

# **TAY DISTRICT SALMON FISHERIES BOARD**

## **ANNUAL PUBLIC MEETING**

Birnam Institute, Birnam, 7pm, Thursday, 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2017

## **MINUTES OF MEETING**

### **Board Members Present:**

William Jack (Chairman)  
Iain McLaren  
Simon Furniss  
Steve Mannion  
David Brown

### **In attendance**

David Summers (Fisheries Director)  
Inga McGown (Administrator)  
Mike Brown (Operations Manager)

Also in attendance were 21 members of the public.

Prior to the meeting, copies of the Accounts for the year ending 31 December 2015 and the Annual Report 2015/16 were available, and copies of the Agenda for the current meeting, and Minutes from the 2016 meeting were available as hard copies (all having been on the website previously).

The Chairman opened the fifth Annual Public Meeting by welcoming all attendees, and stating that the purpose of the meeting was for the Board to be as transparent as possible and questions from the public would be very welcome. He went on to run through the agenda of the meeting, with IMcG presenting the financials, DS to give a resume of the previous year, as well as an insight into the current year's activities, before MB presented on the smolt trap project. A Q&A session would follow.

He then went on to detail the two main events, namely the Wild Fisheries Review being largely abandoned and the rewatering of the Garry after over 70 years. He also highlighted the fact there was a revaluation this year.

## **Annual Report and Accounts:**

IMcG went through the 2015 audited financials, highlighting the main areas of income and expenditure and their relationship to prior years.

A member of the public asked whether the SSE compensation would cease once the Garry was rewatered, to which DS replied that the compensation related all their hydro schemes, and that he didn't see the compensation disappearing.

## **Activities over past year and activities for coming year:**

DS then went on to talk about the activities the Board had undertaken in the past year, and what was forthcoming for this year, and in particular highlighted the following areas:

### **1. Catches:**

DS urged the Eden and the Earn to return their catch statistics. He then went on to inform the attendees that the catch for 2016 was better than 2014, and that mid-February to June catches had been quite encouraging. Since 2008, there has been an increase in size of fish caught. The July-October catches in 2016 saw a change and were well down on prior years. He went on to give data on fish counters, and some possible explanations as to the lack of autumn fish.

### **2. Last Year's Activities ~ 2016:**

#### **River Garry Rewatering:**

DS explained that an agreement had now been reached between the Board, SEPA and SSE to rewater the Garry and that some engineering work had already taken place, with the final works to be completed by Autumn 2017.

A member of the public asked what effect, if any, Brexit would have on the process, to which DS replied the rewatering would still go ahead as the project was so far down the line.

Another member of the public enquired as to how long it would take to recolonise the Garry with salmon, to which DS replied it would hopefully be only a year or two, as the process was not starting from scratch. The Board has been stocking out the Garry for some years.

#### **Hatchery:**

DS informed the attendees that the hatchery formed a major part of the Board's work, and was largely dependent on reconditioning kelts. He urged everyone to visit the hatchery if they could to see for themselves the work that goes on there. He stated that the annual report shows a list of what has been stocked, and went on to explain the list in detail.

A member of the public asked why the Ericht was not on the list for stocking, to which DS replied the Board mainly stocked areas where juveniles were missing.

**Enforcement:**

DS explained that the bailiff team had no serious cases of poaching to report, but had been increasingly involved in other activities besides bailiffing, namely hatchery work, smolt tagging and electrofishing.

**Lyon Project:**

DS explained this project was to be started in conjunction with the Tay Foundation and Lyon proprietors.

**3. 2017 forthcoming Activities:**

DS pointed out that our work may include other SSE hydro reviews in the coming year.

He went on to explain that an Archimedes screw turbine at Pitcastle was now operational and that the Board was expecting to be contracted to monitor smolts.

**4. Wild Fisheries Reform:**

DS explained the history of the Wild Fisheries Review to the assembled audience, before stating that in early February 2017, Roseanna Cunningham MSP had announced the review would basically be ceased, meaning there would be no rod licence or wild fisheries levy; no criminalisation of freshwater fishing; and no change to DSFBs, although voluntary modernisation of fisheries management would be encouraged. Fishery management plans were still ongoing, but had yet to be scoped out definitively.

**5. River Tummel Smolt Project:**

MB then went on to give a presentation regarding the smolt traps in the Errochty and Tummel. He gave an overview of the project and explained that it was a joint project between the Board, the Tay Foundation, Marine Science Scotland and SSE.

**There then followed a question and answer session:**

**Smolt run:**

A member of the audience asked when the smolt run commenced, to which MB replied usually in March, with the bulk of the fish being caught in May. He added that the bulk of the run appeared to go at night.

**Kelt Reconditioning:**

A member of the audience asked whether the captured fish lost their fear of humans over time, to which DS replied they did appear to. When they first arrive at the hatchery, they are skittish and take time to settle down, but once there for a while they have been known to follow the Hatchery Manager around.

The member of the public asked whether the Board had studied their behaviour, to which DS replied the hatchery manager can determine when they will eat based on the weather

**Smolt Project:**

A member of the audience asked how long it would take for data to be available for the smolt project.

MB replied that adults wouldn't be returning up the river until May at the earliest as grilse and then as two sea winter fish in 2018 so it was unlikely we would collect any meaningful data in the near future regarding return rates.

Another member of the audience asked whether this method of study was used elsewhere, to which DS replied smolt traps have been used on many other rivers for many years.

A further member of the audience expressed his interest in the project and especially the smolt run last year. MB commented that after the smolt run had ended last year, juvenile salmon also started to be caught in the trap. There appeared to be a general dispersal of fish from the upper catchment in the spring, which also included trout.

**River Garry:**

A member of the audience asked whether the Garry would be made a sanctuary for salmon, to which the Chairman replied this would be a great idea, but perhaps the water would not be high enough to provide sufficient salmon fishing environment. DS added that the proprietor had yet to be contacted on the issue.

Another member of the audience expressed concern over the number of fish that may not make it to the spawning area due to lack of water. DS replied that the fish may only be able to pass over the falls when the weather was warmer, but that we would be looking for as much water as possible to be coming down the Garry so the fish wouldn't drop back.

A further member of the audience commented that there may be a poaching issue with concentrated pools of fish awaiting their chance to go to the spawning grounds. DS acknowledged the issue.

**Fish farming:**

A member of the audience asked what was happening regarding expansion of fish farming in Scotland. DS replied that this issue might not affect the east coast, as it was not really suitable for fish farming due to shelter issues.

Another member of the audience asked whether fish farms on rivers had any impact on smolts. DS replied that certainly they don't help, as they abstract water. Regarding the abstraction at Blairgowrie he understood it was an issue that SEPA were to supposed to be reviewing.

A further member of the audience commented that a fish farm near him had shut their gates three weeks ago. The gates had acted as an escape route for smolts. He also commented that screens were not in place until May and wondered if the board could do anything about this.

**ACTION: DS to ensure fish farm is contacted and advised of situation with the view to resolving.**

There were no further questions and the Chairman then thanked everyone for coming and closed the meeting.