Tay District Salmon Fisheries Board



Annual Report
2022 / 23

ANNUAL REPORT 2022 / 23

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TAY DISTRICT SALMON FISHERIES BOARD

Convener

T. Metcalfe (Mandatory for Crown Estate Scotland)

Members Elected by Upper Proprietors

R. White (Mandatory for Stanley Fishings)
C. Mercer Nairne
M. Smith (Mandatory for Burnmouth Fishings)
J. Nevin (Mandatory for North Chesthill)

Members Elected by Lower Proprietors

D. Godfrey (Mandatory for Tay Salmon Fishing Company Ltd)
Councillor A. Parrott (Mandatory for Perth and Kinross Council)

Co-opted Members

Representatives of Salmon Anglers

J. Muir
D. Sands
J. Saunders
N. Thompson

Representatives of Tenant Netsmen

C. Innes (Tay Rivers Trust)

Invitees

N. MacIntyre (NatureScot)

Board Staff

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CONVENER'S REPORT 2023

Welcome to the Tay District Salmon Fisheries Board *Annual Report*.

I'm afraid, as I did last year, I am going to focus heavily on the Scottish Government's Wild Salmon Strategy. It is the most important plan of action the sector has had for many years. The strategy sets the national framework against which the Tay Board along with all other fishery boards operate. It represents the best opportunity the sector has to see real and substantive change taking place.

The issue we face now however is the pace at which government are backing up the strategy.
The graph below is lifted from the Strategy :-

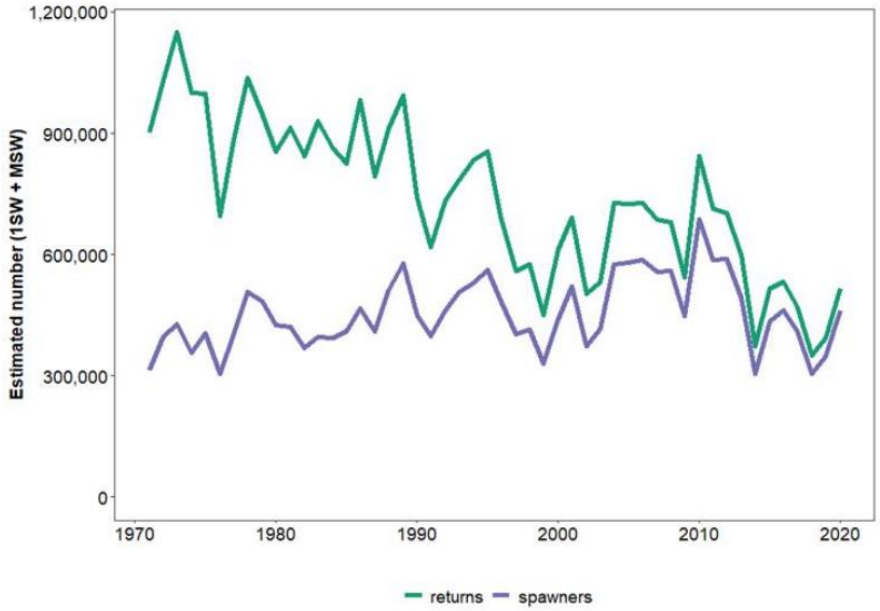


Figure 1: Trends in the estimated numbers of salmon returning to Scottish coastal waters (returns: green line) and the numbers spawning in Scotland's rivers (spawners: purple line) 1971 – 2020. Estimated numbers include both fish that spent one (1SW) and >1 (MSW) years at sea.

It demonstrates in stark terms the steady decline in the numbers of wild Atlantic Salmon returning to spawn in their native rivers in Scotland. When considering the graph it should be remembered that over this period the netting of salmon in the high seas around Greenland, the Faroes and Iceland has almost ceased. Coastal netting has also been banned completely around the Scottish coastline and anglers have taken up catch and release. These actions have helped to protect our salmon stocks from an even more precipitous decline.

So what more can we do. The fact is the Scottish Government's salmon strategy is good. It defines the problem and sets out sensible actions to start to address the many things that need to be done. Beyond that however the story is not so good. The strategy says that it needs to be implemented "at pace" That quite simply is not happening despite the arrival of the government's Salmon Strategy Implementation Plan.

It is essential that all Boards across Scotland through Fishery Management Scotland press home the need for the salmon strategy to be delivered – at pace! Salmon fishing makes a huge contribution to society and life in Scotland. It is of great economic importance proven by many pieces of work over the years to measure this. It provides the framework for environmental issues to be addressed including pollution, control of non-native invasive species, reduction in abstraction levels, and the removal or passing of manmade barriers. The social fabric and health of our society also benefits from fishing in general including salmon fishing.

The members of the Tay board understand the importance of salmon fishing and the concerns over the catch stats on all three rivers for which the board have responsibility. The powers of a board to deliver the changes required depends to a significant extent on other agencies – SEPA, NatureScot and the Marine Directorate working with the board. This must be borne in mind by everyone with an interest in the Tay, Earn and Eden.

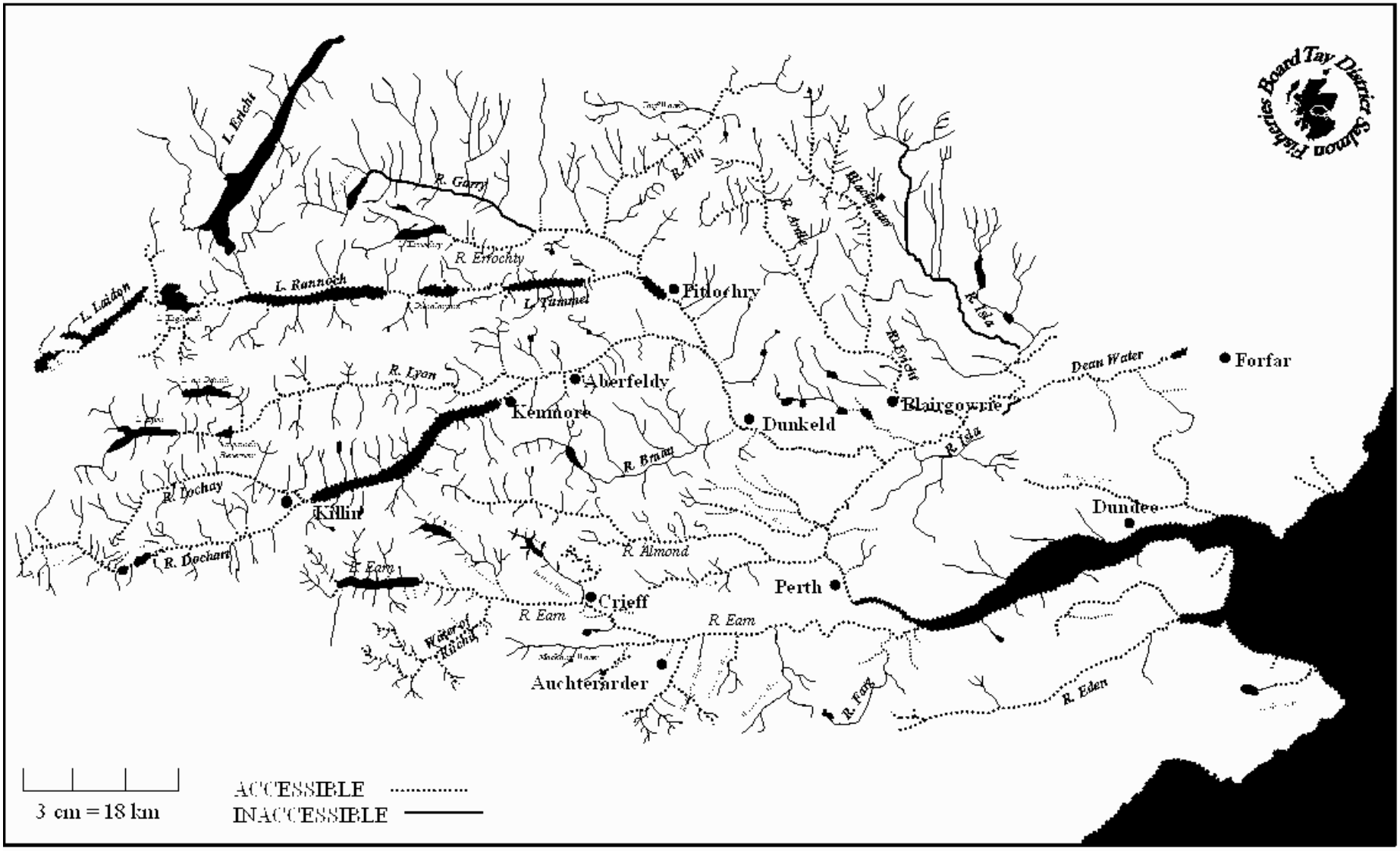
Our Annual Report sets out details of the key pieces of work that we have been engaged in over the period of this report. I would like to specifically draw your attention to the sections on the issues at Blairgowrie and Lochay and to thank those who have been putting in so much time into these specific issues. I hope you find the report interesting and the board would encourage you to ask questions and to support the board in working to get the actions identified in the Government's Implementation plan underway without further delay.

Can I take this opportunity to thank all of the TDSFB staff for their work and commitment over the last 12 months. I am also delighted to welcome two new members of staff – Lee and Mark who have joined us since our last *Annual Report*. They are part of our growing team. Specifically in that regard it is extraordinary to report that whilst the board agreed to appoint a new Fishery Officer some months ago we have to date not been able to make find a suitable candidate. If readers know of someone who might be interested do please contact the Director directly.

I would also like to thank board members for their input and work over the last three years. We have not always been able to speak with one voice, however. Our triennial elections take place in December and I very much hope that the new board will build positively on the progress made over the last three years.

Toby Metcalfe

Salmon Distribution within the Tay District



2023 REPORT

Season 2023

The 2023 Tay salmon season opened on Monday 16 January. Just prior, there had been a spate of over 9 feet but, by the opening, the Tay was clear, down to 7 or 8 feet and falling steadily. Thereafter, water continued to fall until another rise to over five feet in later January.

No spring salmon were caught on opening day, in fact only something like three were caught in the whole month, but these included a lovely sea liced 21 pounder from Upper Scone.

The Tay rose again at the start of February, only really falling from the second week. Following a rise in mid month, it dropped well back for the time of year by the month's end. Temperatures were generally mild throughout.

Perhaps as a result of generally milder conditions, no spring salmon were reported downstream of the Stobhall / Taymount area. Middle Tay beats saw a smattering of fish, with a few on the upper Tay, the Tummel and Loch Tay. However, overall, the February catch was well down on expectations.

The Tay remained relatively low in early March. There was a return of frost and snow on the hills. But, following rain which melted the snow, the second half of the month was more unsettled with several rises.

March saw catches pick up well compared to February, but the unsettled period did not help. Catches were well spread, from a 31 pounder caught at Fishponds, to a decent March on the Tummel. With perhaps under 150 spring salmon caught overall, it was not as good as March 2022, but many were three sea winter fish in the high teens to low 20s of pounds.

For the first week or so of April, the Tay generally held a moderate height. Following a rise on the 12th, there was a steady fall almost to the end of the month. While the winter of 2022/23 was generally mild, the latter part of April turned unseasonably cold. But, when the early 3SW run tailed off, as it does after March, the underlying 2SW run did not increase as it normally would. Catches were generally lower than normal across the board.

In early May, the Tay remained on the low side for the time of year. Following a couple of small rises in the second week, when the very cold wind also eventually shifted, there was no appreciable rain thereafter. The Ballathie gauge was down to about 6 inches by the month's end. Not helped by these conditions, catches were again down, pretty much across the board in May.

June was a dry month, much of it dominated by high pressure, warmth and no rain. As a result, the river continued to drop away and fishing became a struggle for many beats. But, when it began to look as if a disastrous summer was in the offing, several bands of rain came in from the west in the last week, and temperatures fell.

With those conditions, many beats struggled to catch much, but some did better than others. However, the quality of some of the summer salmon reported which was often excellent.

Despite the change in weather, the Tay still remained desperately low for most of the first week of July. But, a few real bouts of rain saw the river progressively rise to over four feet by the 11th. A further bout then saw the river peak around 6 feet in mid month. Levels fell away thereafter and, indeed, in the last week of the month it was back down to just over a foot, though the weather was more cloudy, cooler and much better for fishing than in most of June.

July 2023 very much followed a pattern of July 2022.The Stobhall, Taymount, Ballathie and Cargill beats had a good month. Many of the fish caught there were double figure fresh salmon, even right to the end of the month. Elsewhere it was more mixed, depending to some extent on the water. Previous reports have speculated that this concentration of catches above Stanley may be because the main run of main stem Tay spawners must now arrive at this time of year rather than in autumn as it did before 2016.

