



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

**Thursday 20th October 2022
Coul House Hotel, 11:30am**

Present		In Attendance	
Col Alastair Campbell (Chairman & Fairburn Fishing syndicate)	AC	Sunny Bradbury (Fisheries Biologist)	SB
Ronald Munro Ferguson (Vice Chairman & Novar Estate)	RMF	Stephen Dowds	SD
Troels Bavnhoj (Kirkbi Estates)	TB	Geordie Fraser	ER
Keith Beaton (SEPA)	KB	Cllr. Sean Kennedy	SK
Peter Graham (Conon Fishing Syndicate)	PG	Russell Mein	RM
Christina Pirie (Alness Angling Club)	CP	James Ruggles Brise	JR
Dave Smith (Evanton Angling Club)	DS	Edward Rush (Operations Manager)	ER
William Patterson (Netsman)	WP	Ryan Rutherford	RR
John Urquhart (Dingwall & District Angling Club)	JU	Iain Sutherland	IR
Neil Wright (Galbraith, Clerk)	NW	James Symonds (Biologist)	JS

1	APOLOGIES/ WELCOME	Action
	<p>The following apologies were made:</p> <p>The Earl of Aylesford (Scatwell Estate) Piers Cumberlage (Allt Graad) Ian Duncan (Kildermorie Estate) Linda Fetzer David Flux (Coul) Charlotte Hingston (Fairburn Estate) Calum Macdonald Andrew Matheson Dr. Alastair Stephen Rob Whitson (Fairburn Estate)</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, 24th March 2022	
	<p>AC raised two items within the minutes, hydro report under items 7 – the SSE liaison meeting took place in January and the second one will be due shortly. Under Item 11 AOCB – the Dalmore weir is now working well and AC wished to thank everyone for all their hard work in getting it to that stage.</p> <p>RMF proposed and the CP seconded the minutes.</p>	

4	MATTERS ARISING	
	<p>AC noted that the matters arising would be dealt with during the meeting.</p> <p>AC welcomed three new members of staff, Sunny Bradbury who was appointed as Senior Biologist, James Symonds has been appointed as Biologist and Geordie Fraser has been appointed as a Fishery Officer.</p>	
5	FINANCE UPDATE	
	<p>NW ran over the financial yearend statement, highlighting that the statement provides a comparison with the previous year which was a COVID year, and therefore the two years are very different. In particular the assessments were greatly reduced during COVID. Again there is a variance in costs as there was a significant reduction in expenditure. Expenses have now returned to a more normal level. The Board was left with around £50,000 surplus for the year, partly due to the Fishery Manager leaving part way through the year and that element of salary not being spent, there was also extra contract work which was not budgeted – in particular NEPS which was unknown at the time and this amounted to around £15,000.</p> <p>The Board is to hold the £50,000 surplus in reserve for future projects and to aid in high inflation rates over the coming year.</p> <p>Finances to date, the Board is in a good position as the Board collects the majority of its income at the start of the year and draws this down. NW noted that SB had received extra contract work which had not been budgeted. Salaries are slightly behind due to team member changes</p>	
6	BIOLOGISTS REPORT	
	<p>SB ran over the Biologist report, noting that 6000 smolts had been captured and transported down below Torr Achilty dam, all part of the SSE mitigation works in 2022. 2,000 smolts has been captured from the Brahan system and 4,000 from the Meig system.</p> <p>The day and night release exercise continued again this year and SSE will be looking to fund the project for another year. The results so far have been very encouraging, with night release seeing greater survival rates.</p> <p>Red Skin diseases appeared again on the Alness and Blackwater in 2022, although not as bad as has been seen in previous years. There is still no explanation for the disease.</p> <p>There was a busy electro-fished season with 47 sites surveyed across the catchment. The whole team was involved in the survey work with members rotating in and out throughout the season.</p> <p>The team were involved in a fish rescue as part of the Peffery river restoration project, over 1500 fish were captured. The Peffery project will feature in the River Woods film.</p> <p>SB noted that the adult fish trap at Loch na Croic had been opened yesterday, the trap is now being opened earlier to try and capture more fish.</p> <p>PG enquired if electro-fishing was happening down stream of Torr Achilty dam and how important are the lower reaches. SB responded that as of yet he has</p>	

