

TAY DISTRICT SALMON FISHERIES BOARD

Minutes of the Tay District Salmon Fisheries Board meeting held at Cromwell park, Almondbank, on Monday, 5th February 2018.

Present: Iain McLaren (Convener)
Councillor Bob Band
David Brown
David Godfrey
William Hawes (Mandate for Lord Mansfield)
Tom Monaghan
Claire Mercer Nairne
Cohn O’Dea
Jim Perrett
Mike Smith
Alec Stewart
Ian Young

In Attendance: Inga McGown - Clerk
Dr. David Summers – Fisheries Director
Nicki MacIntyre (SNH)

Apologies: Steve Mannion
Brian Roxburgh (SEPA)

Welcome and Introductions

The Prospective Chairman welcomed ALL to the meeting, followed by ALL introducing themselves to the assembled Board in turn.

Election of Convener

Iain McLaren was proposed as Convener by IY and seconded by JP.

Induction

The members were handed an induction pack which included a sheet for their contact details, a list of TDSFB phone numbers and personnel, Minutes from the previous two meetings, Fisheries Management Scotland’s briefing on Members’ interests for District Fisheries Boards, the last Annual Report and a copy of Marine Scotland’s Good Governance Guide. DS then proceeded to explain the good governance guide briefly, making particular reference to the register of members’ interests, and it was up to the Board to decide what level of declaration they felt was appropriate.

It was decided to keep the declaration of interests as a running item on the agenda.

ACTION: IMcG to ensure declaration of interests on each agenda

ACTION: IMcG to email the Board with Marine Scotland's link, FMS code of good practice

ACTION ALL to return contact sheets and declaration of interest forms to IMcG.

Introduction to issues faced by last Board, plus forthcoming issues

DS gave a brief overview of the activities of the Board over the last few years including stocking, rewatering of the Garry, Tummel smolt tagging, Lyon project, Pitcastle Hydro, Wild Fisheries Review, Salmon conservation regulations, enforcement and the hatchery. He went on to explain the forthcoming issues, including Scottish Invasive Species Initiative project (SISI), offshore windfarms, beavers (European protected species status), and potential issues such as some aspects of Wild Fisheries Reform that may still be under consideration, River Braan, and further SEPA hydro abstraction reviews (eg River Lochay).

Furthermore, he outlined the organisations that had a large impact on the Board, such as Fisheries Management Scotland (FMS) and the Tay Foundation.

Discussion on issues of interest to Board members

The Convener stressed that the Board needed to work as a team in order to deliver the best it could for the Tay Catchment as a whole. Board members were invited to share their suggestions for new issues that should be considered in the next three years.

Restocking back end rivers

DB asked that the restocking of back end rivers be looked at, and perhaps to consider the Almond, Earn, Shochie and Ordie. He gave anecdotal evidence of declining fish stocks. DS replied that various electrofishing studies had been carried out, including an Almond site above Auchnafree, and a site on the Ordie (which had shown promising results), and that these will be the focus of continued monitoring.

Practical Measures

MS asked that practical measures be put in place to conserve fish stocks, such as removing barriers. NMCI stated that it was SNH policy not to remove natural impassable barriers and that this was unlikely to change. MS asked whether a fish counter should be installed in Struan Weir on the River Garry, to which DS replied that it had been discussed at one time, but on balance it had been decided by SEPA, SSE and the Board that the weir was better removed.

River Eden

IY stated that it was a good idea to maximise output from the hatchery, and that he would like to see back end rivers represented in the process, as well as electrofishing data being made available.

ACTION: DS to get back to IY regarding juvenile surveys that have been conducted on the Eden.

River Earn

JP was interested in finding out the upper range of salmon spawning grounds on the Earn. Through his career and personal anecdotes, he was concerned at the apparent lack of spawning salmon in recent years in small tributary streams. He wondered whether upper tributary surveys could be factored into the electrofishing program.

Electrofishing data

CMN enquired as to whether it would be practical for DS to present the electrofishing data to the Board so they could make some decisions based on the findings.

ACTION: DS to present electrofishing findings at next Board meeting.

Pisciverous Birds

AS stated that there were problems on the River Lochay with birds. With the last two summers being relatively dry, fish become trapped in pools due to lack of water. They were then being preyed on by piscivorous birds.

Spawning Habitat Improvement

CMN asked whether there was anything which could be done mid-term to improve spawning habitat, and whether a plan could be drawn up identifying key areas for improvement and actions.

Luncarty Weir

MS stated that he had spoken to both SEPA and one of the owners of a weir on the Shochie Burn at Luncarty. As far as he was concerned the weir was now redundant and required removal, particularly as there were beaver issues, and the fish pass was not great in his view. The Convener stated that he and DS had visited the weir and agreed that it was redundant, but that the fish pass appeared to be working, based on electrofishing studies and counter data.

DS agreed it would be a good idea for it to be removed, and that as far as he was aware the owners might have little issue with this.

JP stated that he thought SEPA had looked at all weirs over 1 metre in height, to which DS replied that he understood they had only looked at licensed weirs, so many may have been missed.

ACTION: DS to contact SEPA regarding status of weirs in the Tay Catchment

JP raised the issue that removing weirs can displace huge amounts of silt, but it was generally agreed that if the weir was removed in stages this would have a lesser impact.

ACTION: DS to move this issue forward and report on progress at next meeting.