The first 10 days or so of August were quite dry and the river fell away to about one foot on the Ballathie gauge before creeping up a bit by mid month. There was then a more decent rise to about three feet on the 20th, with a couple of other pulses of rain keeping it in that general region for about a week, before dropping again towards the month's end. There was never any hot weather.

Catches did pick up on the lowest beats of the river but the best catches continued on those beats just above Stanley, some of whom had their best or nearly best August in five years. But upstream of Islamouth, results were mixed.

More grilse appeared to have been in evidence in August, but that should be expected at that time of year. Some fresh silver fish continued to be caught in the lower river, at least, further into August than in some recent years.

September opened with the river under two feet and falling slowly. This continued, more or less, for over half the month, with only a small rise to break the monotony. Scotland also received its summer in September, with one scorching week, although some east coast "haar" helped for fishing the lower Tay. It was not until about the 18th that the weather finally broke with a serious lift in water, followed by another of over 9 feet later in the month.

Catches reflected conditions, but not all beats had the same experience. Lower beats, still did not experience the same catches as those beats just above Stanley. Cargill, for example, caught 116 salmon in September, including one of 30 pounds.

Catches did improve all round at the end of September, and October appeared to offer some promise. The month started with the Tay at about 6 feet, at which it remained for about the first week. However, the following Friday and Saturday were wiped out by the deluge from "Storm Agnes" which saw the river peaking at around 20 feet. This was the biggest spate during the fishing season, certainly for many years. Even the Queen's Bridge in Perth was closed. But, when it looked as if the remainder

would be a wipeout, there was no more rain and the last two or three days became fishable again, with the river back to down to about five feet on the Saturday, the last day of the season.

The catches for October were, therefore, well down across the board. But, when it had been fishable, there had been a bit of promise. The last day proved to be the best of the season with over 50.

So, overall, the 2023 season was one of disappointment. While 3SW fish were present at the beginning, the 2SW spring run appeared well down, which seemed to be a universal phenomenon. The summer 2SW run appeared stronger than the spring run, which helped, but there was, once again, no late autumn run of fresh fish. Overall then, 2023 is likely to return the poorest reported rod catch since the 1950s, when of course there were nets on and fewer people angling.

Catch and Release

In 2023, the Board continued to recommend 100% catch-and-release of all salmon and grilse for the entire season on the River Tay and tributaries, as it had since 2020. Catch and release was mandatory on the River Earn and River Eden.

While data are not yet available for 2023, the overall reported released rate for the Tay in 2022, excluding the Earn and Eden, was another record at 96.84%. The percentage released varied throughout the season, with a suggestion that some anglers were still keeping the occasional fish in the summer (Figure 1).

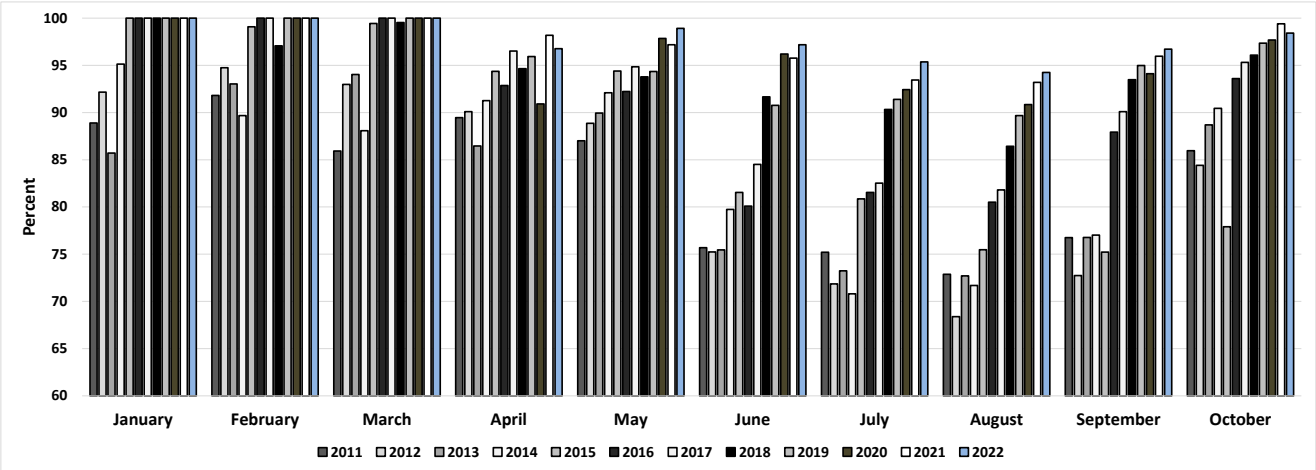


Figure 1. *Percentage of the River Tay and tributaries (excluding the rivers Earn and Eden) district salmon and grilse catch released by month in each year from 2011 to 2022. Data from Marine Directorate.*

Sea Trout Conservation

In 2009, the Board recommended that, following a long decline in their numbers, all sea trout should be released without exception. This policy has been maintained thereafter. Since the introduction of the policy, the great majority of the catch has continued to be released, with very high levels being maintained 2022 (Figure 2).

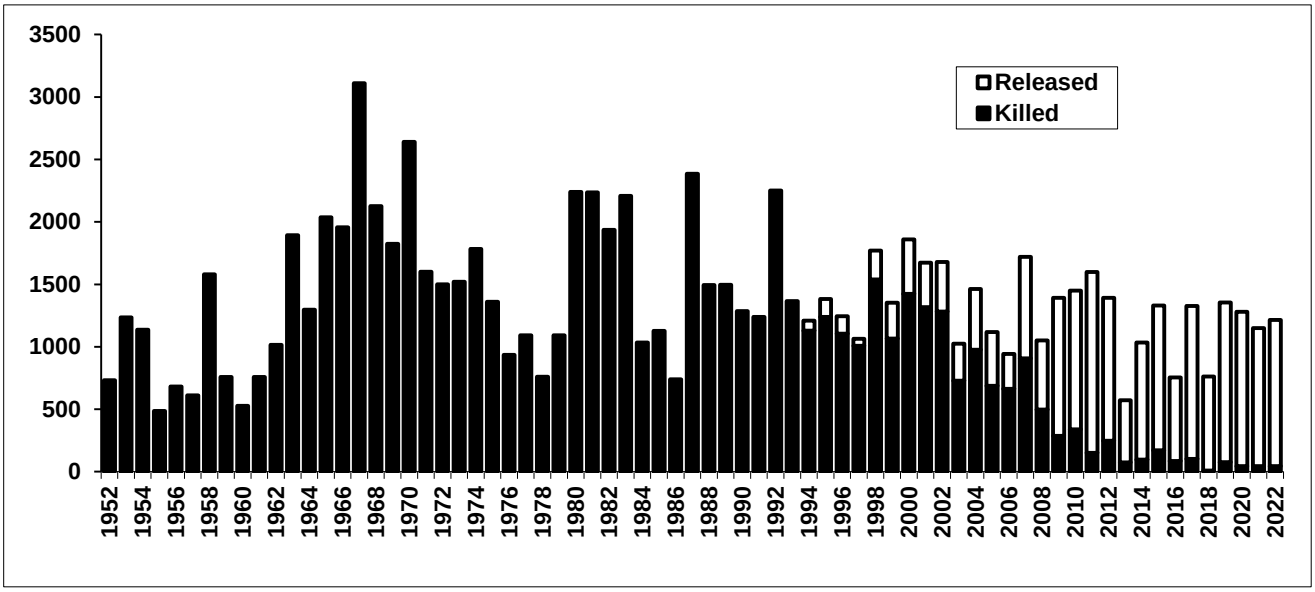


Figure 2. *Tay District rod & line catch of sea trout, 1952 – 2022. 2023 data not yet available. Data from Marine Directorate.*

Enforcement

In 2023, the number of salmon within the catchment at times was reduced and poaching activity was also down on previous years. Board's fisheries officers attended 30 call outs or other enforcement incidents throughout the year. Most of these resulted in warnings and people leaving the water.

However, one incident, in which an individual was found sniggering salmon on the River Ericht has been reported to the Procurator fiscal with aid of Police Scotland's wildlife crime officers.

Throughout the year Board staff enjoyed excellent cooperation with Police Scotland. The Board really values this cooperation and thanks Police Scotland for it.

Working again with Police Scotland's wildlife crime officers joint patrols in sensitive areas are planned for 2024. Board staff also held a meeting in November with senior officers to discuss future working and collaboration.

Incidents reported to the Procurator Fiscal during 2022 unfortunately resulted in warnings which is disappointing. However, enforcement work remains critical in ensuring the protection of our wild Tay salmon while they are within our catchment. Enforcement activity throughout the year is an important deterrent to poachers. Visible patrols are ongoing throughout the year and all times of the day.

Health and Safety at Work

Health and safety at work is a major consideration for the Board. The Board's staff are frequently required to work in situations where potential hazards are present.

In 2023, the Board's Health & Safety policy, which was professionally reviewed by consultants Greens of Haddington in 2022, was approved by the Board.

At the time of writing (December 2023), no incidents have been reported to the HSE under RIDDOR.

Staff Changes

In 2022 / 23 there were two changes to the Board staff. Firstly, Anne Woodcock who had been doing media and marketing work for the Board and Tay Rivers Trust on a part time basis left at the end of 2022 for a full time job on the River Tweed.

The Board recognised that the volume of administration work was such that its part-time Clerk / administrator required assistance. In the autumn, Lee Harvey, was recruited as a part time Administrative Assistant.

Access Road Issues

The access road down to the Board's hatchery has been a cause for concern for several years because a section had suffered from subsidence. However, early in the year, the Tay Rivers Trust, which now owns the hatchery site and access road, was finally able to engage contractors who stabilised the banking with gabions. The work was paid for by rent which the board had been due the previous owner of the site, the Scottish Government, but had never been billed for. The Scottish Government kindly agreed the money could be used for this purpose. The Tay Rivers Trust has continued to discuss with contractors, the board and other local residents to repair potholes on the rest of the road. It is hoped this will be completed before the end of 2023.

Fisheries Management Scotland

Fisheries Management Scotland is the representative body of Scotland's DSFBs and fisheries trusts. The Board's Fisheries Director, David Summers, held one of the six positions for elected representatives of DSFBs on the FMS Board until his term expired in November 2023. Detailed information on the work of Fisheries Management Scotland can be found on its website www.fms.scot. The minutes of its regular meetings can be found at www.fms.scot/board/.

Proposed Conservation Regulations 2024

In August 2023, the Marine Directorate of Scottish Government published the proposed conservation categories for 2024. As in 2023, the Tay SAC (that is the Tay and all its tributaries above the mouth of

the Earn) will remain in Category 1, while the Earn and Eden remain in Category 3. A reminder was again made regarding outstanding issues with the methodology used to estimate these grades.

National Electrofishing Programme for Scotland

Scottish Government was able to find funding for boards / trusts to perform another round of the National Electrofishing Programme for Scotland (NEPS) in 2023. The Board will be paid approximately £15,000 for electrofishing 30 sites across the Tay district during the summer. However, while the income from NEPS and its outputs are valued, the fact that there was no NEPS in 2022 and there was only a three week lead in time in 2023, meant that some other potential work had to be de-prioritised.

Details of this initiative, including results from previous years can be found at www.gov.scot/publications/national-electrofishing-programme-for-scotland/ .

Scottish Wild Salmon Strategy Implementation Plan

As mentioned in last year's *Annual Report*, the Scottish Government published the first stage of its long awaited Scottish Wild Salmon Strategy in 2022. The next part, the Implementation Plan (www.gov.scot/publications/wild-salmon-strategy-implementation-plan-2023-2028/), was published in February 2023. The Board welcomed the publication of the Implementation Plan and the commitment to a program of barrier removal, hydro review and work on predation, but considered that it could have listed specific projects with timescales.

The delivery of the IP is overseen by a delivery group, whose membership includes Fisheries Management Scotland. A Science Advisory Board has been set up to advise the delivery group. Marine Scotland invited the Board's Fisheries Director to be a member.

Fisheries Management Planning

Early in 2023, Marine Scotland made funds available for Boards and Fisheries Trusts across Scotland (£4,500 per river) to produce web based "Story Map" fisheries management plans for each. These should dovetail with The Scottish Government's Salmon Strategy Implementation Plan. The first phase of the project, based on the Board's three year plan, was completed by the end of March. The second, final part of the project will be completed in early 2024.

