

MINUTE OF MEETING OF THE SPEY
DISTRICT FISHERY BOARD IN OPEN
SESSION held at the Craigellachie Hotel,
Craigellachie commencing at 10.00 a. m. on
Friday 18th August, 2017

Present:-

Chairman	Brian Doran	Craigellachie Fishings
Proprietors	Peter Graham Angus Gordon Lennox William Mountain Toby Metcalfe Oliver Russell Dr CMH Wills Alan Williams	Rothes & Aikenway and Laggan Brae Water Trust Delfur Fishings Crown Estate Ballindalloch Knockando Carron Fishings
Co-Optees	Craig Mackay	River Spey Anglers Association
In Attendance	Roger Knight Brian Shaw Alan Wells Jennifer Heatley Alistair Galloway Graeme Henderson William Cowie	Director Biologist Chief Executive, Fisheries Management Scotland SNH SEPA SEPA Clerk
Public Attendees	Peter Kyte	

1. INTRODUCTIONS AND APOLOGIES

The Chairman introduced Alan Wells, the new Chief Executive of Fisheries Management Scotland who would be updating the Board on progress during the course of the meeting.

It was noted apologies had been received from Peter Millar and Grant Mortimer.

2. MINUTE OF PREVIOUS MEETING ON 19th MAY 2017

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

3. MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MINUTE

There were no matters arising other than on the Agenda.

4. DIRECTOR'S REPORT

4.1 The Director's Report was as appended to the Minute but the following particular points arose:-

4.1.1 Salmon catch figures

The Director reported that the figure to the end of June was only 45 fish below the 5-year average of 2,722. The catch and release figure for Salmon & Grilse currently stood at 96%.

4.1.2 Sea Trout

Catches were a little ahead of the 5-year average.

4.3 Pacific Pink Salmon

The Director reported that 9 had appeared in total, 8 of which had been caught and 1 found at the river bank. He also reported that some redds had been found and asked the Biologist to provide further information.

Brian Shaw advised that those caught had been up as far as Abernethy and whilst it was difficult to determine precise figures, there could be a substantial number of redds in the river. It was not known whether they would be able to successfully breed and incubate, but the approach currently was to mark redds and keep an eye on them, recognising that Pacific pink salmon were an aggressive coloniser and it was a matter of considerable concern. Alan Wells interjected to warn that Pacific Pink Salmon were very adaptable and, as yet, there was not sufficient information to establish whether or not they would be viable in Scottish rivers, but licences would be granted to carry out study and control.

The Chairman then invited questions to be directed to Alan Wells.

On enquiry from Angus Gordon Lennox, Alan Wells confirmed that genetic samples were being taken and the instructions for those who had caught fish was to keep them alive if possible, or maintain the fish in a freezer until they could be collected and sampled. There were some theories regarding the origin of the Pink Salmon and it was noted that some stocking had taken place in northern Russia in the 1950's. There was also a fairly well-established population in Northern Norway.

The exact origin however was speculation and until genetic results were clearer, the origin of the current influx could not yet be determined. It was also possible that the differing feeding availability in the marine environment had encouraged wider migration, but the answer would lie in the genetic analysis.

Alan Williams enquired whether liaison had been taking place with Norway and with other Scandinavian and European rivers and the answer was that this had taken place since their first appearance. Reports had also been received of pink salmon appearing in Scottish west coast rivers and in Iceland.

Peter Graham asked whether, as a Board, we should not be simply taking action to destroy them. In answer, Alan Wells felt that the important thing was to generate sufficient genetic material and in any event, entire elimination would be very difficult to achieve. The genetic information would dictate what course of action would then be followed. He confirmed that Fisheries Management Scotland had been taking matters very seriously, monitoring and moving forward on underlying risk assessments and impact studies. They would be putting into place action plans for 2019 which would coincide with the next 2-year cycle of the Pacific Salmon. He denied that FMS were being complacent but that, until the genetic information was available, they were not in a position to finalise action plans.

Alan Williams asked whether there was any indication what had caused the sudden rise in number and in response, Alan Wells confirmed that this was exactly what would be explored and examined in a meeting scheduled for September, including whether this constituted a “one-off” event.

