

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 22nd November, 2019

Present: -

Chairman	Dr Alexander Scott	Craigellachie Fishings
Proprietors	Angus Gordon Lennox David Greer Peter Graham Toby Metcalfe William Mountain Oliver Russell Dr CMH Wills	Brae Water Trust Seafield Estates Rothes & Aikenway Crown Estate Delfur Fishings Ballindalloch Knockando
Co-optees	Craig Mackay	RSAA
In Attendance	Roger Knight Richard Fyfe Alistair Galloway William Cowie	Director SEPA SEPA Clerk
Public Attendees	Dani Morey Ian Armstrong	

1. WELCOME, INTRODUCTIONS AND APOLOGIES

Prior to commencement of the meeting the Chairman noted the sad passing of Peter Millar who had served on the Board and the Spey Fishing Trust for many years. His knowledge of the Spey and his business experience had been invaluable over the years and he would be greatly missed.

Apologies had been received from Callum Robertson, Grant Mortimer, Brian Shaw who was on compassionate leave and Jen Heatley.

2. MINUTE OF OPEN SESSION MEETING HELD ON FRIDAY 16th AUGUST 2019

There were no comments as to accuracy and the Minutes were accepted for signature.

3. ACTION POINTS AND MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MINUTES

3.1 SCOTTISH WATER

Angus Gordon Lennox enquired whether SEPA were going to take a further look at the water table issue and it was noted that Roger Knight would report on this.

The Chairman enquired about progress with the Scottish Water pump at the Brae Water. In response, Angus Gordon Lennox advised that the wells had never been properly maintained and this was the reason he was advised that the pumps had been installed. He further advised that he, the Director, SEPA and Moray Council had a joint meeting which promised better operating practices. Angus Gordon Lennox had urged SEPA to hold Scottish Water to account to ensure that the pumps were more regularly maintained and kept working and this remains the primary concern.

Peter Graham was also very concerned about the security of the pipelines across fields which could be violated and he joined with Angus Gordon Lennox in lamenting the fact that nobody seemed to be holding Scottish Water to account.

Richard Fyfe recommended that contact be made with the local SEPA office, but in response, Angus Gordon Lennox had concern that it appeared that the remit fell within two spheres of responsibility, with the planners denying responsibility and equally SEPA indicating it was a planning issue. It had taken considerable effort on his part to secure the joint meeting.

After debate, it was felt that the Board should put pressure on Scottish Water to provide a maintenance and responsibility schedule and discussion followed on how best to make such an approach. It was suggested that a joint approach from the Director and from SEPA with assistance from Richard Fyfe be made.

ACTION: Director and Richard Fyfe to approach Scottish Water regarding maintenance of the Dipple Wellfield boreholes.

3.2 SIMEC

It was confirmed that the SIMEC Report was received by the Board simultaneously with other recipients.

3.3 ABSTRACTION

Angus Gordon Lennox felt that Abstraction should be a regular action point. Toby Metcalfe supported this but would like to understand the effect of the higher water temperature discharges returning from Distilleries. If SEPA were able to assist in any way in explaining this, that would be a great help.

Richard Fyfe indicated that there was in fact quite a lot involved in the whole question of water temperature and in broad terms, the method of regulation was based on a modelling up to a maximum of 2 degrees.

Toby Metcalfe advised that his question was whether this had an impact on the fauna and flora in the river and he suggested SEPA produce an Annual Report of such releases of heated water into the River.

Angus Gordon Lennox supported this as he felt it was necessary to demonstrate the river was in a good condition and would mean that those who were breaching the terms could be held to account.

William Mountain concurred and indicated that the problem was that none of the Board Members fully understood the process and needed to be appraised of the facts in the first instance.

In response, Richard Fyfe indicated that Envirocentre's Kenny MacDougal could produce some additional facts from the Abstraction data in his forthcoming report. Alistair Galloway added that SEPA colleagues could also supply data regarding distillery abstractions and discharges.

The Board agreed that this should represent an Action Point from now on.

ACTION: Board to acquire better knowledge of distillery discharges.