TDSFB Annual Public Meeting 2023

In order to provide a better educational experience of issues in the district, the Board changed the format of the Annual Public Meeting in 2023. Instead of wholly formal presentations and questions, on 19 April, this took the form of a site visit to the River Ericht at Blairgowrie, followed by a visit to the hydro station at Stanley Mill, followed by a return to the Board's hatchery, where refreshments and updates on the Board's work were provided. Minutes of the meeting can be found at www.tayrivers.org/reports/ .



Part of this year's Annual Public Meeting took the form of site visits, such as here at the River Ericht in Blairgowrie.

Hatchery Report 2022/23

As described in recent *Annual Reports*, the Board's stocking activities are now centered around the Kelt Reconditioning Project which it has run since taking over the former Marine Directorate hatchery at Almondbank in 2011. Kelt reconditioning entails the keeping and feeding of captive salmon kelts following stripping. Such fish can live in captivity for several years on average, producing eggs each year with the great advantage of not impacting on the source population. Every year some new fish do have to be taken from the wild to top up the captive stock, but on their first stripping, the eggs are returned to the native tributary. Thereafter, reconditioned eggs might be stocked elsewhere.

Broodstock collection requires an annual licence from Marine Directorate of Scottish Government. This now significantly restricts what can be taken, particularly from Tay tributaries, being part of the River Tay Special Area of Conservation. For the autumn of 2022, a licence was granted to take 60 salmon from the River Tilt, 60 from the lower River Garry and 28 from the Errochty Water, all for reconditioning in order to stock the restored River Garry. A licence was also granted for taking 13 salmon from the Fillan Water to produce reconditioned kelts for stocking the River Lochay with salmon parr. Licensing conditions are slightly less strict outwith the SAC, and a licence was again granted to take 30 broodstock from the Ruchill Water (River Earn) and 8 from the River Eden

Figure 3 shows the number of adult broodstock caught in each of these tributaries in 2022, with comparisons back to 2015. Figure 4 presents the same data but as a percentage of the licensed quota. The percentage of the quota taken varies between years and between tributaries in any given year. Relatively few have been caught in the River Tilt in recent years, though 2022 was a bit better. This largely reflects weather conditions. The fish are simply harder to catch in wet years. The Errochty and to a lesser extent the Garry around Bruar have been more dependable, as a result of having controlled flows by hydro. Weather is also a significant factor on the Ruchill and Eden, though lack of fish is a particular problem in the latter. For example, one female and two male salmon were caught on the River Eden in 2022.

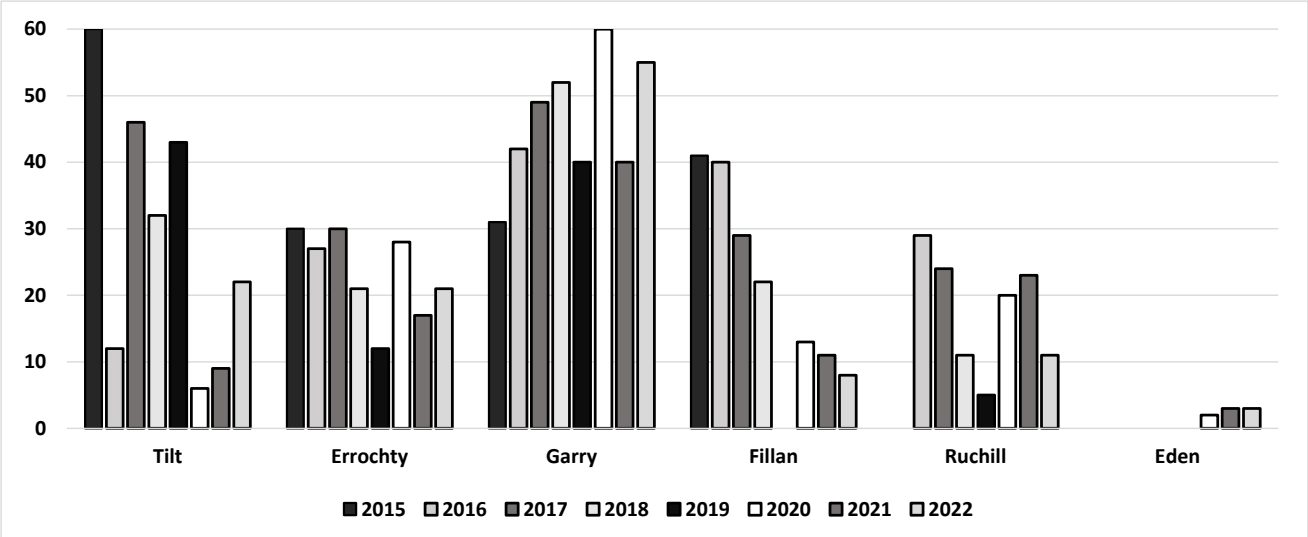


Figure 3. *Numbers of adult broodstock salmon taken each year under licence, according to tributary, 2015 – 2022.*

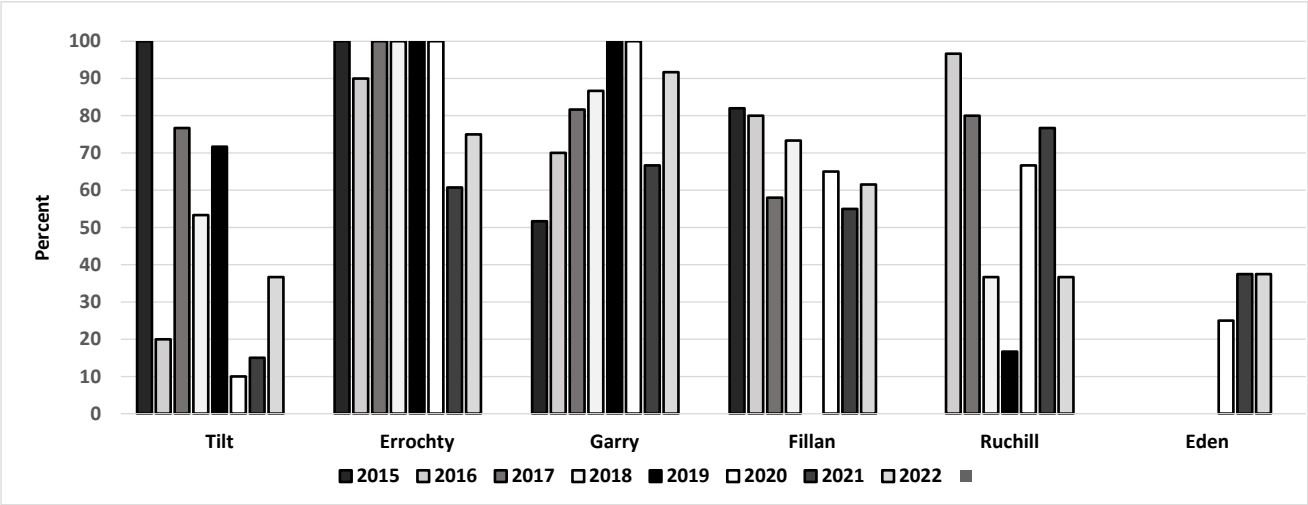


Figure 4. *Numbers of adult broodstock salmon taken each year expressed as percentage of licensed quota, according to tributary, 2015 – 2022.*

Although conditions were not perfect, more new broodstock were taken in 2022, but the number of reconditioned eggs produced had fallen following a run of poorer broodstock years (Table 1). Part of

that, of course, is due to the licensing restrictions which were introduced by the Scottish Government in 2019.

	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Eggs from new broodstock	300,211	189,021	312,421	436,787	622,458	449,065	273,885	340,632	259,155	376,060
Eggs from reconditioned broodstock	354,722	421,379	316,204	222,810	425,936	668,899	727,094	410,281	357,604	279,858
Total	654,933	610,400	629,225	659,597	1,048,394	1,117,964	1,000,979	750,913	616,759	655,918

Table 1. *Numbers of eyed ova produced annually by the kelt reconditioning facility since 2013.*

The numbers stocked out in 2023 are given in Table 2 according to tributary.

Tributary stocked	Eyed ova	Parr
River Tilt	76,710	
River Garry (restored section)	123,564	
River Garry (below Struan)	173,144	
Allt Glas Choire (lower)	19,300	
Allt Glas Choire (upper)	101,803	
Errochty Water	77,171	
Ruchill Water (upper reaches)	35,917	
Fillan tributaries	17,390	
River Lochay		10,679
River Eden		8,503
Totals	**624,999**	**19,182**

Table 2. *Numbers of salmon eggs stocked in spring 2023 according to tributary.*

Broodstock Collection Application 2023/24

An application was made to the Scottish Government in August 2023 to take broodstock from the rivers Errochty, Fillan, Garry and Tilt within the River Tay SAC, plus the River Earn (main river and Ruchill Water) and the River Eden for stocking projects that met Scottish Government stocking policy guidelines. Because of increased interest on the River Earn and the possibility of the licensed quota elsewhere being constrained, the application was once again covered the catching broodstock on the lower Earn for the purposes of obtaining fecundity information to inform Scottish Government's river categorisation model.

Following the application, the Board and Scottish Government received a letter from Pitlochry Angling Club requesting that no licence should be granted for the River Garry catchment given the exceptionally low numbers of adult fish then counted ascending Pitlochry Dam. Scottish Government later informed the Board that they considered that stocking of the main stem of the Garry should

cease, partly as a consequence of the lower count of salmon at Pitlochry Dam this year. However, they would permit stocking continue in the Allt Glas Choire tributary and requested a revised number of broodstock for this. They were minded to continue to issue a licence for broodstock to continue to be sourced in the upper Earn and Eden, as they are not within an SAC, but this should be considered to be for fisheries management purposes not "scientific". This was done and a licence was issued on 16 October, permitting the taking of 18 broodstock from the River Tilt, 12 from the River Garry, 4 from the Errochty Water, 11 from the River Fillan, 60 in total from the River Earn and 5 from the River Eden. For the Tay SAC area, i.e. everything not including the Earn and Eden, that represents a big reduction, and will significantly impact on future reconditioned output.

Beaver Issues

With a significant established population of beavers in the Tay catchment, Board staff continue to have to regularly monitor a number of fish passes and other critical damming points to prevent blockages.

Last year's *Annual Report* referred to a particularly large dam on the Shochie Burn upstream of Battleby Loch and that a licence had been sought for its removal. Unfortunately, by the time the licence was issued by NatureScot (6 December) it was too late for the 2022 spawning season.

However, when an electrofishing survey was conducted in the upper Shochie in late August 2023, the density of salmon fry was the best in over 10 years. It would appear, therefore, that adult salmon managed to swim round the dam during high water in November 2022. Given the prevailing weather, the same is likely to happen in 2023, but a new licence has been obtained and the dam has been removed in case of a future dry spawning season.

As part of the Scottish Beaver Strategy which was adopted in 2022, the Board's director has been invited to participate in a Scottish Beaver Advisory Group Fish and Fisheries sub group. This is the first time the such a group dedicated to fish and fisheries has been established. It should, therefore, be a forum through which concerns about beaver – fish issues can be formalized and presented to key decision makers.

Bird Licence Application

An application to NatureScot for a licence to shoot piscivorous birds as an aid to shooting to scare was made in July 2023. Processing of the application took longer than last year and a licence was then issued on 27 September. A quota of 40 goosanders, 3 mergansers and 7 cormorants was issued. An extension for shooting male goosanders only until 31 May on the main stems of the Tay and Earn was also requested because numbers of migrating males can arrive following the normal closing date of 30 April and pose a danger to smolts. As the initial licence only mentioned the Tay and not the Earn specifically, a clarification was requested and this was subsequently issued including the main stem Earn on 2 November.

Seals

An application for a licence to shoot specialist seals preying on salmon in the lower was submitted at the end of January 2023 and was rejected by Marine Scotland in late July. All other rivers which applied in 2023 were rejected too.

In view of the apparent difficulty in obtaining seal licences, the Board investigated the sourcing of acoustic "seal scarers". These have been tried by various boards, with differing degrees of success according to local circumstances. Fisheries Management Scotland has applied to the Marine Fund Scotland for funding to buy seal scarers for rivers. Three have been requested for this district. One each for the Tay, Earn and Eden.

River Fillan Embankment

The Board has been in discussions with the Loch Lomond & the Trossachs Countryside Trust (LLTCT) and SRUC regarding the potential lowering or partial removal of a flood embankment adjacent to a section of the Fillan Water upstream of Crianlarich. The Board is concerned that by constricting flood flows, flood velocities become particularly high downstream, perhaps then contributing to excessive erosion which occurs along a stretch vital to spring salmon spawning.

