

MINUTE OF MEETING OF THE SPEY
DISTRICT FISHERY BOARD IN OPEN
SESSION held at the Craigellachie Hotel,
Craigellachie commencing at 9.30 a. m. on
Friday 8th February, 2019

Present: -

Chairman	Brian Doran	Craigellachie Fishings
Proprietors	Peter Graham Angus Gordon Lennox William Mountain Toby Metcalfe Oliver Russell Dr CMH Wills	Roths & Aikenway Brae Water Trust Delfur Fishings Crown Estate Ballindalloch Knockando
Co-Optees	Craig Mackay Grant Mortimer	River Spey Anglers Association Strathspey Angling Improvement Association
In Attendance	Roger Knight Brian Shaw Richard Fyfe Alistair Galloway Matt Newton Mark Bilsby William Cowie	Director Biologist SEPA SEPA AST AST Clerk
Public Attendees	Jim Mackie Mike Reed	

1. WELCOME, INTRODUCTIONS AND APOLOGIES

The Chairman noted apologies from Peter Millar who had been unwell, Jennifer Heatley of SNH and Alan Williams, who, as he was no longer a Proprietor, had recused himself as a Board Member.

The Chairman also introduced Matt Newton and Mark Bilsby from the Atlantic Salmon Trust (AST) who would attend the meeting in order to bring the Board up to date on the Missing Salmon Project. It was suggested that, as they had a distance to travel, it would also be appropriate that the agenda was adjusted so that the Missing Salmon Project be the first principal item. He then asked Mark Bilsby and Matt Newton to address the meeting.

2. “MISSING SALMON PROJECT”

A summary of what was hoped to be achieved was circulated in booklet form.

The impetus for the project was the marked decline in catch numbers and how this could be reversed. The Likely Suspects Framework approach was based upon a review of previous studies on other species, such as cod in the Irish Sea and a detailed look at suspect areas of influence, being principally:

- In river
- Estuary
- Ocean
- Unknown factors.

A statistical model framework was being worked on to prioritise causes, and to build a missing salmon alliance with both national and international cooperation. AST were very good at catalysing bodies to come together and they had obtained Unesco assistance as part of the “International Year of the Salmon”.

Matt Newton did recognise, however, that there was very little data on what happened once fish had left the river and the Missing Salmon Project would seek to address this and to develop this area of knowledge.

There were 7 rivers in the project meantime, with an array of monitors and receivers in estuaries and at sea. The initial aims were to:

- Identify where salmon were dying
- Understand smolt behaviour
- Focus future research
- Inform/help local and national management

The challenges they faced were technical, financial and the coordination and momentum of human resources, but the aim would be to report back to Boards by the end of July, leading to a conference on the initial results scheduled for January 2020.

He then invited questions from the Board.

Peter Graham advised that the Scientific Committee had had a number of discussions regarding the tag burden and the most appropriate tag size for monitoring fish travelling down the river as opposed to those in the marine environment. There were also concerns that the size of the project was too small. The Scientific Committee’s view was that the 7 millimetre tag was appropriate, but it had to be recognised that those smolts tagged needed to be big enough to survive the tagging process. He reported that the Scientific Committee were still concerned that the project was focused on fish both in-river and in the coastal environment and was therefore too broad, but they had satisfied themselves

that the involvement of 7 rivers would mean sufficient coverage for the project and also that the money was available. Therefore, the Scientific Committee was able to recommend to the Board that it should support the project.

Mark Bilsby thanked Peter for the summary and confirmed that a stepwise approach would be taken.

Q William Mountain asked how success was to be measured in the first year?

A In response, it was reported that the key aim was to identify where fish were dying so that focus could be put on these areas in the future.

Q Jim Mackie asked whether there were any thoughts about involving Angling Associations.

A In response, Mark Bilsby confirmed that there would absolutely be an opportunity to liaise with Angling Associations, but the physical tagging work would require to be carried out by those licenced under the Home Office Licence Scheme. There would, however, be an opportunity to communicate, which would be encouraged.

Q Angus Gordon Lennox enquired whether they had sufficient numbers in the tagging team?

