

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

**Tuesday 22nd October 2024
Coul House, Contin, 11:30am**

Present		In Attendance	
Col Alastair Campbell (Chairman & Fairburn Fishing syndicate)	AC	Sunny Bradbury (Fisheries Manager)	SB
Ronald Munro Ferguson (Vice Chairman & Novar Estate)	RMF	James Symonds (Fisheries Biologist)	JS
Troels Bavnhoej (Kirkbi Estates)	TB	Edward Rush (Operations Manager)	ER
Andrew Easton (Alness Angling Club)	AE	John MacAskill	JM
William Paterson (Netsman)	WP	Ryan Rutherford	RR
Dave Smith (Evanton Angling Club)	DS	John Wood	JW
Alistair Stephen (Cromarty Firth Fisheries Trust)	AS	Jimmie Ruggles Brice	JRB
John Urquhart (Dingwall & District Angling Club)	JU		
Peter Graham (Conon Fishing Syndicate)	PG		
Glyn Robson (Lochluichart Estate)	GR		
Neil Wright (Galbraith, Clerk)	NW		

1	APOLOGIES/ WELCOME	Action
	The following apologies were made: The Earl of Aylesford (Scatwell Estate) Keith Beaton (SEPA) Piers Cumberlage (Allt Graad) Ian Duncan (Kildermorie Estate) David Flux (Coul) Andrew Matheson (Brahan Estate) Charlotte Hingston (Fairburn Estate)	
2	CONFLICT OF INTEREST DECLARATIONS	
	AC requested that any new conflicts of interest be declared which may have arisen since the last meeting. PG declared an interest as agent for a landowner with the proposed Hydrogen plant on the Struie, this was previously declared at the March meeting.	
3	MINUTES OF THE MEETING, 26th OCTOBER 2023	
	The minutes of the last meeting were proposed by RMF and seconded by TB.	

4	MATTERS ARISING	
	<p>AC noted that any matters arising would be dealt with during the meeting.</p> <p>PG enquired about surplus eggs from the hatchery and whether these could be used around the rest of the catchment. SB responded that there may not be large number of surplus eggs, but the Orrin and the Meig would be a priority.</p>	
5	FINANCE UPDATE	
	<p>Year to date</p> <p>NW ran over the finances to date, noting that the Board was in a good position. Income was ahead of budget. Income to date is £319,000 with a budgeted income of £360,000 for the year. Grant funding of £16,381.62 has been received for various project to date. The SSE funding was £215,000 for the year.</p> <p>The assessment level has remained at 0.65p which brings in £66,654.</p> <p>Several contract works are due to be completed, which will bring in a further £38,000 prior to the yearend.</p> <p>Expenditure, a budget of £365,000 with spend to date being £216,863.</p> <p>The expenditure includes large projects such as the WHOOSH experiment on the river Meig, the gravel introduction on the Orrin and broodstock costs for the Orrin, all of which will be re-imbursed by SSE.</p> <p>Financial statement</p> <p>NW noted that the financial statement has been circulated prior to the meeting.</p> <p>The assessment for the year was set at 0.65p in the £ and the Board collected a total of £71,826. This amount is prior to successful appeals to the district valuer for the rates. The assessment for this year also remained at 0.65p but as a result of the appeals the assessment is lower by £5,172.</p> <p>SSE contract income accounted for £221,131 which included work for the smolt capture and the hatchery works.</p> <p>Further contract work and the SISI contract amounted to around £46,000 for the year.</p> <p>Expenditure –</p> <p>Salary costs have increased with the addition of a project officer, which is being paid for by the SISI project. Motor costs were up which was because of fuel costs.</p> <p>Expenditure for the WHOOSH project fell into the financial statement but will be re-imbursed by SSE in the 2025 financial year.</p> <p>Depreciation is sitting at £24,000 with a depreciation rate of 25% for the vehicles.</p> <p>Looking at the P&L statement the Board made £5,000 surplus for the year,</p>	