In response to an enquiry from Toby Metcalfe, Brian Shaw advised that from a practical point of view, there was little the Board could do other than to keep a close watch on the river, to collect dead fish and to retain those caught.

Oliver Russell recommended that a clear briefing be issued by the Board to all Proprietors on this aspect immediately.

Toby Metcalfe asked whether, given that there was a “fixed cycle” of 2 years for these fish, some targeted action could be taken to account for that. In response, Alan Wells confirmed that they would discuss all possible action, but a coordinated approach on all rivers needed to be taken. The risk assessments they were carrying out would establish such questions as whether these fish returned to the same location to spawn, whether they competed with the Atlantic salmon for the same feed both in river and in the marine environment and their origin.

Toby Metcalfe also asked, through Alan Wells, that he ensure that the Scottish Government were clear about the risk of an invasive species such as Pacific Pink Salmon and were not simply reliant upon Fishery Boards to undertake action by proxy.

In summary, the Chairman confirmed that a briefing note would be issued at the beginning of the following week covering the issues raised.

4.4 **Armadale Tagging Project**

It was reported that to date only 70 fish had been tagged and it was not clear whether funding would continue into the following year and whether the batteries that had been incorporated into the tags would continue to be viable.

In response to enquiry, Alan Wells reported that his understanding was that the project would continue and unused tags would be stored at the end of October. He reminded the Board that the history was that Marine Scotland Science had wanted to locate a suitable tagging site from which fish could be identified “nosing” into rivers and Armadale was chosen as one of only two or three sites with sufficient numbers of fish to tag. Clearly, the actual numbers turned out to be significantly reduced because of low grilse numbers, but he reminded the Board that although FMS had pushed for the project to be carried out in the Aberdeen area, they had been overruled by Marine Scotland who had chosen Armadale.

In further response to enquiry, Alan Wells confirmed that some tagged fish had been re-caught, but this was only a small number. FMS would be pushing strongly for an earlier start to the project the following year and for consideration for it to be undertaken from a different location. He was not aware of the total budget, but it was confirmed that it was partially met through the European Development Fund.

Peter Graham expressed concern that if the project did not continue, the Scottish Government may use the very small sample of 70 fish to extrapolate data in the future and asked Alan Wells for comments. For his part, Alan Wells did not believe they would use scientifically unsound information based on a small sample, but he undertook to make this point strongly to the Scottish Government.

4.5 **Spey Dam**

It was noted that Duncan Mackison had been appointed as Estates Director on behalf of GFG and whilst Harry Jameson’s attendance at this meeting had been suggested, it was felt that it would be more advantageous if Duncan had time to settle in and understand the issues before attending a meeting with Board Members in November. On behalf of SEPA, Alistair

Galloway confirmed that the officer dealing with Spey Dam matters was a Richard Fyffe, who had succeeded Stephen Macintyre who had now left SEPA's employ.

The Chairmen then invited questions.

Angus Gordon Lennox enquired whether there was a firm timeline now for Alcan and SEPA to adhere to and it was confirmed that this would be an aspect for discussion in November. It was noted however that the Gupta family were aware of the dam issue when they bought the Company and would have been aware of it from Due Diligence.

Brian Doran enquired whether there was a confirmed delivery date for John Watt's report. Brian Shaw advised that he understood it was to be at the end of October.

Craig Mackay enquired whether there was any risk that the John Watt report could result in a declassification of the dam as an obstruction. It was felt there was no risk of this and it was more likely to reinforce the Board's own view.

Toby Metcalfe enquired whether SEPA were ready to take tough enforcement action if the John Watt report supported the Board's view and in response, Alistair Galloway confirmed that they would push forward, subject to preparation of detailed plans to resolve the issues.

William Mountain again stressed the Board's requirement for specific dates for action. Peter Graham supported the view that SEPA, as the regulator, must take action and the Board must ensure that SEPA's "feet were held to the fire". Alistair Galloway confirmed he was fully aware of the Board's views.

In summary, the Chairman noted the regulator's requirement to take action and recorded a very strong message on behalf of the Board to SEPA that the Board expected action to be taken irrespective of any requirement for further surveys and estate plans.