A In response, Matt Newton confirmed they expected there would be sufficient.

Q Angus Gordon Lennox also enquired what level of support would be needed in the following year and going forward.

A In response, Matt Newton confirmed that there had been a lot of private, commercial and public support and there was continuing goodwill towards the project. They were currently putting together a budget of approximately £300,000 per year and so far had raised approximately 1/3 of this, but would keep the momentum going on finance. The Board would play their part in the implementation of the project also.

Q Brian Shaw advised that hundreds of receivers would be deployed at sea and elsewhere and he asked what sort of team were analysing the results.

A In response, Mark Bilsby advised there was a huge resource at Glasgow University, with additional support from Durham and there were plenty of analytics experts. It was confirmed that the Board would have to catch the smolts initially and Brian Shaw reassured the Board that they had the resources to do this. The Boards would also be required to help with publicity in due course.

Q Angus Gordon Lennox enquired what the time lag was between capturing smolts and tagging.

A In response, Mark Bilsby confirmed it would be very quick.

Q Toby Metcalfe passed on his congratulations on an excellent booklet and enquired how AST intended to proceed with public relations in the future.

A In response, Mark Bilsby advised that the booklets would be followed up by future booklets in an easily-accessible format and other publicity.

Q Dr CMH Wills asked whether the Ghillies had any responsibility or obligation in regard to the receivers situated on their beats.

A In response, Matt Newton advised that they should not need maintenance and should therefore not need any involvement from the Ghillies, other than knowing where they were located so as to ensure they were not inadvertently disturbed.

Q Richard Fyfe from SEPA enquired regarding marine survival and referred to research on the Shin which showed there was about a 4% return from migration. He asked whether using smolts of 130 millimetres as a minimum would create bias in the results.

A Matt Newton confirmed that this was a limitation of the technology, but adjustments will be taken into account prior to dissemination of results.

The Chairman then sought formal approval from the Board to support the project and this was granted unanimously.

3. MINUTE OF THE OPEN SESSION OF THE MEETING HELD ON 22ND NOVEMBER, 2018

There were no comments as to accuracy and the Minute was proposed by Peter Graham and seconded by William Mountain.

4. MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MINUTE

4.1 SEPA support letter

Roger Knight advised that this had now been received on 11th December, 2018 and in response to enquiry from Peter Graham as to how the letter would now be used, it was noted that this would form part of a briefing and would also be published on the Board's website with Richard Fyfe's consent, which was given.

4.2 Distillery water temperature

It was noted that Alistair Galloway would be continuing to keep this under review.

4.3 Richard Fyfe requested that any action points raised at the meeting be circulated as soon as possible after the meeting so that action could be taken at the earliest

opportunity. There was also a request for a "running log" of action points with an indication of when these were completed by the relevant person.

Angus Gordon Lennox would supply a form of action point list that he had utilised in the past which would be adopted by the Board for future actions to be recorded.

5. DIRECTOR'S REPORT

The Director's Report was per the note attached to the meeting, but the following particular additional points arose: -

5.1 Annual Report

The Director presented a summary of what was in the Annual Report which would be addressed in more detail at the Annual General Meeting.

5.2 Water Abstraction

It was noted that there was now a change of personal at the Gupta Group with Duncan Mackison moving on.

5.3 Stocking

Pressure had been put on the Scottish Government and Marine Scotland to produce a policy during the course of the year, in line with their commitment to NASCO.

6. FISHERIES MANAGEMENT SCOTLAND

The most recent FMS Monthly Update had been circulated, which was comprehensive. On enquiry, the Chairman confirmed that the new FMS Chairman, Richard Sankey, seemed to be a good choice and he had no doubt that FMS would continue to be a big influence on Government and on the proceedings regarding aquaculture. He declared himself comfortable with progress and that by being part of FMS there was unrivalled access to Government with Alan Wells in place. He was the first point of contact on a range of significant issues involving the salmon fisheries and Brian Doran felt FMS were making a significant contribution to the aquaculture debate.

7. PUBLIC AND GHILLIES' MEETINGS

It was noted that the public and Ghillies' meetings had both been held in very positive atmospheres.

The Director then invited questions on the Report.

