



River Findhorn District Salmon Fishery Board

Clerk: Anthony Laing Administrator: Clare Walker

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Minute of the FDSFB Board Meeting

Held on Monday 18th November 2024 at 10:30am in The Long Room, Logie Steading

Present:

Anthony Laing -AnL (Chairman)
Alasdair Laing - AL
Mark Laing - ML

Andrew Howard - AH
Robert Hoskin - RH
Philip Arkell - PA
Colin Morrison - CM

In attendance:

Sean Mclean (SM) (Head Bailiff)
Robert Laughton (RL) – Director, FNLRT
Clare Walker (CW) (Administrator)
Elle Adams (EA) (Living Alive)

A	Item	Action
1.	Apologies: Colin Cawdor, David Paton, Colin Glynne-Percy, Alex Leven, Campbell Ross, Michael Barron AnL welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked them for attending.	
2.	Bailiff Pay Review The Board reviewed the bailiffs' salaries and agreed to award a 5% pay rise from 1st February 2024	
3.	Minutes of Meeting Held on 19th August 2024 The minutes were approved. CW to publish Board minutes to FNLRT website.	CW
4.	Matters Arising not Covered Below None	
5.	Budget and Finance a. <i>Budget/Cashflow Update</i> – CW circulated updated financial reports for the year to date and an up to date cashflow forecast to the end of the financial year. There is currently a projected surplus of £12k, £5k of this is from outstanding assessments from the previous financial year. b. <i>Budget for 2025/Levy</i> - The draft budget for 2025-2026 indicated a deficit of approximately £2k factoring in a pay rise of 5% for the FDSFB Bailiffs. It was noted that the LDSFB will be setting their budget for the coming year, and they may review their budget for bailiffing. There is income within the budget from FNLRT for FDSFB staff time on project activity. The budget was approved with the levy to remain at £0.53 in the £ for 2025. c. <i>Investment Portfolio</i> – £50k of cash was transferred to a Rathbones timed deposit account in January 2024, it is estimated that this will produce £2.5k in interest come December 2024.	
6.	River Matters a. <i>2025 Conservation Code</i> – It was agreed to move the new 'biosecurity' paragraph before the catch and release instructions and to move the	

	<p>contact details for reporting to the top of the page. CW to publish 2025 Conservation Code subject to amendments.</p> <p>AL made the Board aware that FMS had made a proposal to the membership at the recent AGM that recommends 100% catch and release policies across the membership. Indications for and against such a motion by those attending the AGM were almost all in favour of adopting such a policy. This recommendation has been prompted by the recent IUCA classification of Atlantic Salmon as an endangered species, it is becoming increasingly untenable for FMS to lobby for salmon conservation when salmon are still being killed for sporting purposes.</p> <p>The Board acknowledged that a large amount of private funding of salmon conservation comes from the angling community and the angling industry may be disadvantaged by these recommendations. There is a strong desire to uphold tradition within the sport by responsibly retaining some catch. FMS will be providing FDSFB's with the opportunity to feedback to them on their proposal in the New Year. Current thinking within the fish conservation network is that it is likely that a 100% catch and release policy will be imposed legislatively at some point in the future, and it would be better for it to be adopted voluntarily before statutory regulation is imposed.</p> <p>b. <i>Biosecurity</i> – RL stressed the need to continue publicity efforts to raise awareness of the issue. FMS have provided funds for additional biosecurity measures. PA asked whether vehicles crossing through water courses could be a biosecurity hazard, RL confirmed that this is a potential route for spreading contaminants and should be addressed. SM also highlighted the need to continue promoting good fish handling practices, especially as there is evidence that damage due to poor handling is a route of infection</p> <p>c. <i>Health & Safety</i> – There were no H&S incidents. RL informed the Board that the H&S policy will be externally reviewed in early 2025. PA asked whether other estates or AA's provide anglers with life vests. The consensus was that life vests were not generally supplied as standard to anglers and that fishing activity was undertaken at the anglers' own risk.</p> <p>d. <i>Hatchery</i> – RL attended a recent seminar covering results of trials of smolt rearing and release. There are examples of this process from across the world and the river Dee have a project underway in partnership with Stirling University. Feedback from Canada is that the cost per smolt is extremely high with this data being an unknown at present for the Dee hatchery. This method still removes fish from the river into an artificial environment and the evidence that this process is effective is lacking at this time.</p>	CW
7.	<p>Head Bailiff Report</p> <p>SM reported the following catch data for 2024 with a couple of beats still to declare: Salmon & Grilse: 1246 (49 retained) Sea Trout: 73</p> <p>There are a couple of cases going to court in the near future. SM has asked FishPal whether convicted poachers will receive a ban from booking, but he has had ongoing problems with communication from them. FMS have organised a meeting with FishPal to discuss ongoing problems with the site systems.</p>	