A plan for this project has developed following meetings with LLTCT and SRUC, including a site meeting involving the adjacent landowners. As part of the process of obtaining permissions, a Flood Risk Analysis study has had to be conducted. This was commissioned by LLTCT and funded by the Nature Restoration Fund. This work is required to inform local landowners, particularly neighbouring parties, as to any like effects on their properties.

The final Flood Risk Analysis report is still awaited.

Fisheries Management Scotland Hydro Group

Fisheries Management Scotland established a hydro group to help advance hydro issues with SEPA on a national level. FMS requested details of hydro related issues from all relevant boards / trusts. These were then collated by the Board's director on behalf of FMS and subject to a simple prioritisation methodology to identify all the key issues that are not been dealt with or being dealt with adequately. This will, in due course be presented to SEPA / Wild Salmon Strategy delivery group in order to try to advice issues.

River Lochay

In last year's Annual Report it was explained that the Board had submitted a detailed proposal paper to SEPA, SSE, NatureScot and Marine Scotland regarding improvements that might be made regarding abstraction and fish passage on the River Lochay. Meetings have been held and SEPA had told the Board it would prioritise a review of SSE's abstraction licence for the Lochay.

SEPA presented some work on flow restoration modelling on upper Lochay tributaries to the Board. This had been presented to SSE but was only one of a number of licence reviews being considered. The Board considered that SEPA should expand the scope of this work to also include lower tributaries such as the Allt Duncroisk. The Board renewed its subscription of Low Flows software to enable it to model its own restoration scenarios to submit to SEPA.

Signal crayfish

North American signal crayfish are present in several localities within the Tay district. For a decade and more they have been spreading very quickly in the Ericht system and are now abundant below Blairgowrie. It is not clear just what impact they might have on the salmon population. The Tay Rivers Trust wish to obtain baseline juvenile salmon population data in areas before they are overrun, but this first requires a knowledge of the limits of crayfish distribution. Board staff assisted in this process by collecting water samples along the Ardle and Blackwater to determine upstream limits. The samples were taken to Inverness where staff at the university of the Highlands and Islands will determine whether crayfish environmental DNA (eDNA) is present in the water. This work is expected to be completed in early 2024.

Tay Rivers Trust Project Development Officer

The Tay Rivers Trust has appointed a part time Project Development Officer to develop riparian and other projects. Andy Sides has been doing very similar work for the Loughs Agency on cross border rivers in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Andy started at the beginning of October and is currently working in collaboration with Board staff.

Mitigating future high temperatures in upland tributaries

One of the issues identified in the Board / Tay Rivers Trust's River Plan is to consider planting shading trees along upland tributaries that may be vulnerable to overheating in future.

As a first example of this work, the Tay Rivers Trust have been investigating the possibility of such work in the upper Shee area. Initially, relevant landowners agreed to have temperature loggers installed in the summer of 2023 to identify which tributaries are most at risk. While purchased by TRT, these were deployed by TDSFB staff in 20 small and medium tributaries.

With TRT's Project Development Officer now in place, progress in developing a plan of work is expected to happen quickly.

Pacific pink salmon

Pacific pink salmon, which have been appearing in the NE Atlantic area in significant numbers every second years since 2017, were expected again in summer 2023. However, while very large numbers were reported in parts of Norway, fewer seemed to have been reported in Scotland. To the Board's knowledge, only one specimen, found dead at Stanley, was reported from the River Tay.

Fish rescues

Board staff can perform consultancy work, where possible, which brings in extra funds. Two fish rescues were undertaken in 2023, both in connection with maintenance work on Network Rail infrastructure, one on the River Braan and the other at Tyndrum.

Dighty Water works

The Board objected to an application for a marine licence for the creation of a new footbridge over the Dighty Water at Monifieth. This was to involve feeding the Dighty through four pipes at the head of the beach for the duration of the spring / summer to allow digger access. The Board was concerned that sea trout particularly might not be keen to pass through the pipes and be held offshore.

In discussions with consultants, Marine Scotland and Dundee City Council, it appeared there was no alternative to the pipes, but sky lights were proposed in the pipes at intervals to try to make them more attractive for fish to ascend. Marine Scotland authorised the licence on this basis.

River Eden

Following the removal by SEPA of a weir at Gateside Mill on the River Eden in 2022, SEPA have reported salmon fry upstream of the weir in 2023, which is very welcome news. However, Board staff also found good numbers of juvenile salmon upstream in 2022 before the weir was removed, but only fry. However, this may not necessarily mean that salmon could sometimes ascend the weir, because some stop logs in a low flow channel were removed a year before hand and some fish may have ascended there under certain conditions.

***Saprolegnia* fungus PhD**

The fungus, *Saprolegnia*, is a long standing issue in this district, regularly affecting adult salmon in the River Ericht particularly, but elsewhere too. Significant numbers can be lost in some years. However, it appears there have been severe outbreaks in some far northern rivers with little previous history. There are concerns this may be due to a new more virulent strain.

Along with a number of other rivers, the Board agreed to contribute £3,000 annually for three years to fund a PhD study organised by Fisheries Management Scotland. The study, based at Aberdeen University, aims to understand more about this problem; are there different strains and what factors contribute to outbreaks, for example, stress at obstructions? It is hoped that by providing samples from rivers like the Ericht, more can be understood about our local problems as well as a national picture.

Low Flow Concerns

In June 2023, the weather was warm and dry. There were concerns that, should it continue, summer 2023 might see significant low flow problems arising, such as occurred in the River Eden in 2022. In

potential anticipation of this, the Board's director was invited by SEPA to participate in a meeting with Fisheries Management Scotland and the River Tweed Commission as to how boards / trusts could act as eyes and ears to report low flow issues as they arose. However, in practice, shortly after the weather changed and, fortunately, this no longer proved to be an issue.

Lows Weir

Low's Dyke on the lower Almond, the weir which diverts water into Perth Lade, was rebuilt some years ago by Perth and Kinross Council, following having been breached by floods. Some deterioration has since taken place and PKC proposed remedial works in October 2023. Given that the main Almond run of salmon would have ascended and that spawning downstream would not commence for some weeks, the Board did not object to the request. However, in practice the work had to be curtailed due to weather and has been postponed until late spring 2024.

Grandtully in-river constructions

In the autumn, the Board was contacted as part of an investigation on behalf of the Scottish Canoe Association. Apparently, a party or parties, had moved boulders at the Grandtully rapids without permission, even joining boulders together with concrete to create bigger features. This work, which had not been sanctioned by the SCA either, had been discovered and then removed. However, apart from the concern regarding use of cement in the river, it was not felt that the now removed works posed a threat to salmon passage.

Blair Atholl Watermill

The traditional watermill in Blair Atholl is supplied by water diverted from the River Tilt. After being washed down in a flood, the rough stone weir was replaced a year or two ago by more sturdy stones. However, the new construction also then collapsed in a flood last winter. The Board was contacted by both the estate and SEPA and did not object to a rough weir being reinstated to allow the mill to operate again. It is understood that a more formal CAR licence application for a more robust structure will follow in due course.

Salmon in the Classroom

Salmon in the classroom is a joint project which is now headed by the Tay Rivers Trust, although delivery is conducted Perthshire Wildlife, Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Ranger Services, and the Board.

This project had been in obeyance during the Covid years but recommenced in 2023. Salmon eggs were provided from the Board's hatchery at Almondbank to three primary schools Killin, Pitcairn and Robert Douglas Memorial. In the spring, the participating classes then visited the Board's hatchery and were given talks and demonstrations on the salmon life cycle and its conservation, the process of the hatchery and the fisheries on the River Tay. Later in the year, Board staff performed electrofishing demonstrations in the streams where the alevins or fry had been released by the pupils.

Publicity

Unfortunately, the Board's part time Marketing Manager moved on at the end of 2022, which led to a reduction in social media presence. However, Samantha and Sandy Datta of Salmon Fishing Holidays Scotland continued to write and post weekly fishing reports on the Board's website (www.tayrivers.org/category/fishing-reports/) and Facebook (www.facebook.com/thetayriver). There has been discussion regarding the Dattas doing more for the Board on social media, but this has been deferred for the new Board to consider following December's triennial election.

Fishpal

The Board has had a long association with what is now the Fishpal website (formerly FishTay). At the outset in 2004, an agreement was brokered by the Association of Salmon Fishery Boards between the website owner and participating rivers. The Board originally paid an annual "franchise" fee of £21,000 which allowed any beat to have a page on the site and no commission was paid on online bookings. Once the website was established, the Board negotiated the fee down and commission was introduced on bookings.

Currently, the Board still pays an annual fee of £5,372 + VAT, although anglers booking fishing on Fishpal are also invited to make a donation to the Tay Rivers Trust, which usually sees several thousand pounds returning to the river. However, following further negotiations with Fishpal, the annual fee has been reduced to £4,500 and will take effect in 2024. For this fee, any beat in the district can have its own page on the website, without incurring an annual fee, as on some other rivers.

Any proprietor or beat manager who wished to have a page should get in touch with the Board or Fishpal directly.

Meetings Attended

During the course of 2023, Board staff attended numerous meetings in addition to any previously mentioned.

The Board's Fisheries Director attended:

- Three Fisheries Management Scotland Board Meetings.
- Attended Fisheries Management Scotland Conference and gave a presentation on outstanding hydro issues
- Scottish Fisheries Coordination Centre, 2 day annual conference, including giving a presentation on the River Garry monitoring.
- Meeting with conveners and directors of "big four" rivers.
- Meeting with FMS and nearby boards/trusts regarding offshore wind developments.
- Gave presentation on River Garry work at annual conference of the Institute of Fisheries Management
- Meeting of Fisheries Management Scotland, hydro committee

- A meeting of the Scottish Beaver Advisory Group, Fish & Fisheries Sub-Group
- Three meetings of the Wild Salmon Strategy Science Advisory Board
- Meetings of the River Ericht Focus Group
- Meeting with the operator of Stormontfield Hydro
- Attended presentation by a PhD student (now complete) at Aberdeen University who used a heat sensing drone to understand water temperature issues below hydro dams.
- Meeting with ghillies to understand concerns about low fish catches
- Meetings of the Tay Rivers Trust
- Presentation on stocking on the Tay to a committee of the Ness DSFB investigating potential hatchery options.
- Meeting with Convener and M. Smith and representatives of the Tay Ghillies Association
- Meetings of the River Garry Technical Group.
- Meeting with Eden Angling Association

FISH COUNTER RESULTS 2023

As reported previously, SSE have acknowledged problems with their resistivity counters at Pitlochry and other dams since changes were made to them in 2018. The counts displayed in Figure 5 below for the period 2018 – 2022 are underestimates and not to be relied on.

However, SSE have been working with specialists to devise a parallel counting system which relies on AI to identify passing fish on a continuous video stream. This has been operating since the summer of 2022. Over, the course of 2023, SSE have informed the Board that the AI system has counted 1,485 net upstream counts, while the resistivity counter only counted *ca*. 700. However, as the AI camera is not active for the full 24 hours and does not work when the water is coloured, by the Board's estimation on the basis of information supplied by SSE, the true count for 2023 is possibly more like 2,000. It is understood that SSE will, in due course, produce a best figure.

While not comparable with previous years, the AI count supplied by SSE is presented in Figure 5 for 2023 to at least illustrate the timing of movements through Pitlochry Dam this year. There was a relatively high percentage count in June and particularly low in the later summer / early autumn. This may have reflected the cold May, delaying the run, and then less grilse.

An AI counting system has also been installed in the Lochay Falls fish pass and, the Board understands, SSE intends to install these at Clunie and Stronuich dams in due course.