Q Angus Gordon Lennox felt that sawbill management needed to be coordinated and asked who would be attending to this.

A In answer, the Director confirmed it would be him, although he did acknowledge he had concerns regarding the method and timing of the Government's proposals for piscivorous bird stomach content analysis. He had also liaised with BASC with regard to the types of ammunition and firearms that were to be utilised.

Q Angus Gordon Lennox enquired whether SEPA would revisit the water abstraction issues at the lower river, particularly after last year and enquired whether SEPA had put processes in place so that the river was not put in that situation again.

A Alistair Galloway, on behalf of SEPA, responded that they were looking to improve the process and would be coming back on this, although he did indicate there was no actual increase in the volumes of water that Scottish Water took at the Dipple Wellfield. He acknowledged however that the percentage was higher, given the low flow.

Alistair Galloway confirmed that there was a connectivity between water management and other uses and, although they did not have evidence of harm to the fish stocks, they would continue to review matters.

For his part, Angus Gordon Lennox felt there must be an assumption that taking water from the river would be damaging to fish stocks and would increase temperature rises in the river.

The Board were also concerned that, despite the record low flow in 2018, it did not appear that conditions necessary for a hosepipe ban had been met.

In response, Richard Fyfe advised that it was a Scottish Minister's decision for a hosepipe ban, but there would be planning in place in the future.

He also confirmed in response to an enquiry from William Mountain that Scottish Water do have a drought plan in place.

William Mountain offered his congratulations to Roger and Brian on the Annual Report and this was unanimously supported by the Board.

The Director then invited questions:

Brian Shaw updated Board Members on the Piscivorous Bird Control Project and noted that £700,000 had been secured from Scottish Government to carry out research over the next 3 years and the Spey might be eligible for a portion of that. The drought issue would require to be reported to Fisheries Management Scotland and Brian would undertake that and encourage FMS to pursue matters relating to the "drought plan", as noted previously, on behalf of the Board.

Q Peter Graham enquired whether there was a licence for sawbill control on the tributaries

A In response the Director confirmed that there was not and that this would require to be a separate application.

Q Peter Graham then asked whether the Board felt that Alan Wells was too close to the Scottish Government.

A The Chairman's own view was that he was well connected with Government; access was a valuable and important tool for FMS and he did not personally think that he had his own agenda. He felt that Alan could have moved on as he was highly rated, but felt that he had no plan to do so, or to move into Government meantime. The new Chairman would be in place with FMS to ensure Alan Wells continued to fully support Boards.

Brian Doran also advised that there had been a suggestion to move from FMS's current Rutland Place premises in Edinburgh to Battleby near Perth, in conjunction with the Atlantic Salmon Trust. Brian had expressed his discomfort with that suggestion and was supported by Richard Sankey, who felt that this would be too close an involvement.

Toby Metcalfe felt that there was no evidence of Alan Wells not representing Boards and that the new Chairman of FMS had control of policy.

Brain Shaw also felt that Biologists had been getting on very well with regard to representation by FMS and Alan Wells and the Chairman felt that FMS was generally moving in the right direction.

In summary, the Chairman sought the Board's approval to carry on supporting FMS and this was agreed. Particular policy, however, would be left for the new Board.

8. SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE

Peter Graham reported on the last meeting held on the 29th January and said that a Biologist's Report had been circulated along with the Electrofishing Report. He reported that other rivers were jealous of the great resource of electrofishing on the Spey. The last meeting was positive and the Ghillies would like to re-run the floy tagging of released fish experiment. The Committee agreed to this, although tagging must only be done by trained Gillies and, after debate by the Board, this was fully supported, although the technical details of policy implementation and training would be left to Brain Shaw to discuss with the Director.

The Committee also discussed the following: -

- Biomass indexing
- Spey Action Plan
- Mineral contents in water – which was backed up with a request for a SEPA scientist to be involved at the next Scientific Committee meeting.

Brian Shaw also noted that since the production of the Biologist's Report, there had been further discussion on the "springer gene". He had received approaches to carry out some

investigation on the Spey and funding was to be secured. The project would be on behalf of Marine Scotland Science, once funding was available.

