

TAY DISTRICT SALMON FISHERIES BOARD

ANNUAL PUBLIC MEETING

Perth Museum and art Gallery, Perth, 7pm, Thursday, 22nd March 2018

MINUTES OF MEETING

Board Members Present:

Iain McLaren (Chairman)
Steve Mannion
Claire Mercer Nairne
Bob Band
Jim Perrett
Mike Smith
Lord Mansfield
David Brown

In attendance

David Summers (Fisheries Director)
Inga McGown (Administrator)
Mike Brown (Operations Manager)
Craig Duncan (Bailiff)
Ron Whytock (Bailiff)
Marek Wolf (Bailiff)
David Ross (Bailiff)

Also in attendance were 16 members of the public.

Prior to the meeting, copies of the Accounts for the year ending 31 December 2016 and the Annual Report 2016/17 were available, and copies of the Agenda for the current meeting (which was also available on the website).

The Chairman opened the sixth Annual Public Meeting by welcoming all attendees, and introducing himself. 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 and broodstock fishing. A Q&A session would follow.

Annual Report and Accounts:

IMcG went through the 2016 audited financials, highlighting the main areas of income and expenditure and their relationship to prior years.

There were no questions.

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 stated that the catches were down and possibly at their lowest level since the 1950s, but that average weight of fish was up in early spring. He noted that the Autumn catch was well below average figures, and that this was a widespread problem but had been seen before.

He went on to look at the probable causes, such as the changing North Atlantic environment with warmer sea temperatures in eastern areas, and colder in some western areas, along with melting ice caps producing a fall in salinity.

A member of the public asked what DS opinion was on the effects of storm Frank, to which DS replied that it would undoubtedly have produced some effects, but that some areas of the Tay catchment did not have unusual water levels during Storm Frank, particularly around the Almond, but they too had reported less grilse along with the areas more affected.

2. Last Year's Activities ~ 2017:

River Garry Rewatering:

DS explained that the Board had been stocking areas of the Garry to restore its population in anticipation of the rewatering. At present, there is an adaptive management plan in place, which will see SEPA, SSE and the Board working together to resolve issues as they occur. He added that the Board has sampled all broodstock fish which will be genetically profiled so that we can tell which fish in the Garry are natural to the area, and which have been stocked out by the Board. This work is in conjunction with the UHI and is funded by SSE.

Hatchery:

DS explained that the Hatchery constituted a large part of the Board's work and that a list of stocking activity could be found in the Annual Report. He stated that there had been concerns over hatchery productivity, and a subcommittee had been formed which had identified catching up broodstock as being the main problem. The Tay Ghillies Association had provided new electrofishing equipment and manpower in 2017, which had resulted in a very successful broodstock fishing mission.

Enforcement:

DS explained that poaching was still of major concern to the bailiffing team, and although it was not as prevalent as previous years, it was still a big issue in some areas.

Lyon Project:

DS explained the concept of the project.

Tummel Smolt Project:

MB to give a presentation on this later in the meeting.

Pitcastle Hydro

DS explained that an Archimedes screw turbine had been installed at Pitcastle, possibly the largest in the UK, and the Board is to be involved with studies to see if smolts are being affected by the turbine.

NE England Drift Net and Fixed Net Fisheries

DS informed the meeting that although drift nets had been banned in Scotland since 1963, there were still a number of licensed driftnet and gill net operators in England, operating mainly between the Tweed and Tyne. The consultation is still under way.

Pacific Pink Salmon

DS explained that the pink salmon had appeared in unprecedented numbers in 2017 in Norway and Britain and have produced fry in some rivers. There is as yet no legislation attached to them and they will become an issue if they spawn in larger numbers in future.

Wild Fisheries Reform

DS explained that as of early February 2018, the Scottish Government WFR agenda had ground to a halt, but there is still talk of a dilute WFR and a Bill, but it is not clear what will be in the Bill or when it will take place.

Salmon Conservation Regulations

DS explained that every year, rivers are categorised according to rod catch figures and conservation limits. He explained the situation regarding the Eden and the Earn which were now in category 3, and urged anglers to report all catches, as well as providing better information in terms of scale samples so we can build up a better picture to inform Marine Scotland's model.

River Earn – Categorising Habitat

DS explained that canoe and drone surveys had been trialled to collect data to build up the Earn's case to Marine Scotland. The drone trials proved very promising and he proposed that the Board should obtain one to enable a thorough survey to be carried

out. The trial carried out so far had shown a lack of cover for juvenile salmon could be an important issue.

3. 2018 forthcoming Activities:

Other SSE Hydro Reviews

DS explained that SEPA had been considering reviews of other SSE hydros – e.g. the River Lochay which they had visited in 2017. The Board would look to input into any process that came about.