3.4 Health & Safety

It was noted that Greens of Haddington were soon to start a review of Health & Safety matters and it was suggested Health & Safety compliance should appear regularly as an Agenda item in Board Meetings.

4. DIRECTOR'S REPORT

The Director's Report was delivered as attached to the Minute, but the following specific points arose using the numbering from the report: -

1.1 Salmon Catch

This had shown a significant improvement in numbers from the previous year and there had been a 98% return rate.

1.2 Sea Trout

The catch numbers were slightly down on the previous year, but there had been an 86% conservation return rate.

2 Conservation Policy

After debate it was confirmed that the Conservation Policy would remain unchanged for the next year.

2.2.1 Spey Dam

The Director reported that following the recent meeting of the Working Group, which he and Brian Shaw had attended to discuss the draft report from Multiconsult, they considered that the current fish pass was too steep, too dark and too turbulent and there should be a gradient of not more than 10%; the current one was 18.3%. There were also some issues regarding the notches within the pass and a need to upgrade lighting. There had also been a suggestion of carrying out monitoring of the numbers of adult fish trying to ascend the dam's fish pass.

Dimitri Harrison had stated that the Company wanted "things to happen" and he had expressed frustration that they had not moved further on than they would have liked to.

Richard Fyfe had made it clear that the dam was a barrier to fish passage and, although the report had been received in draft form, it was very technical and would therefore not be issued to Board Members until the principal was available.

In response to enquiry as to the date of the issue of the final report, Richard Fyfe was continuing with discussions with SIMEC and anticipated a final report by the end of the year, via Multiconsult.

Board Members were anxious to have a full review of the final report and Richard Fyfe confirmed that he was clear about the Board's concerns.

He also mentioned that there were, of course, now two reports, one carried out in 2002 and the current one, which both concluded that, whilst the dam was a barrier to fish passage, it was not fundamentally flawed. He reiterated that the primary aim should be understanding what fish behaviour actually was by counting the numbers of adult fish trying to ascend the fish pass, with proposals which had included snorkel surveys downstream. He suggested that the question perhaps should be not why adult salmon could not get up anymore, but rather why smolts could not get down.

Peter Graham suggested trapping and trucking smolts above the dam, for which SIMEC should be responsible. He also felt that water management was the crux of the matter.

After discussion, the Chairman suggested that the Biologist put together a proposal for a smolt tracking project, including tagging above the dam. He reiterated the Board's mission to maximise the numbers of smolts going to sea, so this would be a very good project for the Board to pursue.

Richard Fyfe noted that there was now a process within SEPA whereby dam operators had to develop protocols for addressing smolt migration and they were also working with Fisheries Management Scotland to address this.

ACTION: Brian Shaw to identify the resources needed to trap smolts above the reservoir.

2.2.3 Pollution incident at Aberlour

The Chairman added that he had met the person responsible for Corporate Social Responsibility and whilst the discussion with him had been useful, it was felt that progress should be advanced with an individual higher in the organisation.

In answer to enquiry, the Chairman did confirm that the incident was being investigated and the Chairman would continue to pursue matters with Chivas Brothers at Board level.

2.2.4 Envirocentre Report

It was reported that this would be presented to the Board at the February meeting. In response to enquiry, this was because the Director felt that it was important that the report was finalised before it was presented to the Board.

2.3 Stocking

The Chairman, through the Board, thanked all volunteers who had helped with fish collection and stripping of fish and there would be continued pressure on the Scottish Government to revisit the Eyed Ova principle.

3.1 Predator Control

Sawbills

It was noted that the count was very low compared to last year's count. In response to enquiry, the director clarified that applications were not made to reduce bird populations, but rather to prevent damage to fisheries by "shooting to scare". He also confirmed that the Board had met the quota in the previous year's licence.

He then invited questions on the Director's Report and the following were noted: -

- 4.1 Angus Gordon Lennox enquired what the current position was with the possible introduction of beavers and as far as the Director was concerned, there was no further proposal to do so and there had not yet been an appearance in the Spey catchment. It was suggested that a briefing on Beavers be included as an Action Point for the next meeting.

ACTION: Director to produce a briefing paper on beavers.