There was also discussion on new technology for genetic sampling and a review of past genetic samples to see whether this information could assist in the future. All Board Members were in agreement to go forward with the review of past genetic samples and a report would be issued in due course.

Q Toby Metcalfe enquired how success would be measured.

Peter Graham agreed that this was important and was part of the Action Plan the Committee were putting together.

There was also discussion of environmental DNA and it was noted that SEPA had particular knowledge of this. This was all species DNA which was picked-up and dissolved in water and was going to be a useful tool and become part of the classification tool for rivers in the future.

Richard Fyfe would be looking at this as an environmental tool for freshwater stocks and it was felt to be a much better method for classification than potentially damaging methods such as netting etc.

Q Toby Metcalfe enquired whether this would be able to identify signal crayfish.

A Richard Fyfe felt that this was a strong possibility and also could potentially be used to identify pink salmon.

9. AOCB

9.1 Spey Trust Meeting

Angus Gordon Lennox reported on the key messages from the Spey Fishing Trust Meeting held the night before the Board Meeting as follows: -

- The Spey Trust were generally supportive of the Action Plan, but felt that it did not state clearly what it was trying to achieve, so there was a request for objectivity.
- Spey Fishing Trust Members were very keen to know the number of fish in the river. There were some suggestions on how counting could be achieved and they wished the Board to consider how this was to be done.
- They would like the Board to identify areas of the river that needed help from the use of the hatchery and to fill the hatcheries to achieve those objectives. There was a feeling that this should include the Tulchan Hatchery as necessary, as Tulchan had expressed their willingness to be involved in such activities.

- The Fishing Trust felt that public relations must be improved to put a positive antidote to negative publicity.
- There had been some discussion about smolts going down the Tay from Loch Ericht, rather than the Spey.
- There was a general request to get approvals for broodstock capture and sawbill management as soon as practicably possible.

Debate then followed on the attitude of the meeting in general and the Chairman noted that Spey Fishing Trust Members must be aware of the constraints the Board operate under. Although Angus Gordon Lennox felt that the feeling of the Fishery Trust Meeting was an encouragement to move forward, the Chairman felt that there had been a more hostile atmosphere towards the Board.

Angus Gordon Lennox was sorry that the Chairman felt discomfited, although he did not recognise that in the meeting himself. Peter Graham was clear that this was something that would need to be “worked on” so there was a closer alliance.

Roger Knight for his part felt that there had been hostility from some of those in the room and cautioned that the proposals from this river last year had focussed the Scottish Government’s attention on stocking. If we had continued to follow a programme of evidence-based mitigation stocking, the Scottish Government would not have intervened. However, they now aspired to take full control of stocking activities.

Dr Catherine Wills felt that the Action Plan should be shortened to bullet points only and was currently too complicated.

Oliver Russell supported that and suggested more emphasis on what the Board are actually able to do within its constraints.

Toby Metcalfe felt that the Board’s public engagement should be a standing item in Agendas to ensure that positive messages are promoted to the wider public. He also felt that a paper should be produced to outline what the Board were doing to put more fish in the river and that the Board must solely concentrate on exporting the largest number of smolts to sea. This message must be sent out to encourage support within Scottish Government as much as possible.

The Board supported a summary of action to encourage maximising export of smolts and to put pressure on Scottish Government to take this forward.

- 9.2 Brian Shaw mentioned that a very successful day had been had with the Ghillies at Gordon Castle and encouraged more of the same.
- 9.3 Angus Gordon Lennox enquired whether redd counts could be achieved with use of the drone and in answer this was confirmed.
- 9.4 Richard Fyfe indicated that SIMEC have a number of tenders for fish pass investigation at Spey Dam and they would get on with setting up a meeting to finalise these. The Historic Data Contract had also now been let and a report on that would be forthcoming in due course.
- 9.5 As far as the new Chief Executive of the Gupta Group was concerned, a new Chief Executive would be appointed, but Richard Fyfe did not think this would delay matters.

10. DATES FOR NEXT MEETINGS

The dates for the next two meetings were fixed for 17th May 2019 and 16th August 2019.

The meeting then closed at 12 p.m.