TAY DISTRICT SALMON FISHERIES BOARD

Minutes of Annual Public Meeting held
Via "Zoom" 23rd Tuesday, 23rd March 2021 at 7pm

Board Members Present
Iain McLaren (Convener)
Toby Metcalfe
Alastair Riddell
Jerry Saunders
Mike A W Smith
Nichola Thompson
Bobby White
Iain Wood

In attendance
David Summers (Fisheries Director)
Inga MacGillivray (Administrator)
Mike Brown (Operations Manager)
24 members of the public

Apologies
David Godfrey
Andrew Parrott
Allister Wallace

Prior to the meeting, copies of the Accounts for the year ending 31 December 2019 and the Annual Report 2019/20 were available on the website. Copies of the Agenda were available on the website and emailed to all attendees. Copies of Minutes from last Annual Public Meeting in 2019 were also available on the website.

Report from the Convener

The Convener opened the eighth Annual Public Meeting by welcoming all attendees and introducing himself. He stated that 2020 had been a tough year in terms of the global pandemic and its effect on angling yet there had been many positives. He explained a new Board had been elected in December 2020 which he believed was one of the strongest Boards he had seen in terms of skills and expertise, which he thought could only be good for the Tay Catchment. He stated that "Zoom" technology had made a positive impact on the Board in allowing them to be educated on catchment issues through seminars which had been given twice weekly, and that this had proved a resounding success. Zoom was also a great medium to reach a wider number of people from all areas of the country.

The Convener praised DS for his work in preparing and presenting Zoom presentations. John Milligan also praised DS for his efforts.

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The convener continued that a river management plan would be produced shortly and that this would be rolled out to stakeholders for their feedback via Zoom, which was something that the Board had never done before.

Other positive notes included the development of a new Board and Tay Rivers Trust joint website which would be ready in June 2021, and a commitment by the Board to produce a newsletter every couple of months to keep all stakeholders up to date.

Lastly, he thanked IMacG for keeping the Board running through COVID lockdowns of 2020 when all but her and the hatchery staff were furloughed.

2019 Annual Accounts:

IMacG presented the 2019 audited financials, highlighting the main areas of income and expenditure and their relationship to prior years.

John Milligan asked if the accounts had been previously circulated, to which IMacG replied they had been in the Annual Report and should anyone have any queries on the accounts they could contact her directlt. There were no further questions.

2. & 3. 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 overall salmon catch for 2020 was up by about 1,000 on the previous year despite losing two months' fishing in the spring due to lockdown. 2020 had been the first year the Board had recommended 100% catch and release for the whole season. Compliance in 2020 had been good with over 91% of all salmon reported being released.

   DS explained there had been an increased run in late spring and early spring, perhaps offsetting the recent steep decline in fresh run autumn fish. However, autumn fish had also been scarce in the past. A graph of catches from Taymount was presented, showing very low autumn catches between the 1920's and 1950's. Over a similar period on Stobhall beat, the fish caught in autumn in the 1930's averaged over 15 pounds, but gradually diminished over time. 7-8lb grilse were dominant by the 2000's. It would appear that both autumn grilse and salmon were disappearing and the question is whether they were being replaced by earlier running summer fish.

2. ***Cause of Poor runs?***

   DS explained that nobody knew for sure why this was occurring but perhaps global warming was part of the problem as sea temperatures were changing and this had seen a movement in in the distributions of other fish species in the NE Atlantic, notably

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mackerel. Indeed, mackerel migratory patterns had moved the whole length of the British Isles in 40 years.

Activities for 2020

Hatchery/Kelt Reconditioning Facility:

DS explained that the majority of staff had been furloughed during 2020 but the Board considered the hatchery a priority and therefore hatchery staff had continued as normal to keep the broodstock fish alive.

He explained the kelt reconditioning project and the Scottish Government stocking policy. The Scottish Government had revised their stocking policy to allow restoration and mitigation stocking only, but not enhancement stocking. This, he explained would likely see a fall in egg production from the hatchery. All figures are in the Annual Report.

River Garry Update

DS explained that the Garry had been rewatered in 2017, and that the Board had been stocking the Garry for years as part of a restoration stocking program.

He stated a project was underway in conjunction with SSE and UHI to sample tissue from Garry fish in order to genotype and ascertain the population of wild fish versus stocked fish. 2017 had seen wild fish spawning in the Garry which was very encouraging. He stated the project was a work in progress and 2020 data would be available shortly.

Keith Wallington asked what the return rate was for fish stocked on the Garry, to which DS replied he would answer the query further on in the presentation.

River Tummel Smolt Project

DS explained this was a project in conjunction with TRT and SSE and was investigating how marine survival changed year on year. He explained that traps had been set up in the Garry and Errochty and return rates had been gleaned but there was a question over the validity of the data which he hoped to fully investigate. DS produced a slide regarding return rates and explained the findings, thus answering Keith Wallington's query.

Keith Wallington asked what percentage of the fish were wild in the Garry, to which DS replied that there ought to be 0% wild fish as the Garry had been stocked by the Board and there had been an impassable barrier which would have prevented wild stocks.

Lyon Project

DS explained that the Lyon Project was a collaboration between Lyon proprietors and the Tay Rivers Trust and went on to briefly describe the project.

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Basically, the project focussed on determining whether dams on the Lyon were preventing wild fish passage. The results had been interesting, in that they showed Stronuich dam was not proving the issue once thought.