4.6 **SSE**

Matters were principally as reported in the Director's report, but Alan Williams enquired who it was within the SEPA organisation who had inherited the responsibility to represent the Spey's interest. Alistair Galloway was not sure of the particular individual, but confirmed that SEPA would continue to look after the Board's interests.

4.7 **Predator Control**

4.7.1 Sawbills and Seals

It was recognised that there was currently a dis-connect between the procedure for licencing sawbill ducks and that regarding seals. In connection with sawbills, the Board collated information and counts and then submitted the application, but for seals, the counts and surveys were carried out by the Sea Mammal Research Unit and considered by Marine Scotland and so the Board were not a party to it. This resulted in a different application process which was at times very frustrating, but would continue to be monitored.

Angus Gordon Lennox, as an aside, indicated that he had had confirmation from the Policy Officer that as long as there was no deliberate intention to harm, a policy of “shoot to scare” would be permissible.

4.7 **Ranunculus**

It was reported that Peter Graham requested that the Board issue a Press Release about the referral to Europe of the failure to take action on Ranunculus by the Scottish Government. All Board Members supported this and it was agreed that this should be circulated to as wide an audience as possible.

4.8 **Spey Catchment Initiative**

It was noted by Angus Gordon Lennox that Liz Henderson and he had walked a part of the Fochabers Burn and it appeared that the work undertaken was now resulting in “self-improving” of the habitat which was very positive. He asked that the Director liaise with Liz Henderson for an update.

5. **SPEY STOCKING SUB-COMMITTEE**

The report was presented and identified 3 principal points:-

5.1 Electro Fishing Report

Details would follow, but in brief summary it was noted that fry numbers were up on the previous year and parr numbers were down.

5.2 The stocking areas of the previous year had been reviewed and new locations had been determined.

5.3 The future of the stocking programme had been reviewed against two main considerations:-

- Scientific – based upon evidence.
- Political – with pressure from the public and anglers for the Board to expand its stocking programme.

It was noted that balancing the two considerations was a difficult process and the result was the current year's proposed programme. The idea had been to add areas where there could be active management, particularly in the upper catchment and a number of new sites had therefore been identified, with details presented to the Sub-Committee. Consideration had also had to be given to the best way to collect broodstock fish from these areas. In terms of the locations for planting out, there was a requirement to demonstrate a clear need for stocking in particular areas and the proposal for the following year was to plant out 330,000 fed fry in to the areas identified.

Peter Graham commended the proposed programme to the Board and invited questions.

There were some questions regarding specific locations of stocking areas and Angus Gordon Lennox enquired whether there was a reason for targeting the upper river at a time when electro fishing was showing reduced numbers of parr.

In response, Peter Graham advised that this was because of high numbers of fry in the lower river, which obviated any need to overlay more. The aim was to target burns where juvenile numbers were low.

Brian Shaw also noted that the Tommore burn provided good habitat for trout, whereas the Allt Bhran burn had better habitat for salmon. He felt that there could be lessons to be learnt by re-visiting the Allt Bhran burn to see if numbers there could be improved. He also felt it was worth recollecting that the use of the hatchery gave the Board flexibility to react to particular problems and issues as they arose, but the river was remarkably resilient in producing good fry numbers.

Peter Graham commended the proposals to the Board, with the reservation that there was not yet sufficient data for stocking from the Tromie. Board Members accepted the programme in general, with some reservation from Alan Williams.

Finally, the Chairman reported that Macallan Distillery may well contribute some financial support to the Board if it were to stock the Ringorm burn. Peter Graham indicated that this would also be subject to review in the same way as other locations.

6. AOCB

- 6.1 Dr Catherine Wills noted the low number of grilse in the river and enquired whether there was any reason for their small size also.

Brian Shaw felt that this was probably a result of changes in the marine environment where feeding may not be good for grilse.

As an aside, Angus Gordon Lennox reported that in reviewing fishing books from the 1950's, there had been indications of small grilse then also.

6.2 The Director advised that all Board Members should now be required to review and update their Declarations of Interest. He circulated forms for each Board Member to review and return to him.

6.3 Brian Shaw indicated that they were working on a method to integrate data on water quality and resultant trends.

7 CLOSE OF MEETING

The next meeting was to be held on Friday 24th November, 2017 at 9.30 a.m.

The meeting then closed at 12 p.m.