

MINUTE OF MEETING OF THE SPEY
DISTRICT FISHERY BOARD IN OPEN
SESSION held via video conference session
commencing at 9.30 a. m. on Friday 20th
November, 2020

Present: -

Chairman	Dr Alexander Scott	Craigellachie Fishings
Proprietors	Angus Gordon Lennox David Greer Peter Graham William Mountain Callum Robertson Dr CMH Wills Toby Metcalfe Guy Macpherson-Grant	Brae Water Trust Seafield Estates Rothes & Aikenway Delfur Fishings Easter Elchies Knockando Crown Estates Ballindalloch
Co-Optees	John Trodden	RSAA
In Attendance	Roger Knight Brian Shaw Richard Fyfe William Cowie Jennifer Heatley	Director Senior Biologist SEPA Clerk Nature Scot (formerly SNH)
Public Attendees	Chris Davies and Jenna Scott	

1. WELCOME, INTRODUCTIONS AND APOLOGIES

The Chair particularly welcomed Guy MacPherson Grant to the meeting, having been unanimously appointed by the Board to serve following the retiral of Oliver Russell. A welcome was extended to him by all.

Apologies were noted from Grant Mortimer.

The Chairman invited anyone who may have a conflict of interest in any of the business to be discussed, to declare it. None were noted.

2. MINUTES OF OPEN MEETING HELD ON FRIDAY 4th SEPTEMBER, 2020

There were no other comments as to accuracy but it was noted that the February to June catch figures reported had increased slightly due to some subsequent catch returns. The Minute was proposed for signature by William Mountain and seconded by Angus Gordon Lennox.

3. ACTIONS POINTS AND MATTERS ARISING

3.1 Action Points

Angus Gordon Lennox enquired as to progress on the Scientific Strategic Review and the Director responded that the meeting had taken place on the Monday afternoon prior to the meeting.

3.2 Invertebrate Study

The Chairman reported that he had invited Ian Gordon to sit with him to review the invertebrate study, but he had called-off.

3.3 Removal of Protected Status for Birds

It was noted that the Director had yet to follow this up with NatureScot.

4. DIRECTOR'S REPORT

4.1

The Director presented a slide show and short film and the report appended to the Minute was noted subject to the additional points.

Using numbering in Director's Report: -

1.1 Season Catch Statistics

1.1.1 Salmon and Grilse

The Director commented that the catch figures appeared to be remarkably good given lower effort during the year. With salmon and grilse there had been a 98% release rate.

1.1.2 Sea trout

The sea trout catch was about half what had been expected but again, this was against the background that between June and July, which was the most prolific period for sea trout catches, and with lockdown restrictions in place, including closed hospitality, this was likely to have had an effect. Overall the release rate was 91%.

1.2 Conservation

The Director recommended that the Conservation Policy remain unchanged for the 2021 Season and this was approved unanimously.

2.2 Water Abstraction: Spey Dam

The results of the lighting review in the fish pass showed that in the middle sections, there were areas of total darkness and some lighting would require to be introduced. There would also be a review of some of the concrete notches and this was further reported in the Director's Report. The Director also advised that the snorkelling which took place, and as reported, showed no fish, although there was very poor visibility within the water.

Brian Shaw then commented on the trapping and tagging proposal and advised that this proposed a short-term installation of a Rotary Screw Trap and would likely involve PIT-tagging. In his view, this was straightforward and the least invasive process and it was important to best look after the small numbers present.

The Chairman also reported to Board Members on the forthcoming meeting with GFG's Land Agents, at which he would stress the need for implementation at pace for all work. He added that he was personally very keen to see all of the issues around Spey Dam resolved as soon as possible.

Questions were then invited.

Peter Graham was concerned with the ability of GFG to see through the issues. He had heard anecdotally that GFG were pursuing different uses for the Estate and electricity production for outside interests. In his view, it was unlikely that GFG would be around for a long period of time, or would remain in control of the dam and this meant that the Board should apply as much pressure as possible to force the work to take place with the support of regulatory authorities. This was agreed by Board Members.

3.2 Enforcement – Patrol Boat

It was noted that there were now a couple of faults which had developed in the patrol boat which could conceivably be expensive to repair and it was recommended that a more recent model be sought.

4 Habitat Restoration

It was reported that Penny Lawson had secured further funding from the Cairngorms National Park which would allow an extension of the project around Crubenmore. In addition, there was an aspiration to restore flows in the Cuaich and the Allt Bhran, which would amount to significant river restoration successes.

The Director then presented a short film on the work carried out on the River Calder.

He then invited questions:

1. William Mountain requested that the Board be given feedback following the GFG meeting before the next Board Meeting. The Chairman and Director agreed to do so.

ACTION: Chairman and Director to report on meeting with GFG's land agents.

2. Angus Gordon Lennox cautioned against too close a relationship with GFG in case this would prevent the Board holding them to account.
3. John Trodden noted that GFG had been talking about expansion of work with a French subsidiary of GFG in the establishment of a recycling centre and he wondered whether this may pose a risk for further abstraction.

The Director advised that abstraction agreements were fixed and were in place, together with compensation arrangements. They were currently taking as much as they could and there was unlikely to be any scope for increase.

Richard Fyfe also confirmed that there had been no approach to SEPA from the French recycling company and it was generally understood that this connection had arisen as GFG had purchased an aluminium smelter in Dunkirk. Richard Fyfe felt that the important point was that the relationship on the ground with the people they dealt with was good, and there was no reason to believe they would not deliver. He felt it was working on a collaborative basis, but SEPA would continue to press for monitoring and improvements.

