

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

**Thursday 24th March 2022
Coul House Hotel, 11:30am**

Present		In Attendance	
Col Alastair Campbell (Chairman & Fairburn Fishing Syndicate)	AC	Ben Seaman (Fisheries Biologist)	BS
Ronald Munro Ferguson (Vice Chairman & Novar Estate)	RMF	Edward Rush (Operations Manager)	ER
Troels Bavnhoej (Kirkbi Estates)	TB	Andrew Easton (Alness Angling Club)	AE
Okain McLennan (Cromarty Firth Fisheries Trust Chairman)	OM	Andrew Matheson	AM
William Paterson (Netsman)	WP		
Christina Pirie (Alness Angling Club)	CP		
Dave Smith (Evanton Angling Club)	DS		
Dr. Alastair Stephen (SSE)	AS		
Robert Whitson (Fairburn Estate)	RW		
Neil Wright (Galbraith Clerk)	NW		

1	APOLOGIES/ WELCOME	Action
	<p>The following apologies were made:</p> <p>Piers Cumberlege Ian Duncan Linda Fetzer Ben Leysham Lord Aylesford Peter Graham John Urquhart Patrick Creasy Charlotte Hingston</p> <p>AC welcomed the Board to the meeting and noted the new venue seemed to work well. AC noted that this was ASs last meeting for SSE and he wished to thank AS on behalf of the Board for all the help he has given over the years.</p> <p>AC further noted that it was OMs last meeting as the AAC secretary but he will continue on as Chairman for the Trust.</p>	
2	CONFLICT OF INTEREST DECLARATIONS	
	No conflict of interests were declared.	

3	MINUTES OF THE MEETING, 15th OCTOBER 2021	
	<p>AC informed the Board that Peter Graham (PG) had made a submission prior to the meeting which contained comments on the minutes and wider matters. AC allowed the Board to read the email and AC responded in three parts. Firstly under the minutes, secondly under matters arising and thirdly under AOCB.</p> <p>AC wished to acknowledge PGs comments regarding the use of treble hooks and that trebles are hardly used by anyone on any beat. AC further commented that the Board voted to try and ban treble hooks and it is presently Board policy to deter the use of treble hooks and it is encouraged that proprietors and their ghillies assist in rolling that policy out. AC did not wish to alter the previous minutes but to note the comments at this meeting.</p> <p>RM proposed the minutes and OM seconded the minutes.</p>	
4	MATTERS ARISING	
	<p>AC acknowledged PGs second matter which related to the Meig Dam and its efficiency at producing power in comparison to wind turbines, with the Dam having flooded spawning ground and impacting on fish passage. AC discussed the matter with the Board and the concerns raised, the Board agreed that this matter was out with the scope of the Fishery Board as they are existing structures. The Board agreed the matter had been considered but it was not to be considered any further.</p> <p>NW updated the Board on the proposed ban on treble hooks. In order to place a ban on the use of treble hooks a conservation regulation will need to be put in place by the Scottish Ministers. The Board can apply to the Minsters for this regulation which will then require minster and legal time from the Scottish Government, with consultations required locally. The process will be lengthy and the Scottish Government does not at present have the capacity to push this forward but they hoped to be in a better position in 12 months' time. Fishery Management Scotland are assisting with discussions.</p>	
5	FINANCE UPDATE	
	<p>NW ran over the financial update. The yearend will likely see a surplus of over £50,000 which was not by design but due to more contract work being received than anticipated, such as the national electrofishing programme which amounted to £15,000, which was not budgeted due to the uncertainties with COVID. The second main reason for the surplus was a saving on salary with the departure of the Fishery Manager near the end of 2021.</p> <p>As a result of the increased contract work, extra capital items were purchased – which had not been budgeted, such as binoculars. There have been savings too with the repair to the Loch na Croic Road coming in under budget.</p> <p>In a normal year, we would not expect to end up with such a large surplus. The proposal put to the Board would see the surplus retained and spent once suitable projects or equipment are identified. The next 12 months may also be turbulent with fuel prices and a reserve may be helpful. The Board agreed to keep the surplus in reserve.</p> <p>NW ran over the budget expenditure note and highlighted the main elements. The assessment for this year has been set at .75p in the £ compared with .80p in the £ last year.</p>	