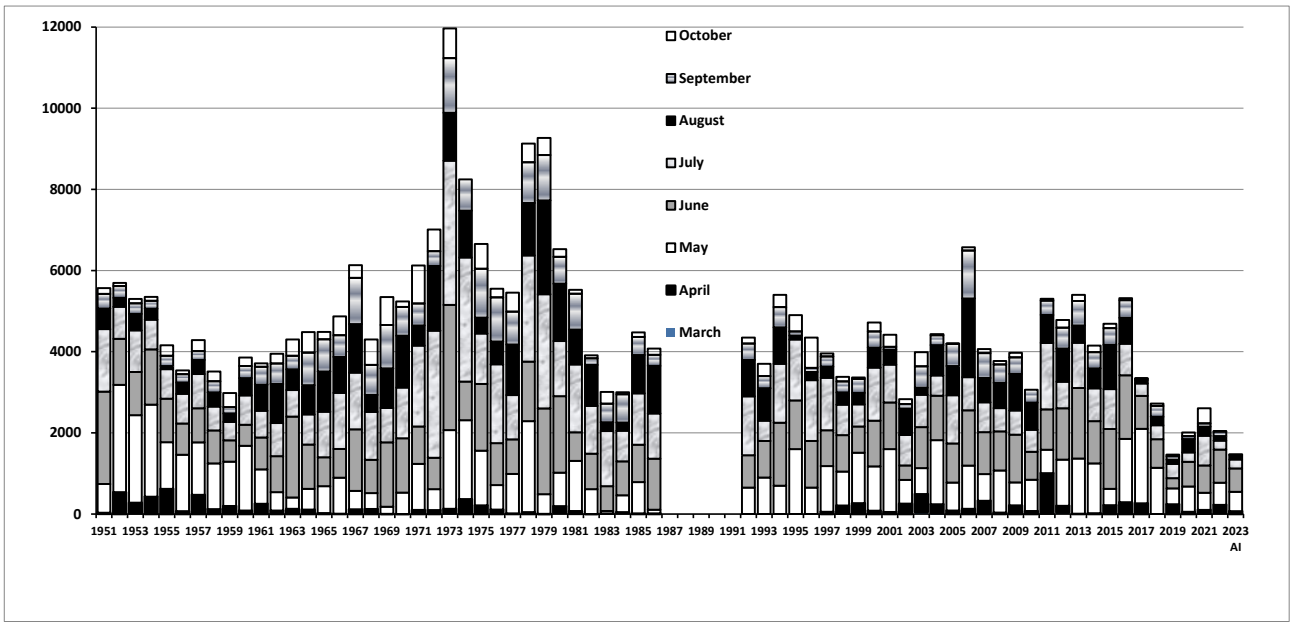


Figure 5. *Monthly net upstream counts, Pitlochry Dam, 1951 to 2020. 2021 and 2022 represent public display data uncorrected for droppers while 2023 are the net "AI" counts. (Data courtesy of the late Michael Gardner, David Stewart, Ross Gardiner and SSE)*

TAY RIVERS TRUST / MALLOCH TROPHY CELEBRATION DINNER

Following the success of last year's Ballantine Celebration Dinner, the Tay Rivers Trust organised another fundraising dinner at Murrayshall Hotel on 7 October 2023, supported by the Board.

Board member and Tay Rivers Trust trustee, Bobby White, himself a previous Malloch winner, awarded the Malloch Trophy to the 2022 winner, John Mitchell, who caught a cracking 27 pound spring salmon at Inshewan on the South Esk. John is also pictured below with actor Paul Whitehouse who was present.

David Barwick, long serving ghillie on Upper Scone was also presented with a memento by Garry McErlain.

Approximately £17,000 was raised for the good of the river. Special thanks are once again due to all the generous benefactors who donated fabulous items for the auction, all those who kindly bought them and to Jerry Saunders and Inga MacGillivray who put in a tremendous effort to make the event a success.









Photos from Graeme Hart, Perthshire Picture Agency

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OPENING DAY 2023 CELEBRATIONS AT MEIKLEOUR

In 2023, Board member, Claire Mercer-Nairne organized and hosted the annual Tay season opening day ceremony.

This year's guests of honour were actor Burn Gorman and well-known writer on country matters, David Profumo. Also present at this very well attended event was Perth and Kinross Provost Zander McDade who blessed the river in the time honoured way with a quaich of whisky.













Photos from Graeme Hart, Perthshire Picture Agency

RIVER ERICHT FOCUS GROUP

Last year's *Annual Report* described how The River Ericht Focus Group had been formed as a committee of the Board to bring more weight on long standing water abstraction and fish passage problems at Blairgowrie. The group comprises TDSFB, Blairgowrie and District Angling Association (BRDAA), Tay Rivers Trust and a local proprietor.

While the cooler / wetter summer of 2023 meant some of the issues were not so acute this year, though the early summer was very dry, the issues are still very much there.

Dry stone work conducted by Perth and Kinross Council to shore up the lower weir below the Bridge of Blair has already started to erode. Concerns that buildings on the right side of the river are being undermined led to material being introduced under the right side of the weir on two occasions.

As it is clear that, at some point, interested parties are going to have to find a sustainable long term solution to the lower weir, the Focus Group recognized that a plan is needed for the rebuilding of the fish pass, should the main weir be renovated. Perth and Kinross Council and BAM Nuttall hoped that, as a community benefit from the Perth Futures road improvement scheme, engineering plans for a replacement fish pass might be produced by their consultants, Fairhurst and Partners. However, as at the time of writing this has not been confirmed, an alternative quote has been sought from a specialist contractor and grant funding has been sought. In another proactive move, it is proposed the plans will also include screening works to ensure the entrance to the lade is smolt-proof. The group enlisted volunteers and land-owners to assist with smolt-shepherding. A method was also devised to deflect smolts away from the lade in low flows, but this was not required owing to flow conditions.

Last year's report also highlighted approaches to the Scottish Government. In 2023, local constituent members of the group met with John Swinney MSP and Mairi Gougeon MSP following previous correspondence. At the meeting Ms Gougeon undertook to elicit responses from SEPA and Mr Swinney volunteered to convene and chair a multi-interest focus group. While the SEPA responses were eventually forthcoming Mr Swinney's initiative is still awaited.

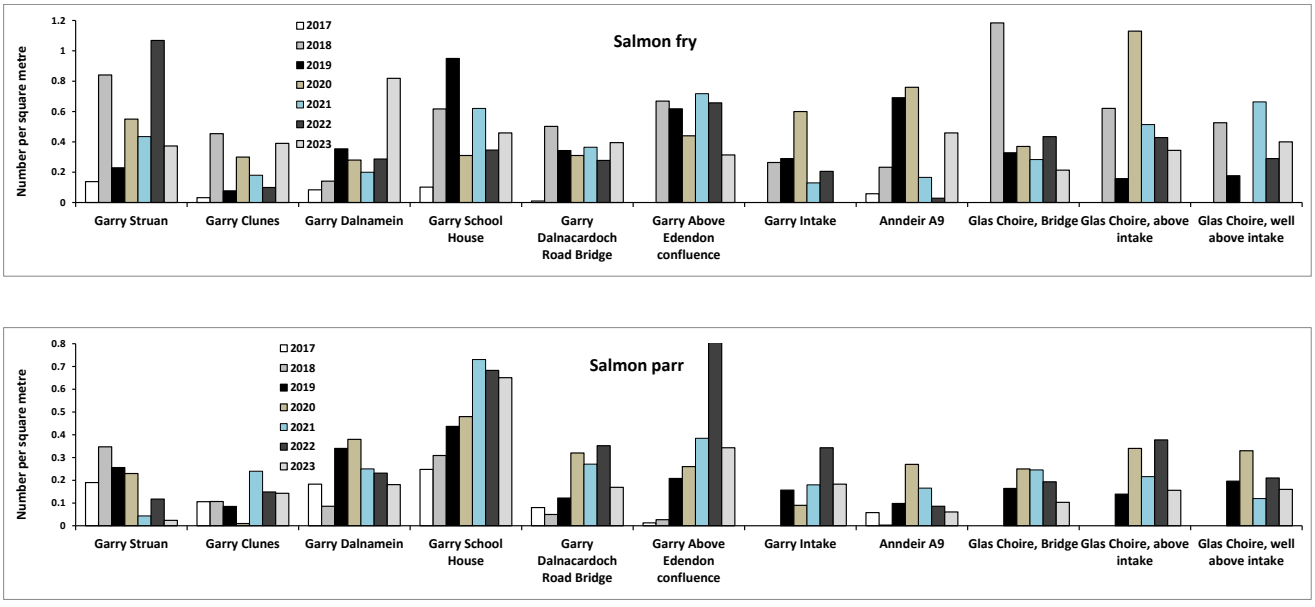
A main demand of the group is that SEPA conduct a review of the licence to abstract water into the lade, as was supposed to have happened by late 2019. In a reply to the group from SEPA, following the Cabinet Secretary's intervention, SEPA informed that SEPA was still prioritizing which reviews of licences would be conducted by 2027 and that the Ericht was still in the melting pot. Further, the requirement for the abstractor to provide a publicly accessible flow gauge in the lade would be removed from its monitoring plan because "regular sediment build-up at this gauge would provide a false reading".

RIVER GARRY FLOW RESTORATION MONITORING

In autumn 2023, electrofishing was again used to monitor the success of stocking / natural recolonization of salmon to those parts of the River Garry to which flow was restored in 2017. 11 sites were fished on the main river and the Allt Anndeir / Allt Glas Choire tributary. The three uppermost sites on the main river and the three Glas Choire sites are all stocked (Figures 6 & 7). The other sites on the Garry and Allt Anndeir are not. Stocking did formerly end at Schoolhouse, but in 2023 the length of the stocked area was reduced, though Schoolhouse is still not far from the end of the stocked area.

Regarding salmon fry, it is notable that none at all were found at the first site below Garry Intake and the density was down at the next site downstream. Staff conducting the survey noted the substrate had changed at the first site and considered this may have been due to scouring operations at the hydro intake. It is also notable that the unstocked site at Dalnamein had its highest fry density yet, by far and the unstocked site at Clunes was relatively good too. Perhaps that may have been a result of more wild fish spawning.

Salmon parr densities, which of course are more of a reflection of future smolt production than fry densities, were again generally well above 2017 levels at the stocked sites and Schoolhouse. However, Anndeir / Glas Choire sites were generally lower for some reason.



Figures 6 & 7. *Densities of age 0+ salmon fry (top) and salmon parr (bottom) found by quantitative electrofishing at standard sites in the River Garry, 2017 – 2023.*

This work has clearly shown that stocking with eyed ova has created a saturated juvenile population in the stocked areas. As explained in previous Annual Reports, in 2023, hundreds of fin clips were also obtained from fry and parr randomly selected along the Garry and Glas Choire. As in every year since 2018, DNA from these will be compared with the DNA of broodstock which will allow stocked fish to be discriminated from wild fish. This work is being conducted by the University of the Highlands and

Islands and funded by SSE. Some results of this were presented in the last *Annual Report* to 2020. The data up to 2022 have now been processed but are not yet available at the time of writing.

For some time the Board has been interested in the temperature of the River Garry. Parts are very open and exposed to the sun but it has the complicating factor of being fed from water emanating for underground tunnels. Automatic temperature loggers were used to collect continuous temperature data at key locations in summer 2023. Ironically, as soon as the logging started in early July, the summer thereafter was colder than normal, with the only warmer spell occurring in early September.

However, what was clear, was that maximum daily temperatures were consistently higher, sometimes by several degrees immediately upstream of Garry Intake compared to immediately below (Figure 8). Therefore, the water arriving from the tunnel must have been even cooler. But, while there was a cooling effect at Garry Intake, maximum temperatures had risen again by Dalnamein, where the river is particularly open and wide. Further downstream the river enters a tree lined gorge. Interestingly, by Struan, at the bottom of the gorge, peak temperatures fell.

It will be interesting to repeat this under warmer summer weather, but these results do suggest the upper Garry does have some unique defence against high summer temperatures.

This work was also kindly funded by SSE.

