



DRAFT Minute of Findhorn Nairn & Lossie Rivers Trust Board Meeting

Venue: Hybrid: The Long Room/Virtual

Date: 17th March 2025 5:30pm

Attending: Mark Laing (ML), Andrew Wallace (AW) (Virtual), Crinan Dunbar (CD), Campbell Ross (CR), Alasdair Laing (AL), Jamie Whittle (JW).

In Attendance: Robert Laughton (Director)(RL), Clare Walker (Administrator)(CW), Elle Adams (EA), Guy Harris (GH), Ollie Smaje (OS)

		ACTION
1	Welcome and Apologies ML opened the meeting and thanked everyone for attending. He welcomed Ollie Smaje (OS) who was recently appointed as FNLRT Ecologist. Apologies were received from Alex Leven, Fiona Strachan, Alec Rose, Charlie Black.	
2	Minutes of Meeting of 25th November 2024 The draft minutes were approved. CW to publish them on the website.	CW
4	Matters Arising None	
5	Financial Update <ul style="list-style-type: none">- CW circulated various finance reports to the Board which had been reviewed by Michael Barron who had no concerns to raise.- CW has added opening fund balances to the surplus and deficit report so that the balance remaining in those funds isn't skewed by them being carried forward from previous financial years.- The 2024-2025 Operational Budget is showing a deficit of £15k, compared to a surplus of £1.8k in November, the expenditure is in line with expectations, however, outstanding income from Carn-na-Saobhaidh windfarm and INNS contracts has lowered expected income for the period. This should be received in due course. Operational expenses continue to increase as the organisation increases in size and activity.- Confirmation has been received of our grant application to the NatureScot Nature Restoration Fund which has been added to the 2025-2026 operational budget and cashflow forecast. This grant funding will go a long way to closing the current deficit in the operational budget. CW had highlighted to the Board that there was the possibility that the Clashgour Windfarm monitoring program may be temporarily paused, which would have a significant effect on the budget, since circulating the Board papers CW had received confirmation that the monitoring would go ahead in 2025 as planned.- CW will arrange for EA to be added to the FNLRT bank account to include a debit card and online banking access, and proposed that FNLRT open an instant access savings account which ringfenced funds could be kept in. This would enable the large pots of capital being held for restoration projects to be held separately to the Trusts operational finances. The Board agreed, CW to action.	CW

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Financial planning for the year ahead, including a projected increase in commercial ecology contract work, has indicated that the Trust may reach the trading threshold for tax purposes within the next few years. As this represents a significant means to diversify income and lessen reliance on grant funding for operational costs, CW proposed that FNLRT should consider the setup of a wholly owned trading subsidiary. There is precedent for this among some other Rivers Trusts. JW suggested contacting Rhonda Dawson at Highland Accountancy Practice who may be able to advise. The Board agreed the EA and CW develop a business plan and proposal to bring to the Board at the next meeting in August. - Changes to legislation around PVG checks will come into force in April 2025. The workstream which FNLRT undertakes which is relevant to the PVG scheme is it's work with schools and youth groups. EC and OS will undertake a Disclosure Scotland PVG check for their work with children, as this falls within their roles. Other changes to the scheme may require Boards whose charity's main purpose is for the benefit of children (or vulnerable adults) to carry out PVG checks for all Trustees. The Board discussed whether this new legislation would apply to the FNLRT Trustees; it was felt that the charitable purposes of the Trust are not specifically targeted towards children or vulnerable adults and, therefore, the Trustees will not need to be PVG checked. The Board agreed to keep this under review and action as necessary. - CW confirmed that the audit recommendations agreed at the last Board meeting had been implemented. <p>Item 8. Policy and Procedure Review was discussed at this point.</p> <p><i>Scheme of Financial Delegation</i> – amendments made to reflect audit recommendations. The Board approved.</p> <p>The following draft policies were circulated to the Board prior to the meeting and were externally reviewed by Themis Consultancy prior to issue.</p> <p><i>Parental Leave Policy</i> – sections highlighted in yellow indicate provision beyond what we are obliged to provide by law, but which might be considered as reasonable provisions. The Board approved.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Special Leave Policy</i> - sections highlighted in yellow indicate provision beyond what we are obliged to provide by law, but which might be considered as reasonable provisions. The Board approved. - <i>Sickness and Leave of Absence Policy</i> – The Board approved subject to the addition in 3. Fit Notes to review and revising risk assessments to ensure any risk is managed as appropriate. - <i>Employee Appraisal Policy and Procedure</i> – The Board approved. - <i>Training and Personal Development Policy</i> – The Board approved. - <i>Redundancy Policy</i> – The Board approved. - <i>Capability Policy</i> – The Board approved. <p>CW will implement approved policies and circulate to staff.</p>	CW/EA
5	<p>Director Succession</p> <p>The handover process has been excellently handled with regular meetings between staff and the Chairman to review progress and identify focus areas.</p>	CW