- 4.2 Angus Gordon Lennox noted that in connection with the Director's Report number 5.7.1, the Salmon summit would be a "wild" Salmon summit.
- 4.3 William Mountain reported concern from the Ghillies Committee meeting on the tagging project and the stocking of eyed ova. There had been considerable

discussion on this and he had wanted Brian Shaw to explain that eyed ova could produce good results.

In general terms it was felt that the fish tagging project should continue. The threat of fungal infection was felt to be very minimal and it was recommended that the Board continue with tagging at the same intensity.

The Chair felt that this was also useful for engaging with the Ghillies.

Finally, Angus Gordon Lennox suggested that the Ghillies be invited to the Public Meeting.

ACTION: Director to invite the Ghillies to the Board's Public Meeting on the 19th December 2019.

5.1 SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE MEETING

Peter Graham reported that three main topics had been discussed: -

- Kelt reconditioning
- Missing Salmon Project
- Eyed Ova verses unfed/fed fry

As far as kelt reconditioning was concerned this was a very labour intensive issue and could also involve the risk of disease. Water supplies were also a significant requirement too. The Tay had carried out an experiment to stock a barren area, but we did not have a suitable facility for a kelt reconditioning programme on the Spey and, even if we did, we could only utilise it above Spey Dam, and even that had yet to be decided.

Moving to the eyed ova debate, it was reported that Doctor Summers strongly preferred eyed ova as the way forward and felt that it was clearly better in areas without any natural stock. He had suggested that about 12% of them were likely to smolt and the cost of rearing to fed fry was prohibitive.

William Mountain suggested that a separate Board Meeting should be convened on stocking alone. Peter Graham added that the Tommore Burn would be a great experiment to test the Scottish Government's stocking policy. We had excellent data for fed fry and we could then compare the product of eyed ova to that of fed fry.

Debate followed on whether to apply for a licence to Marine Scotland to undertake an experiment to compare the difference between eyed ova and fed fry and this was supported by the Board with a remit to be determined. There would need to be a robust experiment proposed.

Angus Gordon Lennox wondered whether this might be an FMS project and whilst the Board felt that this was a well-made point, it was unlikely that they would support matters.

William Mountain still stressed the need to have an overall discussion on stocking, given the possible mortality of fish planted-out but, after discussion, it was decided not to proceed with this meantime.

Following further discussion, it was agreed that the Biologist and Director would work on developing an experiment and would report on this further.

ACTION: Biologist and Director to work on developing an experiment to stock fed fry a well as eyed ova.

5.2 BIOLOGIST'S REPORT

As Brian Shaw was not available, the Chairman then asked whether there were any questions on the Biologist's Report circulated.

Peter Graham reported that the electrofishing results had shown a spread of generations which showed an increase in multi-sea-winter fish in place of grilse.

Toby Metcalfe was very pleased with the information from the electrofishing, but would like to have more analysis of this and perhaps this could be distilled into a good news story.

Peter Graham indicated that there was a suggestion that the Biologist might start to look at biomass productivity as a means of measurement.

Toby Metcalfe felt that the electrofishing results were a positive story which supported the Board's aim of maximising the numbers of smolts going to sea. This positive message should be promoted.

6 PUBLIC AWARENESS

The Chairman highlighted that catches were up 60% on last year. Angus Gordon Lennox added that there had also been an increase in the numbers of fish over 20lb that had been caught.

The Chairman also highlighted the climate change mitigation projects and the AST's Missing Salmon Project that were also positive stories.

It was noted that Andrew Flitcroft, Editor of the Trout & Salmon magazine, would be coming to open the 2020 season.

There were other positive messages that would need to be made clear and in particular Angus Gordon Lennox stressed the improvement in catches and the increase in over 20 lb fish caught.

7 DATES FOR 2020 MEETINGS

Dates were suggested: -

Friday 7th February, together with the AGM, although it was noted that the Clerk would be absent.

22nd May

4th September

20th November

The above dates were all agreed.

8 AOCB

It was noted that there would be the possibility of some Board staff retiring in 2021, including Jimmy Woods as Hatchery Manager, although he was keen to stay on if he was able. This would be noted further in due course.

The meeting then closed at 12 p.m.