

TAY DISTRICT SALMON FISHERIES BOARD

Minutes of the Tay District Salmon Fisheries Board meeting held at the Hatchery, Almondbank on Tuesday, 20th October 2015.

Present: William Jack (Chairman)
Simon Furniss
David Godfrey
Claire Mercer Nairne
Gavin Clark
Alastair Munro
David Brown
Mike Brown
Steve Mannion
Iain McLaren

In Attendance: Dr. David Summers – Fisheries Director
Inga McGown - Clerk

Apologies: Alastair Riddell
Eric Starke
Brian Roxburgh
John Apthorp
John Wood

There was one member of the public present at the meeting.

The Chairman welcomed Councillor Alastair Munro, the new Perth & Kinross Council representative, to the meeting.

Declaration of Interests:

There were no new declaration of interests.

Minutes of Board Meeting of 6th August 2015:

The Minutes were taken as read, approved unanimously and signed by the Chairman.

Matters Arising:

Horseshoe Weir:

DS explained that the operator of the lade had still not been able to visit the site. We should continue to seek repairs to be done because if the worst happened and the weir collapsed,

then we would be without water and the turbine would also suffer. DS stated that the weir would not totally disintegrate tomorrow but would definitely need work in the near future. DB added that Stormont Angling Club had ringfenced £6k for the weir, which was to be used to raise the water level, but that he could talk to the Committee and perhaps utilise the monies for repairs. DG suggested we should help speed up matters by obtaining a quote for the required work. This was agreed.

(CMN & IMcL arrived.)

ACTION: DS to continue to raise issue with lade operator.
ACTION: DG to provide quote for reparation of weir.

Website:

ACTION: DS and CMN to liase regarding the website.

Parabolic Filter:

It was agreed that we should push the sale of the filter.

ACTION: DS/SK to research markets for the filter and arrange to sell.

“Licence to kill” and Carcass Tagging:

The Chairman explained that he, DS and Gary McErlain from the Tay Ghillies Association had met with John Swinney MSP regarding the issues in the summer consultation on carcass tagging. Mr. Swinney had appeared to understand their concerns.

Since then Scottish Ministers had issued a new consultation document on licence to kill. This had taken a u turn from the previous consultation. The bulk of the Tay district was now listed as Category 1, meaning no change to the status quo. However, the Earn and the Eden were Category 3 and DS was to find out why this was the case. DS would go into in more detail later in the meeting.

CMN added that Fiona Hepburn from Aileen McLeod’s office had phoned asking for clarification on the Board’s consultation response paper, and there was a feeling that the Government were genuinely interested and wanted to understand the issues at hand. The Chairman added that Roseanna Cunningham had also been contacted.

New Chairman:

The Chairman explained that the potential new Chair candidate had now withdrawn his interest in the post.

Financial Report:

Cash Account to 7th October 2015:

As at 7th October 2015, the Cash Account was showing an increase of £83,878. The overall bank balance stands at a healthy £402,696.

Income

Over 85% of the Assessments have now been paid, with the remainder being chased.

We are still actively looking to rent out our old office building, and have found a potential tenant whose details are currently with Marine Scotland's solicitors awaiting approval.

It still looks highly unlikely that the Hatchery will require Tay Foundation funding this year, and therefore the budget and forecast remain at zero.

Expenditure

There is a potential saving of £7,500 on salaries, arising from our Operations Manager departing earlier in the year, and the delay in finding a suitable replacement.

As reported last time, we have still not received a rent invoice for £64k to end of 2014 from the Government, but have made a provision in the Statutory Accounts, and will do so for 2015 cost (£18.5k).

To date, the Kelt Reconditioning Hatchery has cost £21,423, of which £17,286 is salary related.

Our Capital forecast is some £9k above budget due to the necessary purchase of a new pick up for the bailiff team prior to broodstock fishing.

Overall, the forecast is showing a slight deficit of £3,167 against budget.

ACTION: IMcG to check whether 5 year warranty on new Ford Ranger

ACTION: IMcG to phone Kings re road repairs for 2015.

Health & Safety Report:

DS stated that there had been no health and safety issues reported since the last Board meeting.

The Chairman enquired when the last H&S audit was carried out, to which DS explained they were carried out by Greens of Haddington every three years and that another audit was due this year.

ACTION: DS/IMcG to commission H&S audit.

Wild Fisheries Review:

DS explained that there was very little to report on this subject, as the response was submitted in August and little had been heard since. A recent update document from ASFB / RAFTS had been circulated which summarised the situation.

“Licence to Kill” / Carcass Tagging:

DS explained that the issue consisted of two parts, namely that there needed to be a mechanism to determine the health of a river’s salmon stock, and then some form of action based upon the findings. He stated that this year’s two previous Government consultations had never dealt with the first part of the issue, only the latter.

The Government had now issued a third consultation which for the first time provided information on both parts of the issue. They had ditched the initial carcass tagging scheme in favour of categorising rivers and proposing measures for each category. Category 1 rivers are deemed healthy and therefore can carry on pretty much as before. Category 2 rivers require some improvements including a conservation plan. Category 3 rivers will have 100% catch and release imposed, which will be reviewed annually.