	<p>Contract work will see the usual income from SSE for the main contract work. £8,000 will be paid for PIT tagging on the Meig. A further £26,000 of contract work has been budgeted for the Invasive Species work, Peffery restoration work and the Ussie Burn monitoring.</p> <p>OM noted it was good to see the rate in the £ coming down again and considerably down on a few years ago. NW commented a lot of work had been done to modernise and make the Board more efficient and the savings have been passed on.</p> <p>AC noted the Galbraith fee has increased and will be reviewed. The increase takes account of the extra work required considering there has not been a Fishery Manager in place.</p>	
6	BIOLOGISTS UPDATE	
	<p>BS noted that the Biologists report had been circulated prior to the meeting and he would only highlight the key items. The Loch na Croic trap had been opened a week earlier last year, with the theory being that if the trap was opened later the fish would have fallen back into the loch and wouldn't run as they were looking to spawn, meaning less fish being caught. The fish were held in tanks for longer as a result - while they matured for stripping. This was possible though prophylactic treatment to prevent fungal disease. This method only resulted in around 2% mortality which is very low.</p> <p>861 fish were caught in the trap, the majority of the fish were cock rather than hen salmon with more multi sea winter fish being identified rather than grilse. Just under 1 million eggs were laid down in the hatchery. There was less than 3% mortality in the eggs which is better than in previous years.</p> <p>There were a number of mechanical failures at Loch na Croic, which SSE has attended too.</p> <p>The eggs were planted out earlier this year due to the mild weather, with the majority of the eggs being placed in the Blackwater with a number of eggs going into the Orrin, to assist with the Orrin restoration project.</p> <p>Smolt trapping will be due to start in April this year and the smolt traps will be upgraded with motors to allow for them to remain efficient during low water conditions.</p> <p>The PIT tagging day and night release project will continue again this year. Fish returning this year should be the first year of data from last year's project. This will hopefully determine if releasing smolts during the day or night had an impact on survival.</p> <p>BS noted that bailiffing has been quiet recently due to the closed season, there has been a couple of pollution incidents and the Board has worked with SEPA on these.</p> <p>Another Seasonal Project Officer will be interviewed for the invasive species this year.</p> <p>TB enquired about the PIT decoders and if they were operational. AS responded</p>	

	that the decoders are being rebuilt and will be installed shortly.	
7	HYDRO REPORT	
	<p>AS noted that a report has already been circulated but it was worth highlighting a few points.</p> <p>New liaison meetings have started with SSE and the Board, with the first meeting in January and a second one planned for later in the year. The meetings allow operational discussions to be had outwith a formal Board meeting setting.</p> <p>AS noted outages for various powerhouses. OM enquired if this would affect Loch Meig. AS responded that it could possibly, but Meig was affected by water run off and it would be difficult to tell. OM requested that Stephen Dowds, the AAC chairman be informed if it looked likely the reservoir would be affected. AS acknowledged.</p> <p>AS noted that the hatchery water supply continued to be problematic and work was planned for the summer. There has been a hold up with an EIA now required by the Highland Council.</p> <p>AS explained that the mark 12 fish counters are still not working correctly and the processor unit has an issue. AI software is being installed at 4 sites initially to test the counters. If the AI works well it may take over from the resistivity counters in the future.</p>	
8	TRUST REPORT	
	<p>OM noted that the Trust report had previously been circulated. As at December the Trust had £482,000 in holdings and Brodies are presently holding £32,000 in cash.</p> <p>OM commented that a Trustees meeting would be convened shortly and the Trust agreed to pay for the motorised rotary screw traps (motors rather than the traps) and AS has agreed to take forward the junior involvement, to find suitable ways to encourage junior angling.</p>	
9	NETTING	
	<p>WP explained that a video had been created on the salmon netting. As part of the filming they had a net out for a week and 38 fish were caught. All salmon were released.</p> <p>The Board discussed the practicalities of tagging the netted fish and the Board discussed the Chanonry point study.</p>	
10	RECRUITMENT	
	<p>AC advised the Board that Sunny Bradbury had been appointed as a Biologist and he is completing his PhD at UHI. A direct replacement for the Fishery Manager could not be found and the Board will have two Biologists supervised by the Clerk and the Chairman. There will not be a Fishery Manager for at least 12 months.</p> <p>AC asked the Board to welcome Sunny to the Board when you meet him.</p>	

11	AOCB	
	<p>AE commented on the Dalmore Weir on the River Alness. Dalmore Distillery carried out work to the fish pass a couple of years ago but the water level in the pool has dropped meaning the fish pass is not working as it should. The Alness Angling Club and Novar Estate are looking to carry out work to the pool itself to raise the water height, which will allow the fish pass to operate more efficiently. The work required will likely mean rock armouring and SEPA are being consulted. RM responded that Novar Estate would cover the costs of the works for this year. Thereafter it would be a maintenance obligation as and when required, with funding possibly coming from other sources.</p> <p>OM noted that the Trust is always willing to looking at proposals for protection and enhancement of salmon.</p> <p>CP noted that Dalmore should be informed as they are owners of the weir. EA responded that Dalmore have been kept up to date.</p> <p>TB noted that Strathconnon are looking into more riparian woodland on the estate. TB enquired what SSE's views on beavers are, as they appear to be moving north and how does it affect salmon movement. AS responded that at present they don't appear to be causing any issues, mainly just beaver sticks having to be collected at screens on dams.</p> <p>CP enquired who was on the Management Committee. AC responded that the Management Committee comprised the Clerk, Trust Chairman, Vice Chairman and Chairman but no business was discussed that was not then raised at the Board meeting. AC noted that any enquiries or requests should be directed to the Clerk in the first instance.</p> <p>WP wished to thank the team for their work at Loch na Croic and the hatchery last year.</p> <p>AC noted that PG had one other point which was appropriate to raise under AOCB. The Board discussed PGs request from the previously circulated email - that the Board should be discussing more effective ways to store power, reviewing SSE payments and SEPA enforcement of SSE. The Board considered the points but does not wish to discuss them further at this time. AC noted that PG had requested contact details of Board members. Board members were free to pass over their own details to PG but the Board would not hand out members details.</p> <p>OM wished to thank AS for his many years' service to the Board and he was glad he will continue on as Vice Chairman of the Trust. TB echoed the same.</p>	
12	DATE OF NEXT MEETING	
	Provisionally set for the 20 th of October 2022.	