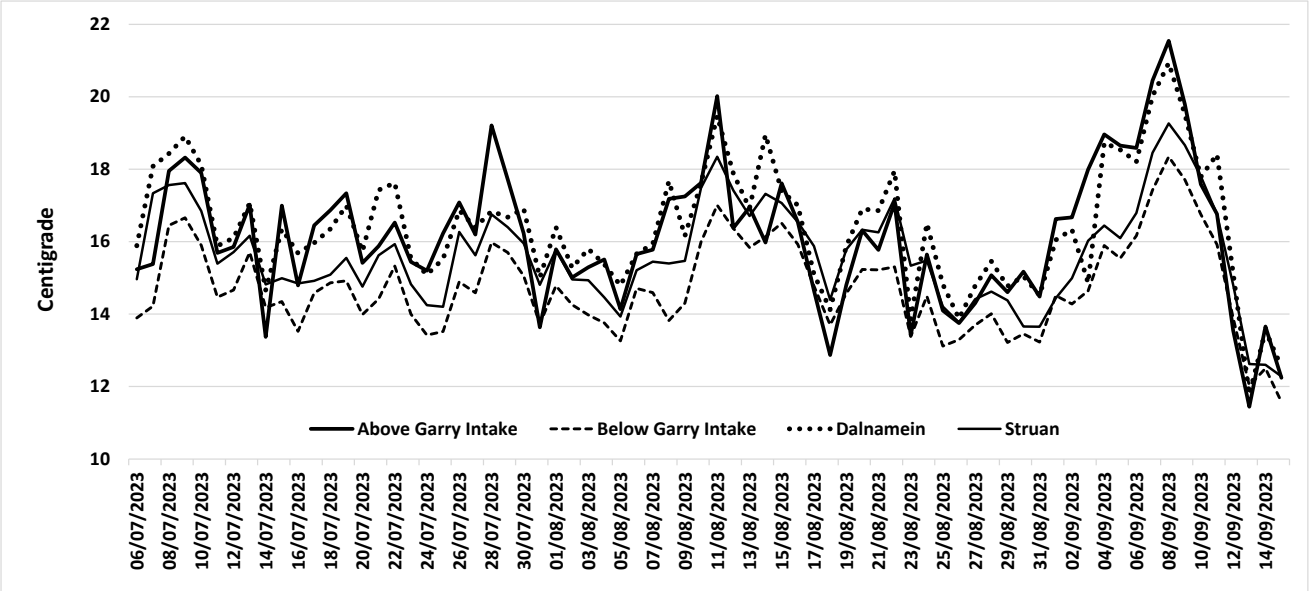


Figure 8. *Maximum daily temperatures observed at four locations on the River Garry, July – mid September 2023.*

SCOTTISH INVASIVES SPECIES INTIATIVE

Mark Purrman Charles
Tay Catchment Invasive Species Officer

The 2023 season has been a year of transition and expansion for SISI operations in the Tay catchment. We were fortunate to secure new funding in the region of 2 million pounds through the Nature Restoration Fund, which will allow us to continue operations into 2026. As part of this funding, staffing was reorganised with additional invasive species officers being recruited to better cover the project area, taking us from three full time officers to eight. This has allowed me to hand off the Esk catchment to a new officer and move over to the Tay full time. As a result, it has been possible to deliver a more focused and strategic control approach in the Tay catchment in 2023, as my time is no longer split between two different catchments. Despite the very severe weather in the Autumn which cut our plant control work short this year, we've been able to make substantial progress and set ourselves up well for 2024.

Expansion into new areas

This season we have expanded plant control operations into new areas of the Tay catchment, building on the success in the core control area from 2018-2022. In 2023 have been able to expand to include the River Almond, River Ericht, River Isla, the north bank of Loch Tay, and the main stem of the Tay between Kinclaven and Luncarty.

River Almond – Working in collaboration with Perth and Kinross Council, we have built a mini partnership project to address the extensive giant hogweed problem on this river, and also target smaller outbreaks of Japanese knotweed and American skunk cabbage (ASC). As part of this work, over 30 volunteers from the local area were recruited, seven of which got their spraying and injection qualifications, and relevant landowners were identified and engaged. In 2023, complete control of giant hogweed was undertaken from Buchanty bridge down to Bertha Park bridge. This work was primarily undertaken by volunteers working with myself and PKC staff, with a small amount of targeted contractor allocation. Smaller areas of ASC and Japanese knotweed were also identified and controlled. For 2024, the final section of the Almond from Bertha Park to the Tay confluence will be added to the control area. In addition, we will be handing off certain areas of the Almond to landowners for them to manage in collaboration with our ongoing work.

River Ericht – To begin to address the extensive Japanese knotweed infestation present on the Ericht, contractors were deployed to undertake an initial sweep of the affected areas. Work was undertaken between the Blairgowrie road bridge, down to Millhorn footbridge. Despite very difficult weather and water conditions during the knotweed control window, most areas of dense infestation were able to be injected and sprayed. A few areas will need to be attempted next season as they could not be reached safely this year, but this is not a problem as a second sweep of the Ericht was already planned for 2024. We are constantly monitoring for any knotweed further upstream, but have not discovered anything as of yet.

River Isla – Surveying has been done to identify any problem areas are on the Isla, with two issues found so far. A giant hogweed infestation has been identified in a small tributary running from Tullyfergus, through New Alyth, down to Leitfie. It has not reached the Isla yet and has been contained. Small amounts of knotweed have also been found in the Leitfie area and will be controlled next season. We will be continuing to check the Isla and tributaries to identify any further areas of concern.

Loch Tay – After several years of work to get a coordinated control strategy over the line, we were finally able to begin controlling the significant Japanese knotweed infestation on the shores of Loch Tay this season. Working with trained volunteers from the local community we were able to treat all knotweed along the shoreline in the Fearnan area and, by engaging with Forestry and Land Scotland, we have secured an agreement from them to control the knotweed on their land between Fearnan and Kenmore next season.

Tay main stem – We have expanded control work on the main stem of the Tay as well, with new hot spot areas of knotweed and hogweed controlled at Kercock/Delvine, Stanley and Luncarty. We will be undertaking further surveys of all beats between Kinclaven and Luncarty next season to identify any other areas of infestation and work with proprietors to eradicate the problem.

Core control area

We have continued monitoring and follow up control within the core control area (nominally the area upstream of Kinclaven to Kenmore and Kinloch Rannoch). Control sites must be annually monitored and any regrowth controlled until complete eradiation is achieved. This can take many years, especially to ensure seedbanks or rhizomes are fully exhausted. Many beats in the core area have been controlled for several years now and are significantly improved, meaning the annual control requirement is much reduced. Where this is the case, we are handing back primary responsibility for control to proprietors who will continue to work towards complete eradication with our support. By reducing the time demands on me from the core area, this frees up time for me to work on new areas of infestation.

Mink

We are looking to extend our mink trapping coverage in the Tay catchment and in particular would like to target the Earn, Almond, Isla, Ericht and Dean Water. If you are a proprietor or land manager on these rivers and would be interested in getting involved, or already have staff undertaking trapping that I am not aware of, please get in touch as we would like to work with you. We've had 30 recorded captures so far this season, although I am expecting more reports to come in before the end of the year as proprietors send me an annual summary.

Thank you

I would like to say thank you to all the volunteers, staff and proprietors who work with me on plants and mink in the catchment. It's been great to be able to focus on the Tay full time this year and I'm looking forward to continuing working in partnership with so many excellent people as we move forward.





Volunteers (left) and contractors (right) treating giant hogweed on the River Almond





Giant hogweed infestation, Bertha Park, River Almond, 2022 (above) and 2023, after treatment (below).

Mark Purrmann-Charles
Tay Catchment Invasive Species Officer
markpc.sisi@gmail.com, 07741 639556

AQUACULTURE AND FISHERIES (SCOTLAND) ACT 2013

The Aquaculture and Fisheries (Scotland) Act 2013, placed a number of new duties on DSFBs relating to openness and accountability. It requires that the *Annual Report* should include:

1) A summary of what the board has done in carrying out its statutory functions during the year to which the report relates.
2) A summary of what the board propose to do in carrying out those functions in the following year.
3) Information about complaints made to the Board during the year, including: the number of complaints; and a statement of the nature of each complaint and how it was disposed of.
4) A statement as to how the Board have complied during the year with the good governance requirements and propose to comply with those requirements in the following year.

Point 1) has been covered by the main body of this report. 2) The same areas of work described in this report will continue into 2024 as described in the 2022 – 2024 Tay River Plan (see www.tayrivers.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/TDSFB-River-Plan-2022-to-24.pdf).

Regarding point 3), at the time of writing (November 2023), the Board has received no complaints during 2023. One complaint from 2022 which had reached Stage 3 of the Board's complaint process has not been closed off and is still awaited.

New governance requirements

The Act placed a number of governance requirements on DSFBs, as indicated in point 4) above.

Meetings

Board meetings in 2023 were all held in-person at the Board's hatchery. Members of the public were able to attend the Board meetings, although some items of business which considered staffing issues or confidential information about stakeholders were taken in private. The Annual Public Meeting was also held along the same lines.

The Annual Meeting of Proprietors will be held in person and members of the public will also be able to attend. A facility can be set up, if required, whereby qualified proprietors and members of the public will be able to attend using Zoom by prior arrangement with the Clerk.

The dates and details of forthcoming meetings can also be found at www.tayrivers.org/reports/ .

Once approved at the next meeting, the minutes of Board meetings are published at www.tayrivers.org/reports/ where they will continue to be published. Hard copies can also be obtained from the Clerk on request.

Annual Report and Accounts

The *Annual Report* with accounts for 2021/22 was published at www.tayrivers.org/reports/ and hard copies were sent to all qualified proprietors in the district and a copy sent to Scottish Ministers. This report and subsequent *Annual Reports* will also be published on the same basis and a copy will be sent to Scottish Ministers.

Complaints procedure

The Board has set up and maintains a complaints procedure which can be viewed at www.tayrivers.org/policies/ .

Board members' interests

The Board has set up a register of members interests. This can be viewed on request at the Board's office. We have included a standing item at each Board meeting inviting Board members to declare new/amend existing interests and all such instances are recorded in the minutes of these meetings.

TAY DISTRICT SALMON FISHERIES BOARD

DRAFT

Minutes of Annual Meeting of the Proprietors within the Tay District held in terms of Section 44(1) of the Salmon & Freshwater Fisheries (Consolidation) (Scotland) Act 2003 held at Birnam Arts Centre, Birnam on Tuesday, 13th December 2022.

Present:	Toby Metcalfe (Convener)
	Bobby White
	Claire Mercer Nairne
	John Nevin
	Michael Smith (Jr)
	Mike Hay
	Simon Furniss
	Ken Freshwater
	Bob Mason
	Michael Smith (Sr)
	Duncan Twigg
	John Lessels
	Rona Harkin
	Gary Harkin
	Dr. Simon Wright
	Alan Craig
	Grant Tigwell
In Attendance:	Dr. David Summers, Fisheries Director
	Inga MacGillivray, Clerk to the Board
	Mike Brown, Operations Manager
	Mark Purrmann Charles, SISI Project Officer
	Jerry Saunders
	Nikki Thompson
	David Sands
	John MacDougall
	Geordie Stewart
	Alec Stewart
	Felicity Goodall
	Donald McLarty
	Stevie Watt
	Gordon Nichol
Apologies:	Anne Woodcock
	Calum Innes
	Michael Campbell

1. Welcome from the Convener

The Convener welcomed everyone to the AGM, commenting that he believed the Board was now in a stronger position to face the future. In particular, he saw the delivery of the three-year plan as a major step forward, giving the newly elected Board of 2023 a smoother transition for the care and management of the Tay catchment.

He added that another major step forward has been the reformation of the relationship between the Board and the Tay Rivers Trust.

The Convener asked if anyone from the Tay Ghillies Association was present and asked that it be noted that he would welcome any steps to overcome historic problems between the two organisations.

He then referenced the annual report and the challenges the catchment had faced in previous years. He asked that everyone look forward in unison with the TDSFB and TRT to ensure the Tay catchment was in a better position to face up to the challenges. He mentioned the overriding problem of less fish in the Tay which was a common problem with other river systems.

Lastly, he hoped that everyone would look forward to the 2023 season.

2. Consideration of AGM & Triennial Election Minutes held 14th December 2021

The Minutes of the 2021 Annual Meeting of Proprietors and Triennial Election were previously circulated in the Annual Report and were taken as read. There were no matters arising, and on a proposal by Jerry Saunders, and seconded by Nikki Thompson, were approved.

3. Consideration of 2021 Accounts

The Accounts for the year ended 31st December 2021, which were incorporated into the Annual Report, had been circulated and were taken as read.
On a proposal from Jerry Saunders, and seconded by John Nevin, the 2021 Accounts were approved.

The Clerk gave a brief overview of the 2021 accounts compared to prior years for both income and expenditure. There were no questions from the floor.

4. Consideration of Annual Report 2021/2022

Dr. Summers gave a broad overview of the 2022 catches and touched on the 2022-4 river management plan.

5. Presentation on work of the Board during 2022 and beyond by David Summers, TDSFB Fisheries Director

Dr. Summers gave an overview of the events during 2022 highlighting the following areas:

Overview

Dr. Summers stated the catches were up slightly from previous years and although the final catch statistics were incomplete, the total catch looked to be around 6,000. He commented that the spring

catches were better than previous years and that COVID had impacted on some of the previous years' figures. In particular, beats such as Stobhall and Cargill fished well whereas some of the beats around Stanley had not fished so well due to water levels.

Dr. Summers commented that the spring fish appeared to be becoming larger. Spawning too appeared to be happening earlier. One of the Fisheries Officers had taken drone footage of spawning occurring the first week of December.

River Plan 2022-24

Dr. Summers explained that the Scottish Wild Salmon Strategy was published in January 2022. An implementation plan was due by the end of 2022 but would appear to be slightly delayed. The Board had taken the decision to "dovetail" their river management plan into the implementation plan to ensure the Tay catchment priorities become the national Scottish Government priorities.
He acknowledged that some of the issues had been ongoing for several years. Unfortunately, the Board has very little power or control over the areas they wish to see changed. Indeed, many of the issues are controlled by organisations outwith the Board's control. However, Scottish Government can influence external agencies such as SEPA and NatureScot.

