was worth highlighting a few points.</p> <p>SSE is still working on the Loch na Cran water supply which feeds the hatchery. The fault has been identified and work will hopefully start in spring 2022 to correct the issues.</p> <p>The day and night release of smolts has yielded interesting results. It would appear 77% of smolts released at night survive whereas day released smolts only had a 52% survival rate. This is based on only 100 acoustic tagged fish. SSE are committed to this project for a further two to three years. The intention would be to gather sufficient data for the study to be peer reviewed.</p> <p>RG commented that the release site may be moved in 2022 to see if there is a change in survival rates. The smolts have previously been released at a site which may have high brown trout numbers.</p> <p>TB enquired if the 2019 PIT fish had been picked up on the decoders in the dam. RG responded that the data had not yet been downloaded.</p> <p>AS gave the Board a general update on the PIT decoder upgrades.</p> <p>AS commented that the wolf trap on the Meig was no longer viable due to the high water flows. The suggestion would be to attach motors to the existing screw traps to make them more efficient in low water. AC enquired if that would happen this year. AS responded that it would depend on their engineering department but the screw traps could still be deployed regardless of the motors.</p> <p>PG enquired about the night and day release percentages and the predation by trout. RG responded that brown trout do not generally eat in the dark and this is one of the reasons for releasing smolts at night.</p> <p>PG enquired about freshit releases from the Meig dam. AS responded that the freshit from the Meig dam does not occur and all flows go down the fish pass. This is due to the design of the dam; a freshit would release water from the ground sluice which would encourage fish away from the fish pass.</p>	

	<p>PG suggested that the Board should reassess the arrangements so that all water goes down the Meig and not to Luichart via the tunnel.</p> <p>AS provided a general update on the fish counter upgrades.</p> <p>OM enquired about the number of fish caught at Loch na Croic last year. RG responded that it was 1200 fish. TB asked how many fish were stripped out of that number. RG responded that all fish were stripped. TB enquired about the size of the fish and how this compares to previous years. RG responded that the fish sizes are all comparable over the last 5 years.</p> <p>JU asked what happens to the fish after they have been stripped. RG responded that the hen fish are now released downstream of the Rogie falls, to aid them in going back to sea as kelts. The cock fish are released up stream as they are likely to die and will provide nutrients to the river.</p> <p>AM suggested that the kelts could be used for the AST acoustic tagging. RG noted that this was an interesting point but the issue would be battery life in the tag; the kelts would not go back to sea immediately and the battery would not likely last long enough. AC asked RG to look at a bigger tag with a long battery life.</p>	
8	TRUST REPORT	
	<p>OM noted that the Trust had investments worth £430,000. The Trust will be meeting Brewin Dolphin to discuss the fund structure and level of fees.</p> <p>The Trust remains committed to protecting salmon and stocks with an emphasis on developing the youth angling side.</p>	
9	CONSERVATION POLICY 2022	
	<p>The draft conservation policy had been circulated prior to the meeting.</p> <p>AC proposed that a conservation regulation be requested from the Scottish Government to make it illegal to use treble hooks in the Cromarty Firth Catchment area.</p> <p>The Board had a general discussion regarding treble hooks. All members have previously banned the use of treble hooks but there remains an issue with some anglers disregarding the policy. At present the policy cannot be enforced by the bailiffs but they could enforce it if it was part of regulation. The Board discussed the merits of a regulation and whether all avenues have been exhausted and would the voluntary system work better than a regulation.</p> <p>AC put the suggestion of a regulation to a vote and all members agreed that this should be pursued.</p> <p>DS enquired about water temperature and how to tell if the water becomes too hot for fishing. RG responded that the only method would be for the anglers to take a thermometer.</p> <p>OM suggested that remote thermometers could be used where anglers could dial in. AC suggested this should be looked at. OM offered to progress.</p> <p>RG noted that at 23 degrees Celsius fish go into a biological change; the</p>	

	standard recommended temperate to cease fishing is 18 degrees Celsius.	
10	NETTING	
	No items.	
11	RECRUITMENT	
	<p>AC noted that Ross is moving on from the Board to start work with SSE. AC wished to thank Ross for his hard work over the last year.</p> <p>The position of Fisheries Manager has been advertised but there have been no applicants. The position will be re-advertised for the New Year.</p>	
12	AOCB	
	<p>RW enquired about pink salmon. RG responded that there had been no confirmed cases but there was an unconfirmed sighting on the Allt Graad.</p> <p>CP noted that MSS have a fund of £650,000 for a fish counter network. RG responded that the Alness was identified and MSS did have a look at the weir but they felt it would not work due to the fish pass and the length of weir. Security was a further concern they had for the site.</p> <p>CP noted that the work on the weir did not appear to have worked as intended and there remain issues. CP ran over a number of problems that the Club have identified. RG responded that the issues are not as a result of the work carried out to the weir but due to large spates bringing large volumes of gravel down, which is a natural process, but the pool remained chest deep at the weir face which is sufficient for fish to jump.</p> <p>[Post meeting note – Novar Estate and the AAC are looking to jointly work on boulder works at the weir in 2022].</p>	
13	DATE OF NEXT MEETING	
	Thursday 24 th of March 2022	