Juvenile Surveys

DS explained that the Government had ringfenced £200k to be spent on juvenile data collection to inform river categorisations, and the Board would certainly want to be involved with this.

Scottish Invasive Species Initiative (SISI)

DS stated that this was a joint project with SNH and the Esk Board and would cover a large area of the Tay Catchment, east of Perth up to Kenmore but excluding the Earn and Loch Tay.

Beavers – proposed European Protected Species Status

DS informed the meeting that the Scottish Government would soon be laying an Order to give beavers European Protected Species status. But at meetings with SNH it had been explained there would be a licensing scheme whereby problem dams could be removed unless kites were present.

Offshore Windfarms

DS explained that the windfarms proposed off the mouth of the Tay were in the process of reapplying for planning as wind technology had moved on drastically, and the planning process had been held up by RSPB objections.

River Braan

DS explained that the Board would be looking at the feasibility of getting salmon up the Hermitage and Rumbling Bridge. Leaping salmon at the Hermitage could also become a tourist attraction.

New Board – New Opportunities

DS explained that the Board was elected in December 2017/January 2018 and was looking forward to resolving issues on the river.

Smolt Tagging and Broodstock Fishing Presentation

MB explained the smolt tagging project to the audience, and also gave a presentation on broodstock fishing.

There then followed a question and answer session:

Smolt predation:

A member of the public asked if sea bass could be killing smolts, to which I MacL replied that he saw no reason why they wouldn't, but was unsure what could be done about it were it a problem.

Piscivorous Birds:

A member of the audience stated that he had seen no mention of piscivorous birds in the Annual Report and was keen to know if the Board carried out bird counts, and if so, where and when these were carried out and if the ghillies were involved. DS replied that two bird counts were carried out by the bailiffs every year- one in winter and one mid to late Spring. He went on to state that protocol must be adhered to ensure objective counting and that the licence from SNH granted for piscivorous birds was designed to scare them and not eradicate.

Furthermore, the counts were designed so as not to double count birds. In the past up to 15 people had been used to count birds and the Board had encountered problems with potential multiple counting of some birds. The Board now goes from vantage point to vantage point at a time least likely to disturb the birds.

Another member of the audience stated that he was very keen to build up a case against piscivorous birds and had indeed sent DS pictures of 110 goosanders, to which DS reiterated that the licence was designed to shoot to scare and not as a "cull".

The same member of the public demanded to know how many days were spent counting birds and at how many locations. DS replied that it took approximately 8 days to conclude the counts over around 50 locations across the catchment. He stated that evidence would suggest that merganser numbers were decreasing whilst goosanders were relatively stable.

The member of the public then asked the Board to do proper counts and to lobby the Government, to which DS replied that proper counts were being done and that all Boards were in the same boat. The Chairman added that these birds were a protected species and therefore the licence was designed to shoot to kill as a scare tactic rather than eradication.

Hindered Smolt passage in Blairgowrie Lade

A member of the public stated that smolts were not able to pass a fish farm on the Blairgowrie Lade. DS replied there was a bywash channel and that the fish farm had a licence to abstract flow from the Ericht. Proof would need to be obtained that smolts were not getting past.

The member of the public then stated that an Archimedes screw turbine had been granted more water as part of its licence and was not obliged to have a screen. DS replied that he had originally objected to the screw turbine which did not have to have smolt screens. The studies that had been done so far suggested that smolts going through the screw turbines did

not appear to be harmed therefore no objection on that basis would be considered credible. DS stated that he was not aware of any increase in the amount of water permitted to be abstracted from the Ericht.

The member of the public stated that he had video evidence of smolts at lade gates, to which DS replied consideration should be given to changing the position of the main flow on the Ericht by filling the gap on the Blairgowrie side of the weir and opening one at the Rattray side providing a bypass for smolts finding themselves at that side of the weir.

The member of the public stated there were still 2 miles of the River Ericht that get very low downstream of the lade intake at Blairgowrie and cause fish to die. The member of the public then asked what he could do to resolve the issue at the fish farm and the screw trap. DS replied that SEPA had for some years considered reviewing the abstraction on the Ericht and perhaps the best thing he could do to try to push it up the agenda was to lobby the local MSP, John Swinney.

Luncarty Weir

A Board member asked what was being done about Luncarty weir, to which DS replied he had met with SEPA and they were not averse to it being removed, but would need us to have a morphological survey carried out. He had hoped that a SEPA hydromorphologist would have visited the site to give a preliminary view as he was visiting the Luncarty anyway on another issue. The Chairman added that the Board would keep pressing the issue.

Pink Salmon

A member of the public asked whether pink salmon catches would affect the levy, to which DS replied that the levy purely applied to Atlantic Salmon at present, and that pink salmon presented a bit of a legal loophole at present. He did add that the Government were aware of the issue.

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