River Ericht

Dr. Summers explained that the situation arising on the Ericht was largely due to a water abstraction issue where fish became trapped when a fish farm extracted too much water. The fish farm has a license to operate issued by SEPA. He explained that the Board had invited Antje Branding and her policy team to visit the hatchery and the Ericht. The Government team are now more aware of the hatchery operation and the Ericht situation. He stressed that the Board were actively trying to influence others.

River Lochay

Dr. Summers explained there were very few fish in the Lochay and that during the year, the staff had put evidence together and presented this to SEPA with a view to having the Lochay abstraction licence reviewed. The board would also be pushing to have this included in Scottish Government's Salmon strategy implementation plan.

Predators

He then stated that the piscivorous bird licence goosander quota had been increased and thanked the increasing bird counting team. During the year the licence had also been reset so there would no longer be a break during the winter months.

Tay Rivers Trust

Dr. Summers explained that the TRT and TDSFB were looking to work together on habitat improvement projects such as in the Cononish.

He stated that the recent TRT Dinner had raised over £18k from very generous donations and auction lots. There was also a silent auction ongoing which would close on the 20th December 2022. He added that the TRT were looking to recruit a development officer and continue fundraising.

There was a round of applause for DS presentation.

6. Presentation on Ericht Sub Committee by Jerry Saunders, TDSFB Board Member

JS started by emphasizing the importance of the Ericht catchment, particularly for spawning.
He explained the situation was impacted by a Victorian weir and abstraction of water to both a turbine and fish farm operation. At certain times of the year and under certain conditions, adult fish found themselves stuck and unable to move. They become stressed and prone to disease as water temperatures increase, coupled with effluent water.

Both the turbine and fish farm are operated under licence and are legal, but the issue with trapped fish is still prevalent. JS explained that the board has been unable to mitigate the 13 problems it had identified as it has no authority to fix any of them.

Only Scottish Government and SEPA have the authority to remedy the issues. JS explained that the group comprised members from TDSFB, TRT, Blairgowrie and Rattray Angling Club and riparian interest.

The group had been formed 8 months previously and had produced a communication strategy and action plan; continued to record and collect evidence to support the case; undertook more bird counts and had started a smolt shepherding program which they hoped to expand.

The sub committee had started stage 1 of their plan and had written to Scottish Government, which had elicited a standard reply. They had followed up with a response urging Scottish Government to encourage SEPA to act and asking if they would consider funding some of the work required to fix problems. Coupled with this, they group had met Antje Branding and her team on site, and were due to meet with ecological groups in the near future.

He thanked all on the team and all that had taken part in the smolt shepherding exercise.

7. Presentation by Mike Brown, TDSFB Operations Manager

MB gave a presentation on the work of the TDSFB Fisheries Officers team for the year, highlighting the weather issues which had shaped the year.

He highlighted that fact that smolt runs tend to take place at night, usually around April and May. Dry spring weather slows the smolt run down and makes them particularly susceptible to predation. Dams and lades become increasingly risky. During this time.

The team were concerned with aiding migration and monitoring the smolt run to gain evidence.

He went on to explain the emergency at Stanley Mill, where a bywash had ruptured and required a speedy repair. There was another incident at Stormontfield Hydro.

MB explained the Adult sampling project had been carried out in the year, with 58 fish being sampled.

As to enforcement, there had been 49 incidents in the year, with 5 being charged.

He explained the broodstock fishing and hatchery work that had been carried out throughout the year.

There was a round of applause for MB presentation.

8. Presentation on Scottish Invasive Species Initiative (SISI) by Mark Purrman Charles

MPC explained that due to careful budgeting, the project was extended to March 2023.

He highlighted the issues with Japanese Knotweed in the catchment and the success of the project by decreasing it by 90%. He stated that the Himalayan Knotweed issue at Kinloch Rannoch had now been contained.

Mink had also been an issue, and MPC highlighted the fact that of the 545 mink trapped across Scotland, a whopping 26% of these had been trapped in the Tay catchment.

As to future plans, MPC explained the project was seeking funding to extend for another 3 years to 2026 and to bring on new staff, allowing MPC to concentrate solely on the Tay catchment (he is currently in the Tay and Esk catchments). The project is also looking to expand into the Ericht and Isla areas. There is more work to be done on Himalayan Balsam, with new methods being trialled on the Tweed.

9. AOB and Questions from the floor

Salmon in decline

Duncan Twigg asked if politicians were aware of health issues in salmon and their declining number, citing habitat erosion as an issue.

The Convener replied that nobody disputed salmon numbers were in decline.

River Lochay

Steve Watt asked DS about a social media post from the TDSFB regarding lack of juvenile salmon. He asked what the main problem on the Lochay was and how soon it could be resolved.

DS replied on the Lochay there were four separate fish passes for salmon to overcome and added to this there is abstraction on the river. The board has been electrofishing the Lochay for 20 years. Studies showed very few fish in the upper Lochay 20 years ago. SSE upgraded fish passes in 2006/7 and the board stocked juveniles. Over the years, numbers did improve, with 2-3 sites showing marked improvements in numbers. However, the last few years have shown poorer returns. The board tried to mitigate this by stocking fin-clipped parr into areas of the Lochay with limited results. He explained that the board had no power over abstraction or fish passes and that this responsibility rested with SEPA. SEPA have agreed to move the Lochay further up their agenda and indeed have hydrologists looking at the issues.

MB and DS had met with SSE to discuss the issues and progress had been made but it may take time.

Steve Watt thanked DS for his reply.

Smart Rivers Project

Alec Stewart stated the board's plan made no mention of the Smart Rivers Project which was now in its third year. He asked if the board could become actively involved in the Ericht and Lochay and if they would assist with the project.

DS replied the board had not been asked to assist previously. Alec Stewart argued that an approach had been made some time ago and asked if the board would get involved, perhaps through a mixture of funding and scientific work.

The Convener stated this would be put to the board at the next board meeting.

ACTION: IMacG to ensure Smart Rivers assistance is on next board meeting agenda.

Triennial Election Audit and Stanley/Stormontfield issues

Mike Smith (Sr) commented that he would like to see Perth & Kinross Council's offer of an independent audit of the triennial election process in 2023 be taken up.

The Convener replied that the board would discuss this with Andrew Parrott, TDSFB Board Member representing Perth & Kinross Council and that unfortunately he could not attend the meeting.

Mike Smith (Sr) commented that smolts were lost at Stanley Mills and Stormontfield and that the board had statutory powers and should exercise these to prosecute where possible. He thought the board should be more proactive rather than reactive.

JS asked if Mike Smith (Sr) would help with smolt shepherding during the smolt run, to which Mike Smith (Sr) replied he would.

DS replied to Mie Smith (Sr) that regarding prosecutions the board used to have the right to prosecute but that this was revoked in 2013. All rights had then been passed to SEPA.

Stanley and Stormontfield Issues

Steve Watt thanked MB for his presentation and asked if there were further problems envisaged for the Stanley Mills and Stormontfield areas.

DS replied that SEPA was in discussion with the new owner at Stormontfield and that new screens would be installed in due course which would alleviate the issue.

As to Stanley Mill, DS stated either the board or some other body would need to keep checking for issues. He understood the pipe fix was temporary until a more robust long term alternative could be sought.

The Convener noted that the board may wish to consider how to address such issues with operators as they took up valuable staff resources.

JS added that it was important to have local eyes on the ground to help with monitoring, which he had touched upon in the Ericht catchment where this approach worked well. He suggested local volunteers at pinch points on the system.

Steve Watt suggested discussing this issue at next board meeting and to include broodstock fishing assistance.

Fish Counters

Steve Watt commented there had been 3 fish counters on the system at one point, with the SSE counter not being accurate. He asked how the board was liaising with SSE on the matter and why SSE had not put in a new counter.

DS replied that SSE are going to put in new counters. They had tried to upgrade the existing software but despite spending thousands of pounds, this had not worked. They have put in a new system and are actively trying to resolve the issue, but this has been hampered by the fact the software is so specialized and that the original company is no longer in operation.

Stocking of Braan

Simon Furniss commented that he was impressed with the board's approach to liaising with Scottish Government over SEPA and NatureScot issues. He wondered if the Braan stocking project had been furthered at all.

DS replied that Simon Dryden had been keen on the Braan project but he had since left his position in Marine Scotland and a new team had been introduced. DS stated this issue would be brought up in due course as part of the implementation plan.

Sponsoring tanks at Hatchery

Steve Watt asked if sponsoring a tank was for smolts or parr. DS replied it was parr.

The Convener asked the attendees to show their appreciation for the speakers, which they did.

He then thanked all proprietors and guests who had attended the AGM and for joining in the discussion. He wished them a merry Christmas.

The meeting came to a close

INDEPENDENT AUDITOR'S REPORT TO THE PROPRIETORS OF SALMON FISHERIES IN THE TAY DISTRICT

In accordance with the Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries (Consolidation)(Scotland) Act 2003, section 44, we have audited the financial statements of Tay District Salmon Fisheries Board (the 'Board') for the year ended 31 December 2022 which comprise the Income and Expenditure Account, the Balance Sheet and the related notes. The financial reporting framework that has been applied in their preparation is United Kingdom Accounting Standards including Financial Reporting Standard 102, the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice).

This report is made solely to the proprietors of Salmon Fisheries in the Tay District as a body. Our audit work has been undertaken so that we might state to the Board's proprietors those matters we are required to state to them in an auditor's report and for no other purpose. To the fullest extent permitted by law, we do not accept or assume responsibility to anyone other than the proprietors, for our audit work, for this report, or for the opinions we have formed.

Respective responsibilities of duly elected and duly co-opted board members

Section 44 of the Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries (Consolidation)(Scotland) Act 2003 require the Board to prepare financial statements for each financial year which give a true and fair view of the state of affairs of the Board and of the income and expenditure of the Board for that period. In preparing these financial statements, the Board's proprietors are required to:

i select suitable accounting policies and then apply them consistently;
ii make judgements and estimates that are reasonable and prudent;
iii prepare the financial statements on the going concern basis unless it is inappropriate to presume that the Board will continue in business.

The Board's proprietors are responsible for keeping proper accounting records which disclose with reasonable accuracy at any time the financial position of the Board and to enable it to ensure that the financial statements comply with the Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries (Consolidation)(Scotland) Act 2003. It has general responsibility for taking reasonable steps to safeguard the assets of the Board and to prevent and detect fraud and other irregularities.

Scope of the audit of the financial statements

An audit involves obtaining evidence about the amounts and disclosures in the financial statements sufficient to give reasonable assurance that the financial statements are free from material misstatement, whether caused by fraud or error. This includes an assessment of: whether the accounting policies are appropriate to the Board's circumstances and have been consistently applied and adequately disclosed; the reasonableness of significant accounting estimates made by the Board members; and the overall presentation of the financial statements. In addition, we read all the financial and non-financial information in the annual report to identify material inconsistencies with the audited financial statements and to identify any information that is apparently materially incorrect based on, or materially inconsistent with, the knowledge acquired by us in the course of performing the audit. If we become aware of any apparent material misstatements or inconsistencies we consider the implications for our report.

Opinion on financial statements

In our opinion the financial statements:

- give a true and fair view of the state of the Board's affairs as at 31 December 2022 and of its income and expenditure for the year then ended; and

- have been properly prepared in accordance with United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice.