Keith Wallington asked if this was before or after hydros, to which DS replied that the hydros had been there all the time and the population appeared to be constrained by the amount of food and conditions. The studies had proven that juveniles on either side of the dam were quasi separate breeding population and the area below the dam was not dependent on juveniles migrating into it from above the dam. He added that the Lyon growth rates of fish were very poor and indicated that hydros may be a factor but that further work was required to determine whether this was the case.

Mill of Ross Weir, Bridge of Earn

DS informed the audience that the owner of a weir was looking to replace it, but DS had objected on the grounds that it did not meet current best practice fish pass designs. SEPA had taken on board his objection and now the weir was to be rebuilt to modern standards, which would ultimately benefit the fish population.

Blairgowrie Fish Farm Abstraction

DS explained that changes had been made to the abstraction regime, which had thrown up concerns regarding the passage of wild smolts. Board staff had set up a camera to record what was happening and found that smolts tended to hang about the screens and appeared to find it difficult to enter the by wash. A report had been submitted to SEPA at the beginning of 2020 and SEPA had in turn suggested improvements to the fish farm. This is an ongoing issue.

National Electrofishing Program for Scotland (NEPS)

DS explained the NEPS project had been cancelled in 2020 due to COVID but hoped that it could continue in 2021. The Board are paid £14k by Scottish Government to undertake electrofishing surveys at 30 sites across the catchment. Marine Scotland maintain a model of the results and this in turn helps them refine their categorisation process.

New Board

DS stated there had been a new board elected in December 2020 and they were getting up to speed on catchment issues.

Immediate Priorities

DS explained the immediate priorities for the new Board were to produce a plan for the next 3 years, to finalise evening educational seminars, to revamp the website and to review the TDSFB relationship with the Tay Rivers Trust (TRT).

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Scottish Government – Wild Salmon Strategy

DS stated that the Scottish Government had declared a wild salmon emergency and had held a summit at Holyrood, set up a strategy group and a pressures tool to identify issues affecting salmon population.

Potential Issues and Projects to be considered

- Safeguarding flows on River Lochay against hydro impact
- Improving smolt passage at hydro dams (in conjunction with SEPA)
- River Braan trap and truck project
- River Lyon
- Habitat improvement projects (including fencing, tree planting, peat bog restoration)
- Signal Crayfish
- Invasives

He explained the plan was for the priorities to be set in the next few weeks and rolled out to stakeholders for comment.

Immediate Issues for this year

- Continue Hatchery and Garry work
- Smolt filming on the Ericht
- National Electrofishing Programme for Scotland

Lastly, DS explained that Ron Whytock (Fisheries Officer) and Steve Keay (Hatchery Manager) had both retired in 2020 and thanked them for their contribution over the years.

Enforcement Presentation by Mike Brown, Operations Manager

MB then gave a presentation on the work of the Board's Fisheries Officers including enforcement, fish pass clearing, environmental and hatchery work.
He then explained the Laws which the Fisheries Officers work to and some of the partnership organisations which the staff work with such as Police Scotland and the Procurator Fiscal.

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Mike Brown issued an appeal that information be passed on to the Fisheries Officer team as quickly as possible regarding any suspected incidents..

The Convener thanked the team for their presentations and opened the floor up to a Q & A session.

3. **Question and Answer Session**

Salmon Returns from sea

John Stewart thanked DS for his interesting presentation and asked how many smolts got back to the river.

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DS replied that the work on the Tummel was designed to answer this very question and the return rates were between 2-5%.

JS was also interested about the information from electrotagging studies which had highlighted where fish had died along their migration passage.

DS replied that the larger acoustic tags were very invasive and may be at the heart of the mortality issues. Indeed, the Tweed had released fish in the Gala water and recorded something like a 25% mortality rate before even reaching the Tweed, and were now doing further studies to ascertain the mortality rate through the actual tagging process.

Statistics surrounding 1920's and 1930's

Michael Campbell pointed out that the catch statistics shown for the 1920's and 1930's may be lower due to less anglers at this point in history, to which DS replied this was a valid point and that indeed on Taymount one tenant used to lease fishings for 6 months of the year so could well have reported less catches than in modern times.

Stormont Angling Club – Poaching Issues

Stewart Godfrey highlighted the issue at Stormont Angling Club where there is a serious problem with people fishing illegally.

MB acknowledged the issue and stated he had been in talks with Police Scotland to start joint patrols in the area, which had so far not happened. He had also contacted the Wildlife Liaison Officer.

Michael Campbell suggested contacting local MSP's for help.

DS explained the difficulty of the situation, as the area of water is tidal and therefore anyone can fish for species other than salmon. The Fisheries Officers need to prove that the alleged were actually fishing for salmon and also catch them in the act.

Garry Stocking

Stewart Godfrey asked where exactly the Board stocked on the Garry, to which DS replied they stocked from intake at Loch Garry at Dalnaspidal down to Dalnamein, and also at Garry intake and Glas Choire intake.

Almondbank Site Queries

Peter Hutchinson thanked the Board staff for their presentations and stated he had a number of queries regarding the Almondbank site but was happy to hold on if there was to be a residents meeting.

DS replied that when COVID restrictions eased, a residents meeting could be arranged on site and would like to hold this sooner rather than later.

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JS thanked the staff for their presentations.

DS stated that it was great to receive feedback and Zoom was a great medium for attracting more people to meetings and seminars. He welcomed more thoughts on how to get more people involved.

There were no further questions and the Convener then thanked everyone for coming and for their questions before closing the meeting at 10pm.

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