	although the cash position is different due to the capital purchase of the vehicles – one replaced each year.	
6	FISHERIES BIOLOGISTS UPDATE	
	<p>SB ran over the biologist report which had been circulated prior to the meeting.</p> <p>The river categorising for the Conon system has been proposed as category 1 again for 2025, the assessment for hypothetical juveniles is down but still at 91%.</p> <p>The Alness has been proposed as a category 2 with 77%, this is close to being a category 1 river.</p> <p>There will be no NEPS funding for 2025 but the Board will carry out its own NEPS programme which will run for 12 years. Initial results are good, and the river is operating at 129% of the national average. This equated to around 75-80 fish per 100m2 on average.</p> <p>Junior Angling was successful, and it was run in June, July, and August. A thank you to all that helped with these days. A freshwater ecology lesson was run at Kildermorie estate for school children which was a great success.</p> <p>The Orrin gravel re-introduction work went ahead as planned and 900 tonnes of stone was introduced. The site will be electro-fished in 2025 to see what success this might have had as a redd/ spawning ground.</p> <p>The WHOOSH project on the Meig was logistically challenging and didn't have a high success rate. The project was less successful than trapping and trucking in terms of smolt survival. Some lessons have been learned and the smolts seem to travel down the far side of the loch and not down the middle. The system was also turned on and off to gauge its effects, but this may have limited its effectiveness. Ultimately this was being trialled to help on the Orrin, but the system couldn't be scaled up easily. The aim is now to focus on the efficiency of the rotary screw traps for the Meig.</p> <p>A new website is being designed; SB noted that if anyone wanted to advertise their fishing via the website, they should contact him directly.</p> <p>The Upper Orrin remains challenging, however, both SSE and Strathconon estate are committed to working on a solution. As a result of this 300 smolts are being reared in the Lochy hatchery for egg stripping. SSE will fund the project for 5 years and this will allow the river above Orrin dam to be stocked.</p> <p>SSE will also fund a second gravel introduction for the lower Orrin in 2025.</p> <p>PG enquired as to who owns the WHOOSH system. SB responded that SSE owns the majority of the equipment used. PG enquired if the design could be changed to make it more efficient or used in conjunction with rotary screw traps. SB suggested that it would be of limited use in river environments, but WHOOSH is keen to evidence that it works, and they may experiment with directional flows. PG and SB agreed that making the rotary screw traps more efficient would be the priority. Rotary screw traps can be operated at around 40% efficiency.</p>	

	<p>AS noted, that rotary screw traps can achieve close to 80% efficiency with the use of rock bags, SB responded that rock bags were in use on the Meig.</p> <p>The Board had a general discussion on the WHOOSH project, rotary screw traps and SSE flows. SSE have recently purchased different traps which might be more efficient, and this is being investigated by SB.</p> <p>The Board had a general discussion around the Orrin dam and the difficulties of getting smolts to migrate out of the reservoir.</p> <p>PG and SB discussed the Orrin gravel introduction and natural movement of the gravel downstream. SB noted that they wished the gravel to move down stream and they would continue to photograph the site. SSE will also re-introduce gravel, so it doesn't become depleted.</p> <p>AS noted, that the freshets and the compensation flows from the Orrin dam are the wrong way around for the seasons. SB responded that the flows will be normalised. The Board discussed flows and freshets generally.</p>	
7	HYDRO REPORT	
	No hydro report was available. The chairman is to engage with SSE to get a representative and report for future meetings.	
8	TRUST REPORT	
	<p>AS ran briefly over the Trust report, and how the Trust will now be set up going forward. The name is in the process of being changed and they are looking at opening bank accounts. The Trust wishes to head in the same direction as the fishery Board.</p> <p>AC noted that the management committee met with the Trustees to better understand the proposed set up of the Trust. The committee were concerned there was a miss match between the Trust and Board objectives, including the use of the funds which primarily derived from the Board or board members in the past. However, it is hoped things are back on track and it will be kept under review.</p>	
9	NETTING	
	WP noted no changes to netting.	
10	CONSERVATION POLICY	
	<p>AC noted that the proposed policies for 2025 are the same as last year.</p> <p>PG noted that FMS wished to propose a 100% catch and release policy. Most Boards do not seem to be in favour of this approach due to wider implications and bleeding fish. AE noted that politically it could enable the banning of catch and release. PG wished an objection to be made by the Board.</p> <p>JU enquired about fishing effort and whether it will have an impact, the Board generally discussed categorisations. AE stated he wasn't confident about categorisation from previous presentations by MMS, they can't apply one policy to many variables.</p> <p>WP suggested a word change for the conservation policy with the removal of</p>	

	'caught' and add 'returned'. NW noted the changes.	
11	AOCB	
	<p>AC discussed pension and health care provisions for staff, the clerk will consult with the staff to see what would be of most benefit. The package will be fully affordable for the Board.</p> <p>NW requested that all catch returns be submitted to him at the end of each season.</p> <p>TB enquired about the SSE fish counters and the Meig fish lifts didn't appear to be working at times. Large number of fish have been seen at the bottom of the dam. TB to provide dates to SB so he can follow up with SSE. General discussion regarding fish counters and an update to be sought from SSE.</p> <p>TB noted that Strathconon is carrying out a lot of peatland restoration and woodland planting. TB will be with Strathconon until the end of July 2025 with a replacement in post prior to this date.</p> <p>AE commented that work on the Weir Pool is required due to the winter storms. SEPA have approved works between June and September which is a long wait, part of the fish pass might be affected with stones having moved. NW suggested the Board can contact SEPA to see if the date could be relaxed due to the lack of spawning ground above the weir.</p>	
12	DATE OF NEXT MEETING	
	25 th March 2024	