	<p>not electro fished that area but would look to programme that in for next year. SB noted that randomised sites would be chosen going forward to help get a better picture of the stocking, as has been done in the previous years. PG commented that the NEPS criteria of random selection was limited. AC suggested that the Board could look at electro fishing below the dam if it was practical to do so.</p> <p>TB enquired about the PIT decoders in the dams and whether they were now working. SB responded that they were not working with Torr Achilty going down in May and the Meig counter is having issues. SSE are looking to fix the issues and overhaul the counters.</p> <p>The Board had a general discussion regarding counters in the dams and whether SSE could do more. KB noted that there is no statutory obligation for SSE have counters, only to demonstrate fish are getting up above the dams. Members felt that the counters were critical in assessing that fish were getting above the dams. AC commented that the Board would raise this as an issue with SSE when they met at the next liaison meeting.</p> <p>TB explained that Strathconon are looking into the feasibility of getting smolts out of Orrin reservoir and SSE have given permission for boat access for the fish transportation. AC noted the difficulty that the dam had caused. SB responded that the habitat above the dam is far better than the habitat below and it would produce significant amount of smolts. TB stated that Strathconon estate would operate the trapping and trucking project when operational.</p> <p>PG enquired about the fish lift in the dam and whether the fish could get back up stream. NW noted that there is an adult trap below the dam which avoids the need for the fish lifts, which are not operable at present. A surface collector for smolts – which can be seen on the baker river in the US might be a solution for exiting smolts, although a much smaller version.</p> <p>SB noted that the project would only work if a suitable capture method was devised and if enough eggs can be found to re-stock the river.</p>	
7	HYDRO REPORT	
	<p>AC noted that Ross Glovers report had been circulated previously and that SSE were not attending Board meetings, but providing liaison meetings instead.</p> <p>AC ran over some items from the report, in particular SSE are looking to fit AI fish counters in the dams and there will be one fitted in the Meig dam initially.</p> <p>The Board discussed the day and night release of smolts project and the benefits that this may have.</p> <p>SD wished to raise undercutting on beat 2 on the clubs water, RG has been contacted for comment and rectification.</p> <p>PG suggested that if proprietors have issues relating to SSE that they raise them with the Clerk for the liaison meeting. NW noted that in addition where possible issues should be raised with SSE as and when they arise as the liaison meetings only happen infrequently.</p>	

8	TRUST REPORT	
	AC commented that the Trust report had been circulated prior to the meeting and neither Okain nor Alastair Stephen were able to attend the meeting. General discussion on the Trust and its funding.	
9	CONSERVATION POLICY 2023	
	<p>The draft conservation policy had been circulated prior to the meeting.</p> <p>AC noted only minor changes were proposed. SB suggested a change to the size of fish that could be retained, the proposed reduction is based on data from the Loch na Croic trap and the egg counts for fish. The proposed size would be anything larger than 7.5lb (28in) to be released.</p> <p>The Board discussed the need to return all hen fish where possible, minor re-wording may be required to make the policy clearer on hen fish.</p> <p>SD noted that the Loch Achonachie club do not match the Board's conservation policy for releasing fish in June. AC asked if the club would consider making a change. AC asked that all members and clubs adhere to the Boards conservation policy to help the fish but also to help the bailiffs, so that there is consistency.</p> <p>SD commented that there is a big element of education required and the Scottish Government needs to take anglers on that journey.</p>	
10	NETTING	
	WP noted that there is still no netting. Concern regarding capital value of assets. There is the possibility of netting for scientific purposes. WP suggested that the Board might want to take on a set of nets and anchors for any future work.	
11	AOCB	
	PG enquired about the Atlantic Salmon Trust data for the river. SB responded that he would look in to it and see what was available.	
12	DATE OF NEXT MEETING	
	Thursday 23 th of March 2023	