Perth & District Angling Association Seminar

DB informed the Board that the PDAA were holding a seminar on Sunday, 15th April 2018 at the Perth Museum starting at 10am, which would include talks from Andrew Graham Stewart, Colin Bean and Matt Newton. ALL welcome.

Press Response

DB asked whether the Board had a policy on replying to press articles, the reason being that there had been a damning article in the press a couple of weeks ago relating to the Board. DS replied that the Board had responded to some articles in the past but could only do so were they drawn to their attention.

After some discussion, it was agreed that if any Board member came across an article related to the Board, they should forward it to IMcG.

ACTION: ALL to forward any articles pertaining to the Board to IMcG for deliberation.

Piscivorous Birds

MS mentioned a River Dee report that 70% of smolts from the upper river may have been eaten by piscivorous birds. C'OD asked whether there was a correlation between birds eating juveniles, usually in the middle to lower river. DB stated that there was a serious bird problem for most of the year.

The Convener pointed out that the annual licence the Board obtained from SNH was for the purpose of scaring birds. DS explained that the 2018 licence was expected shortly.

DS offered cautionary advice on the Dee's results, explaining that the fish used in the study had major procedures performed on them to implant acoustic transmitters, and a number of similar studies had experienced a period of mortality shortly after tagging, in various mediums, including rivers, estuaries and the sea. It was only assumed that the Dee mortalities were attributed to piscivorous birds, but tagging may have been the cause of mortality or made the smolts more vulnerable.

River Braan

DS explained that an ex Board member had raised the issue of the falls on the River Braan and in particular whether the falls could be made passable or the river stocked upstream. DS suggested the falls could be made into a salmon leap at the Hermitage, thus creating a tourist attraction, with a Borland fish pass at Rumbling Bridge. This idea had been mulled around previously but had encountered opposition and would cost many thousands in engineering works.

He went on to explain that the present situation was that the stretch of water was owned half by the Forestry Commission and half by the National Trust for Scotland.

Any such proposal would require widespread local support if it was to have any chance of obtaining permission. DS suggested in the first instance approaching John Swinney MSP to ascertain whether or not he thought there would be mileage in this site becoming more of a tourist attraction, particularly against a background of A9 dualling.

MS commented that this was considered around 20 years ago, but the National Trust for Scotland had not liked the idea but in actual fact it was not a difficult project.

ACTION: DS to produce briefing on Hermitage/Rumbling Bridge project to take to John Swinney.

Minutes from Meetings held 12th December 2017 & 11th January 2018

The Minutes were taken as being read, agreed unanimously and signed by the Convener.

Matters Arising

Biosecurity

ACTION: DS to investigate biosecurity measures for the Tay by next Board meeting.

River Lyon

ACTION: DS to continue investigating the move for the counter at Stronich Dam.

River Garry

ACTION: DS to circulate finalised Garry plan to Board once completed, with accompanying map of affected areas.

Tay Foundation Representatives

DS explained that two of the trustees of the Tay Foundation were nominees of the Board. As neither of the two previous representatives had been re-elected or coopted, two new Board

representatives were required to join the Tay Foundation trustees. Volunteers were requested from the Board.

CMN put her name forward, and the Board unanimously suggested SM as the second representative. As SM was not present he would be asked if willing. Both candidates were proposed by JP and seconded by MS.

IMcG intimated that the Financial Report contained sensitive information which was only appropriate for Board members and would be taken in private. The Health and Safety report was then swapped with the Financial report.

ACTION: IMG to approach SM regarding Tay Foundation membership.

Health & Safety Report

DS explained that the Board took H&S very seriously and commissioned a review every three years from Green's of Haddington. He went on to state there had been no reportable incidents since the last meeting, and that a First Aid course for all staff was planned for February.

ACTION: IMcG to email H&S policy to ALL Board members.

(the member of the public left the meeting)

Financial Report

IMcG explained that normally she would present the current spend against budget, but that as there was only one month of spend, she would concentrate on presenting the draft budget. She went on to present the budget, and the Board agreed to stick with 46% levy charge as per previous year. They also agreed a 4.4% salary increase in line with the Agricultural Wages Index.

DG asked if the R.I.B. was still for sale, to which DS replied there would be a review of boat. The Board agreed they would like to see the kelt reconditioning costed out differently, taking into account heat & light costs, bailiffing costs and broodstock fishing costs.

ACTION: IMcG to add heat & light and bailiffing costs into kelt reconditioning actuals and budget.

(NMCI left the meeting)

On the topic of writing weekly updates for the fishtay website, after some discussion, it was agreed that C'OD would ask whether the Tay Ghillies Association would like to take on the blog as part of their duties, and report back to the Board

ACTION: C'OD to ask if TGA would take on blog duties, and report back at next meeting.

There was some discussion around capital expenditure, with the Board agreeing to purchase two new heaters for the hatchery, and a new Jimny.

The budget was then approved.

AOB:

Tay Foundation

CMN asked what the situation was with the Tay Foundation, to which DS replied that it reported separately and was a completely separate organisation from the Board. MS suggested this be put on the agenda for the next meeting.

ACTION: IMcG to include Tay Foundation in next agenda.

Beavers

TM stated that he had received an email regarding the beaver devastation, and wondered what could be done about it if anything. DS replied that as of now, the beavers are not protected species, but that this would likely be coming soon.

There were no further items, and the Chairman thanked the Board for attending, and closed the meeting.