DS went on to explain that most of the Tay Catchment was category 1, with the Earn and the Eden being category 3. The Chairman asked for clarification on category 1, to which DS replied we carry on doing what we’re doing. The Chairman asked what could be done if we knew our recommendations were not being followed on certain parts of the river, to which DS replied we could presumably still apply to Scottish Ministers for mandatory 100% catch and release if that was felt to be required.

DS then went on to explain the categorisation methodology the Government had used. Basically, the part of the Tay district that is within the SAC has been given category 1 status, whereas all other areas were category 3. DS had been in touch with Marine Scotland to ascertain their exact methodology and was hoping to meet soon to discuss. DS explained that it had been suggested to him that the Earn might have categorised as a 3 as it had been combined with the Eden. He believed it should be perfectly possible to split the rivers out and recategorise them separately. However, DS had looked at catches from both rivers and found that the Eden might not actually be very different from the Earn. He was concerned that both rivers had been categorised incorrectly.

DS told the Board that he had written to John Swinney MSP thanking him for his time and making it clear that the Board greatly welcomed the Government’s change of heart and was happy with the principles behind the new proposals which were now much more workable than the proposed tagging system would have been. He also mentioned that, although the bulk of the Tay catchment was fine under the new rules, this was not the case in the Earn and Eden and he would take this up with Roseanna Cunningham MSP. Indeed, some Earn clubs have already met her, and across Scotland there has been lobbying by other rivers also.

The Chairman asked exactly where the SAC boundary is, to which DS replied he was not entirely sure but would find out.

DS explained that categorisation was based on the estimation of a conservation limit for each river. Similar principles had been used in some other countries, including England and Wales, for years but Scotland had ironically resisted going down this route until now as the methods were considered too simplistic. In order to calculate the conservation limit, you have to work out the surface area of the river and multiply it by an average number of eggs per area. The overall number of eggs required to be laid in the river is then compared with an estimated actual number of eggs being deposited in the river. Ideally, a fish counter is required to calculate the number of fish in the river, but failing this, catch return figures have been used. The main problem with this, he argued, is if your catch goes down even if due to poor fishing conditions, as it has this year, then the river is in danger of not meeting the conservation target and will therefore drop down a category.

IMcL asked if we knew how close we were to being a Category 2 area, to which DS replied he had no idea.

DS then went on to explain that there was not only a problem with using catch statistics, but that the conservation limit may also be flawed. At present, the North Esk is the only river in Scotland with the information required to estimate this. However, two Marine Scotland reports provide estimates of the North Esk conservation limit. That in the most recent report did not appear to have been used. There is a need to find out why the older, higher, figure has been included and whether this is unattainably high. DS pointed out that the North Esk is an excellent juvenile salmon habitat and therefore you could reasonably expect its density to be higher than rivers with less perfect conditions such as the Eden, a lowland river. He went on to explain that the English category system takes into account altitude bands, trying to adjust the conservation limit according to habitat quality. The new Scottish system does not. The system has also classed lochs as spawning grounds, when there is no evidence to support that they are.

DS proposed explaining to the Government the nature of the flaws in the system, highlighting the need for electrofishing data, and asking whether they can exclude lochs and produce more accurate spawning targets, taking into account the quality of the rivers. SM asked about whether the statistical methodology should include extreme figures, as these were normally discounted.

ACTION: DS to circulate synopsis of meeting with Marine Scotland to Board.

GC enquired as to whether there was a consultation on the new proposal, to which DS replied that the Government were now seeking opinions but it was perhaps also worth making representation to constituency MSPs too.

Garry Update:

DS explained that he has had discussions with SSE to see whether there is common ground to try to reinvigorate the restoration of the River Garry process. SSE is keen to draw up a monitoring plan with DS, and DS is awaiting feedback from a genetics expert as to how genetic fingerprinting could be used to differentiate stocked fish from the hatchery from wild spawned fish.

Opening Day:

DS informed the Board that Aileen McLeod MSP had agreed to open the river in 2016. CMN added that she was going to learn to cast with CMN and another two ladies beforehand. The Chairman asked if CMN would make herself available to help out on Opening Day to which she replied she would try to work it round her Meikleour commitments.

AOB:

Almond beat:

DB informed the Board that the Almond beat which had previously been offered to Stormont Angling Club by the Crown Estate had now been turned down by them and was again available. The Chairman stated that the Board had already made the decision not to rent the beat as it was worthless for conservation purposes as it was only the right bank.

Ordie Burn Pollution:

SF asked for an update to the Ordie Burn incident, to which DS replied that there was to be a criminal investigation into the incident and that SEPA were therefore not in a position to discuss the detail. However, from where DS had seen dead fish, then thousands of juveniles could have been killed.

Stormont Angling Club:

DB thanked the Chairman and DS for their recent presentation to Stormont AC, which had dispelled many rumours surrounding the licence to kill and tagging proposals and had been very useful.

New Chairman:

The Chairman reiterated that as of next meeting he would be standing down as Chairman and it was therefore becoming more urgent to find a replacement. DG suggested contacting proprietors and angling clubs for candidates

No Other Business was brought up and the Chairman closed the meeting.