	<p>In addition to the cases going to court there were 17 other incidents during 2024.</p> <p>SM and Alister Taylor attended a recent fish health workshop organised by FMS. This included instruction on how to take histology samples from deceased fish</p> <p>RL has discussed the Nairn Angling Associations use of FishPal and Charlie Black had confirmed that they had resumed using them after FishPal implemented changes to bookings including requiring photographic ID. PA said that Cawdor are considering not using FishPal next season as they have also had problems as a result of bookings made through them.</p>	
8.	<p>FNLRT Directors Report</p> <p>ML announced to the Board that RL will be retiring as Director of FNLRT at the end of March 2025. The FNLRT Board are currently looking at a succession plan and expect to make an announcement before the end of 2024. It will be useful for FNLRT to have a clear idea of what the FDSFB wants from the ongoing relationship with the Trust so that this can be built into future plans.</p> <p>AnL asked for volunteers to form a short life subcommittee to discuss what the FDSFB needs are. AH, AL, PA, CM and AnL agreed to join the committee. AnL will organise an initial meeting of the subcommittee.</p> <p><i>Fish Disease</i> – It was a relatively good year with reports of diseased fish much reduced on the preceding two years. This is likely due to colder weather and higher flow during the Spring and Summer. Approximately 20-30 fish were affected. It has also been a good spawning season with positive reports from the Upper catchment.</p> <p>Fish post spawning are prone to infection, Murray Wilson kept 4 infected males which Peiter van West travelled up to sample. RL has received a licence to catch fish out of season for sampling purposes.</p> <p>RL asked that, if possible, they can be kept wet, in a bucket or similar until RL can come to sample.</p> <p>The research PhD has accumulated a lot of samples from across Scotland, RL sits on the steering committee and will continue to monitor. SM, AT and CW can also now take samples following the FMS fish health workshop.</p> <p><i>Tomatin Distillery</i> – temperature loggers are back in the burn. RL needs to meet with Fiona again and offer to take on this monitoring. AH asked what SEPAs position on the situation is; RL confirmed that SEPA have been invited to meetings but have not responded. The discharge requirements for distilleries have not been reviewed since the 1970's. Most distilleries have improved their discharge voluntarily. Invertebrate monitoring on the burn has shown good numbers of invertebrates which indicates that these species may not be as affected by high water temperatures.</p> <p><i>Allt Neacrath</i> – the local community may consider a repair project for the bridge apron potentially supported through wind farm community benefit funds. Further discussions with Highland Council and community fund representatives are required to see if this is feasible.</p>	AnL

	<p><i>Predators</i> – A bird license has been granted for 7 mergansers, 5 goosanders and 3 cormorants. This licence covers the Findhorn. Bird counts will begin shortly.</p> <p>An acoustic deterrent device (ADD), funded by Fisheries Management Scotland through the Marine Fund Scotland, was supplied to the FNLRT for use by FDSFB to deter seals entering the river system. Initial trials were fairly successful, and the intention is to utilise the device during winter to protect kelts. Scottish Government are planning a review of the seal licencing process in the New Year.</p> <p><i>INNS</i> – 24 American Mink have been caught across the 3 rivers with 5 in the Findhorn area. This is an increase in catch on previous years and reflects the greater effort being placed on mink control this year with the trapping/volunteer network significantly increased this year. Similar upturns in catch have been reported across the rest of the SISI area.</p> <p><i>Season Extension</i> – Scottish Government had previously planned a review of all seasons, but this has now been postponed indefinitely. The current application process requires that clear evidence of fresh fish in the river during that proposed period, which would be hard to provide. The current messaging around catch and release and the reclassification of salmon as endangered will add to the likelihood that a season extension would not be granted.</p> <p>It was acknowledged that many of the upper catchment proprietors want to push for consideration of an extension and feel it will provide clear benefit to those beats. It was agreed to draft a formal response to the upper catchment proprietors explaining what information and process would be required for an application to Scottish Government for a season extension.</p>	RL
9.	<p>Catchment Developments</p> <p>A9 – RL is trying to set up a meeting with a representative.</p> <p><i>Windfarms</i> – contracted to carry out surveys for Carn na Saobhaidh windfarm. During the electrofishing surveys for this contract RL discovered several unique sea trout populations in obstructed burns which need to be protected. RL has submitted comments for several other windfarms currently in scoping/planning.</p>	
10	<p>AOCB</p> <p>PA asked whether temperature data from the upper catchment was available. RL confirmed that some data had been gathered over the previous year and this could be shared. The placement of some of the loggers will be reviewed in the new year with the aim of having a core of around 10 loggers in the upper catchment.</p>	RL
11	<p>Dates of 2025 Meetings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Board Meeting 19th May 2025 at 10:30am, venue tbc - Board Meeting followed by AGM and Triennial Elections 18th August 2025 at 9:30am, venue tbc - Board Meeting 17th November 2025 at 10:30am, venue tbc 	