Milne Craig
Statutory Auditors
Abercorn House
79 Renfrew Road
Paisley
PA3 4DA
6th December 2023

TAY DISTRICT SALMON FISHERIES BOARD
INCOME AND EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2022

	NOTES	£	2022 £	2021 £
INCOME				
Fishery Assessments	2		456,306	457,301
Revaluation Appeals			-	(1,248)
Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme Income			-	12,614
			456,306	468,667
NEPS/Adult Sampling/Pressure Tool			5,000	29,099
Compensation Received (SSE)			16,021	7,978
Tay Rivers Trust – Hatchery Donation			-	20,788
Consultancy			3,371	1,116
SISI Project			3,540	-
			484,238	527,648
EXPENDITURE				
Salaries & National Insurance		239,219		246,838
Pension & Death in Service- Board's Contribution		26,019		25,295
External Contractors (Finance/Marketing)		5,088		1,706
Recruitment & Training		390		-
Employee/Board Expenses		-		-
Road Maintenance		-		885
Bank Charges		-		-
Motor Cars & Boats Running Costs, incl Insurance		33,539		25,827
Rent, Rates & General Insurance		56,482		52,235
Heat & Light		11,444		13,269
Consultancy Fees (HR)		1,270		240
Repairs & Maintenance - General		2,937		3,355
Telephone & Communications		6,354		6,935
Printing, Stationery, Postage & Advertising		3,331		1,669
Annual Report Costs		713		650
Meetings & Other Statutory Costs		2,178		2,151
Ghillies Lunch & Meeting		-		-
Legal Fees		1,482		3,390
Audit & Accounts Fees		4,800		3,814
Depreciation		9,219		12,293
Subscriptions & Levies		16,135		13,291
IT Costs		1,247		1,305
Health & Safety Implementation incl Clothing		12,458		6,823
Hatchery Running Costs		21,916		33,935
Project Work		2,160		1,084
Websites		5,093		14,762
Opening Day		843		-
Gifts & Presentations		59		2,057
Garry Project		20,800		-
Bad Debts, Changes to Provision for Doubtful Debts etc		-		-
			485,176	473,809
			(938)	53,839
Gain on Sale of Fixed Assets			-	-
			(938)	53,839
Interest Received	3		-	-
			(938)	53,839
Surplus (Loss) for the year			(938)	53,839

The notes on pages 43 to 45 form part of these accounts.

TAY DISTRICT SALMON FISHERIES BOARD

BALANCE SHEET
AS AT 31 DECEMBER 2022

	NOTES	£	2022 £	2021 £
FIXED ASSETS				
Tangible Assets	4		57,993	59,538
			57,993	59,538
CURRENT ASSETS				
Debtors & Prepayments		101,516		121,799
Cash at Bank & In Hand		323,214		311,641
Stock		5,018		5,018
		429,748		438,458
CURRENT LIABILITIES				
Other Creditors & Accruals		21,522		30,837
Net Current Assets			408,226	407,621
NET ASSETS			466,219	467,159
Representing:				
Reserves	5		83,434	83,434
General Fund	6		382,785	383,725
			466,219	467,159

These accounts were approved on 6th December 2023

TOBY METCALFE
..... BOARD MEMBER

DAVID GODFREY
..... BOARD MEMBER

The notes on pages 43 to 45 form part of these accounts.

NOTES TO THE ACCOUNTS
AT 31 DECEMBER 2022

1 ACCOUNTING POLICIES

The accounts have been prepared under the historical cost convention and are in accordance with the United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice. The following accounting policies have been applied:

Fixed assets and depreciation

The cost of fixed assets is stated at the net amount after deducting grants available. Donations relating to expenditure on fixed assets are credited to the Profit and Loss Account in the year of receipt, where there are no conditions attaching to the donation.
Depreciation is provided on all fixed assets, at rates calculated to write off the cost over the expected useful lives of the assets concerned as follows:

Hatchery	Over term of the lease
Motor vehicles	25% per annum straight line
Boats	25% per annum reducing balance
Plant and Equipment	25% per annum reducing balance
Computer equipment	33.3 % straight line

Taxation

No taxation is provided due to the fact that HM Revenue and Customs has agreed that the Board is not liable for corporation tax.

Death in service scheme

Contributions to the Board's scheme are charged to the Income and Expenditure account in the year in which they become payable.

2 FISHERY ASSESSMENTS

		2022		2021
	Rateable Value	Assessment	Rateable Value	Assessment
	£	£	£	£
Upper Proprietors	1,007,531	453,917	1,009,740	454,912
Lower Proprietors	13,470	6,069	13,470	6,069
	1,021,001	459,986	1,023,210	460,981
Less River Shee		115		115
Estuarial Netting Stations		3,565		3,565
		456,306		457,301

The 2022 Assessments are based on 46% of Rateable Value (2021 – 46%)

3 INTEREST RECEIVED	2022	2021
	£	£
Bank Interest	-	-
	-	-

NOTES TO THE ACCOUNTS (cont'd)
AT 31 DECEMBER 2022

4 FIXED ASSETS

	Leasehold Property	Motor Vehicles	Boats	Plant & Equipment	Office and Computer Equipment	Total
	£	£	£	£	£	£
Cost:						
At 1 January 2022	191,468	96,460	42,671	206,112	27,921	564,632
Additions	-	-	-	7,674	-	7,674
At 31 December 2022	191,468	96,460	42,671	213,786	27,921	572,306
Depreciation:						
At 1 January 2022	139,721	96,460	42,645	198,579	27,688	505,093
Charge for Year	5,174	-	7	3,805	233	9,219
Eliminated for Disposals	-	-	-	-	-	-
At 31 December 2022	144,895	96,460	42,652	202,384	27,921	514,312
Net Book Amounts:						
At 31 December 2022	46,573	-	19	11,402	0	57,994
At 31 December 2021	51,746	-	26	7,533	233	59,538

5 RESERVES

	GENERAL	NASF(UK)	TOTAL
	£	£	£
At 1 January 2022	83,434	-	83,434
Provision in Year	-	-	-
	83,434	-	83,434
Expenditure in Year	-	-	-
At 31 December 2022	83,434	-	83,434

NOTES TO THE ACCOUNTS (cont'd)
AT 31 DECEMBER 2022

6 GENERAL FUND

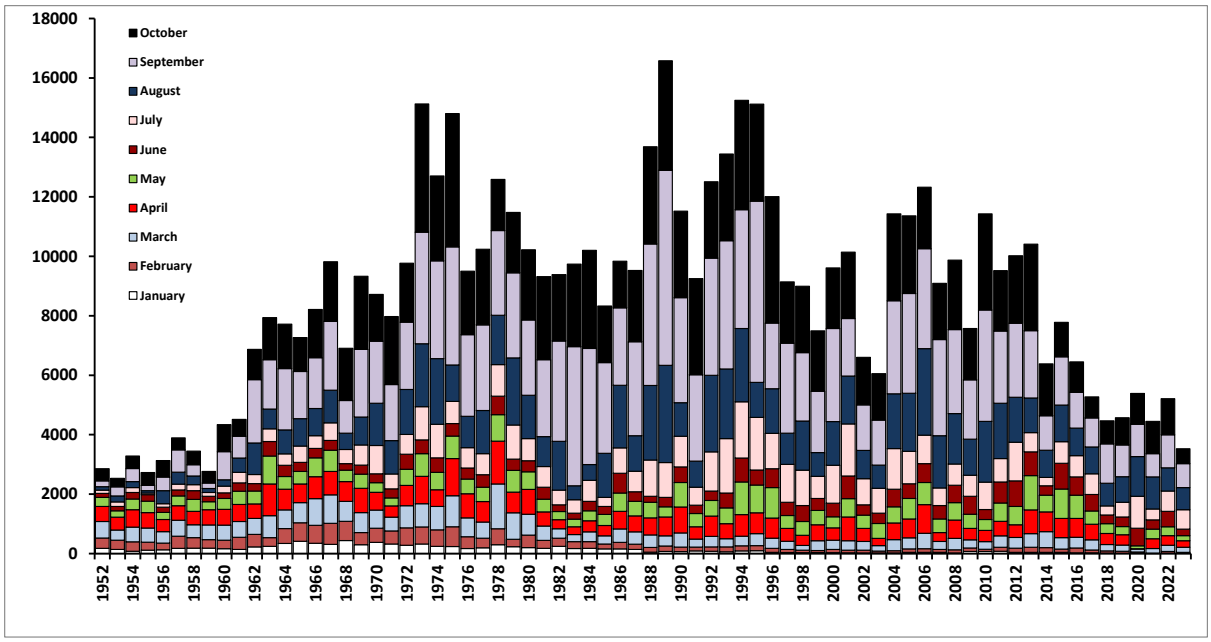
	2022	2021
	£	£
At 1 January 2022	383,725	329,886
Surplus/(Deficit) for year	(938)	53,839
At 31 December 2022	382,787	383,725

7 CAPITAL COMMITMENT

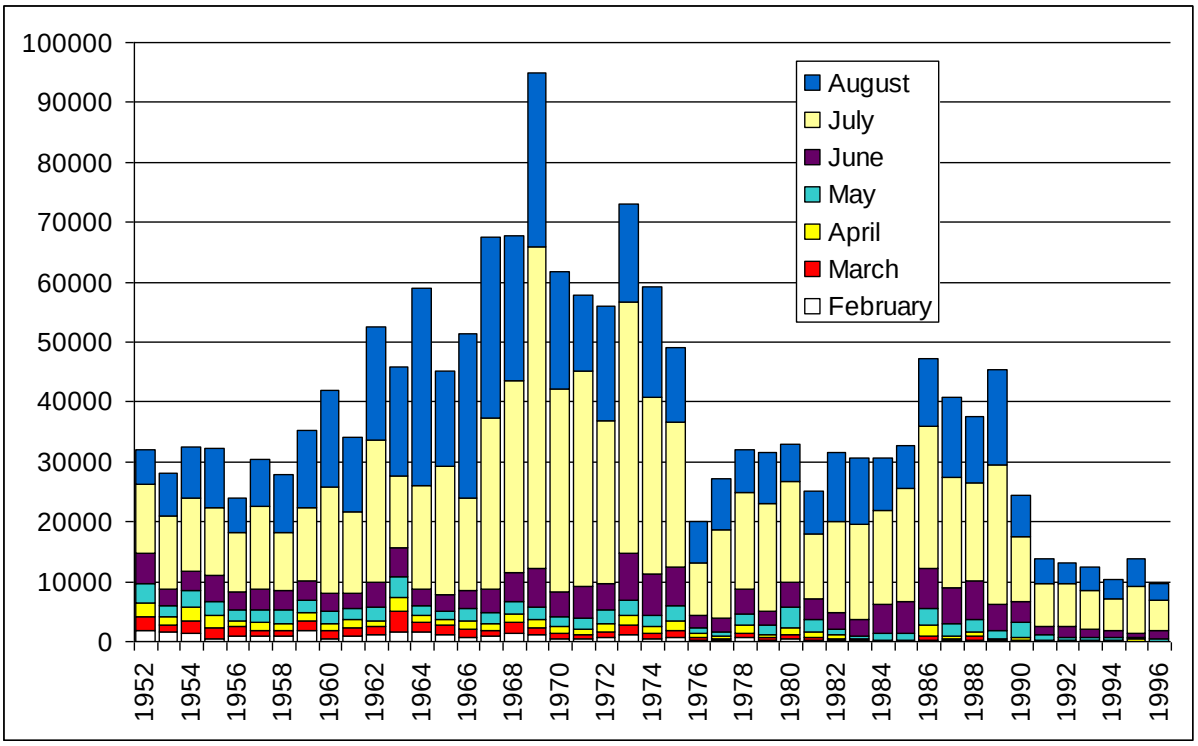
There were no capital commitments as at 31st December 2022.

8 RELATED PARTY TRANSACTIONS

During the year, proprietorial members of the Board were invoiced for fishery assessments. These transactions were all at arm's length under normal market conditions.



Monthly angling catch for the Tay District 1952 – 2023 (including released fish). The 1952 – 2022 data were obtained from returns to the Marine Directorate of Scottish Government and the Board. 2023 is based on a preliminary analysis of www.fishtay.co.uk catches.



Monthly net and coble catch, Tay District 1952 – 1996 (netting largely ceased in 1996). Data obtained from Marine Directorate of Scottish Government.

BOARD MEMBERS ATTENDANCE FOR 2022

	8 February	12 April	7 June	9 August	25 October	13 December
T. Metcalfe	✓	✓	-	-	✓	✓
D. Godfrey	✓	-	✓	✓	-	✓
C. Mercer Nairne	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
J. Nevin			-	✓	✓	✓
J. Saunders	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
N. Thompson	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
M. Smith	Sanctioned	Sanctioned	Sanctioned	✓	✓	✓
B. White	✓	-	✓	✓	✓	✓
A Parrott	-	✓	-	✓	-	-
C. Innes	-	✓	-	✓	✓	-
D. Sands	Coopted later in year				-	✓
J. Muir	Coopted later in year				-	-

✓ Present - Apologised for non-attendance

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Tay District Salmon Fisheries Board wishes to acknowledge the following people, organisations and companies for their very kind assistance and support in 2022 and 2023.

All Proprietors within the Tay District
John Apthorp CBE, OBE
All Ghillies and Boatmen
All Tay Board Staff
The Tay Rivers Trust
The River Earn Improvement Association
Scottish Environment Protection Agency
The staff of Marine Scotland and Marine Scotland Science
Fisheries Management Scotland
Rivers and Lochs Institute, UHI
Fishlegal
NatureScot
SSE plc
Police Scotland
All volunteers who assisted the Board in any capacity, but particularly bird counters and those who participated in smolt shepherding
Volunteers on the River Ericht Focus Group