4. Peter Graham asked Richard Fyfe whether he was aware that GFG were looking to increase the productivity of the water they do take? Richard Fyfe confirmed he was aware that they were looking to maximise productivity and had engaged Consultants to assist.

4.2 SUMMARY

In summary, the Chairman felt that it was astonishing what the Spey Board had achieved at the top of the Spey and were achieving big successes with the Spey Catchment Initiative and restoration. He expressed a vote of thanks to

all of the team and particularly to Roger and Brian. Peter Graham also expressed his thanks on behalf of the Board to the Riparian Land Owners who had allowed access to the restoration areas. The Chairman concurred that this should be part of a positive media briefing and said that further discussion of the method of approaching the media would take place in the Closed Meeting.

5. **SCIENTIFIC REPORT**

Brian Shaw had circulated the Biologist's Report prior to the meeting but made the following comments: -

5.1 There was a need to look at resources for the smolt tracking programme which would be an issue for the following year.

5.2 Brian Shaw repeated a request to SEPA on water quality data which had been previously requested.

In response, Richard Fyfe advised that monitoring used to be his job and there was a large body of information, but he felt the Board needed to ask itself what questions they were looking to answer.

In general, they had found that the quality was very good and there were no particular issues. He advised that the programme had been scaled back in recent years because of this and had concentrated on poorer areas.

In response to the request for data, he had spoken to Alistair Duguid who now controlled the programme and, rather than going through a middle man, he suggested that an approach directly to Alistair Duguid should be made. But he again cautioned the Board would need to be specific about the information that the Board actually wanted and consider carefully what the Board actually wished to do with it. He mentioned the same was true of the invertebrate monitoring.

Peter Graham had heard anecdotally that the quality of water had declined since the heyday and would be very appreciative of the data to answer this issue. He felt that there was some evidence there was a lesser quality of water now. In response, Richard Fyfe again stressed that the Board would need to be clear on what they regarded as "water quality" as there was not one particular answer as to what represented "good quality water" as opposed to "poor quality". Some chemical substances would not have been recovered or recorded in any event.

Brain Shaw commented that there had been some issues in England about tick treatments and emerging threats and enquired whether Richard Fyfe was aware of this.

In response, Richard confirmed he had no knowledge, but would pass on the comments.

Callum Robertson felt that it was important to concentrate on the increase of pesticides and chemicals in the river, although it was recognised it would be difficult to identify, because of the long list of particular types.

- 5.3 Angus Gordon Lennox directed a question to Brian Shaw about underwater filming. He had seen that the Ness seemed to be doing this successfully and he enquired with Brian whether we could adopt something similar.

In response, Brian Shaw advised that in fact it had been the Spey who had suggested this to the Ness, but it was recognised that it was a very time-consuming occupation and the water was much clearer on the Ness. Given the time-consuming nature, it would be a resource issue.

The Chairman mentioned that Callum Robertson had generously paid for diving equipment. Some of the Ghillies were keen divers and would be able to undertake underwater filming, so he hoped that there would be more pictures available soon.

The Director noted that he had built into the budget some diving training for Richard Whyte.

- 5.4 The Chairman also noted that there was a review of the draft scientific strategy, which would be broadly aligned with the Board strategy and enhanced by highlighting the resources required. This would be revised and approved and circulated in due course.

6. SALMON IN THE CLASSROOM

John Trodden presented a slide show about Salmon in the Classroom, which involved the Biologist, himself and Steve Burns from the Board. The project was now very well established in Scotland and involved 3 schools in rotation within the catchment. The aim was to give children an opportunity to learn across the curriculum and whilst the programme worked very well, he felt it could be enhanced with perhaps visits to the Sandbank Hatchery, or with more details about the jobs people do and what they were involved with, and to introduce the children to angling.

The Chairman expressed a particular thanks to John Trodden and felt that this was a very important area for the Board to be involved in to demonstrate it was “fit for purpose”. He agreed that the Board would look at resourcing the programme.

Questions were then invited: -

Toby Metcalfe had noted that there were reports that Covid had resulted in an increase in people being interested in angling. He felt that this was encouraging and might encourage take up with young anglers too.

Callum Robertson enquired whether the Board offered work experience to school leavers.

The Director confirmed that this does happen and said that we currently had a student from Milnes High School doing work experience with our Head Water Bailiff.

Callum Robertson said he would also be keen to offer some days fishing at Upper Arndilly for young anglers to become involved and this was very much welcomed by the Board.

In summary, the Director offered a vote of thanks to John Trodden and in further responding to the earlier question regarding work experience, he said he had tried to develop a Modern Apprenticeship with assistance through Highland College at Thurso, but it had proved to be too difficult and there was not the capacity within the academic circles to develop this.

Peter Graham also noted that he had tried to develop a Fishery Management course in Moray, but had received little or mediocre assistance from the Thurso Highland College.

7. **DATES OF 2021 MEETING**

The first meeting would be held on Friday 5th February at 09.30a.m. with the AGM following immediately thereafter at 2 p.m. The following meetings would be: -

- Friday 21st May, 2021
- Friday 3rd September, 2021
- Friday 19th November, 2021

All commencing at 9.30 a.m.

8. **AOCB**

There was no further business.

Thanks were given to Richard Fyfe for his involvement.

The meeting then closed at 10.50 a.m.