6	<p>Director's Report</p> <p><i>Developments:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Clashgour monitoring complete for 2024 and confirmation to continue monitoring in 2025 received shortly before the meeting. - Paul's Hill Windfarm monitoring in development with the Spey DSFB. There is only a very small part of the Lossie catchment included in the monitoring and RL and OS will be liaising with Atticus Albright on the Spey to finalise the contract which will be worth around £5k to FNLRT. - RL, EA and GH met with the Balfour Beatty Environmental team working on the A9 duelling at Tomatin to Moy and the plans look ok but will require ongoing monitoring. - Further reviews of the A96 corridor are with the Government. <p><i>INNS</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The SISI staff made excellent progress in 2024 and hit their targets. Particular inroads were made with Japanese knotweed. The Nairn and Findhorn, to the A96 bridge, are now at management levels. - No response has been received from Network Rail following prompts to take control measures from RL. ML will write another letter to the CEO of Network Rail raising the issue. If no response is received, JW suggested contacting the Rail Regulator. - There was no funding available this year for a seasonal SISI post. This will impact the amount of ground that can be covered, as well as having health & safety implications for lone workers. - The SISI project is currently in negotiations with a large offshore wind farm development for long term funding of the project. If this is successful it would potentially secure funding for the SISI project for 30 years and could set a precedent for leveraging developments for nature restoration. - A record number of 24 American Mink were caught across the three rivers last year. There has been one capture on the Nairn so far this year. <p><i>Catches</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Catches for 2024 included 1246 Salmon and Grilse for the Findhorn and 19 Salmon and Grilse for the Lossie. - There have been reports from proprietors that Scottish Government have been following up on catch returns submitted to check for accuracy. <p><i>Saprolegnia</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The research team are currently working through the data gathered so far. RL and OS will be attending a meeting tomorrow to discuss some of the findings so far. - The message to anglers and other river users to check, clean and dry equipment remains a critical message to disseminate. <p><i>Juvenile Surveys</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A full survey of the Lossie was carried out in 2024. Numbers were as expected, with lower densities of salmon. A full report will be ready shortly. <p><i>Temperature Data</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - RL and OS will be collecting temperature data from the network on the Findhorn and reviewing the positioning to maximise monitoring of project work. 	ML
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Latest readings from Tomatin Distillery do not indicate any improvement in temperatures within the burn. The distillery needs to be pushed to make improvements <p><i>Schools Go to Fish</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The relaunch of Schools go to Fish post Covid is finally underway and has been delivered to 3 local primary schools. - We had a request from the Kinloss Sea Cadets to come and give a talk on the Trust's work. The session was very well received and it would be good to develop this relationship and possible roll out to other local youth groups. <p>RL thanked Helen Nasrat for all her work during her time with FNLRT and welcomed OS to the FNLRT team.</p> <p>AW expressed how rewarding it has been to work with RL over the years. ML also gave RL thanks on behalf of the Board and congratulated him on leaving an accomplished legacy within the fisheries management industry.</p>	
7.	<p>Findhorn Watershed Initiative (FWI)</p> <p>This has been an extremely busy time for the project as it nears the end of the Just Transition Fund (JTF) grant, as well as navigating a smooth handover with RL. The JTF award has encountered some minor difficulties with getting the remaining award spent before the end of the financial year due to issues outside of the project team's control, but every effort is being made to utilise the award before the deadline.</p> <p>The 'River Within' partnership with Chivas Brothers Ltd has seen over £500k drawn down towards restoration in the catchment. The FWI has benefitted from having a pipeline of shovel ready projects developed which have been ready to use The River Within funding to implement.</p> <p>EA spoke at the Wild Salmon Connections conference in London in January, this was very well received, with plenty of interest in the FWI's holistic approach to catchment restoration.</p> <p>The Rivers Trust are hoping to open membership up to Scottish rivers. They provide their members with many different resources which FNLRT would be able to make use of so it would be worth considering if the opportunity arises.</p> <p>The project continues to facilitate community engagement events by hosting environmental film nights, venison butchery and cookery demonstrations and launch events for the publishing of a publication and podcast produced as part the cultural heritage research commission of the Upper Findhorn catchment.</p> <p>EA is meeting with the social impact team for Balfour Beatty who have the contract for upgrading the A9 stretch near Tomatin.</p> <p>Work on the nature finance strategy is almost complete. EA is developing a 0.5 FTE nature finance role in conjunction with Dark Matter Labs.</p> <p>EA has also reopened discussions with Zulu Ecosystems, now that the projects values are better formed and a clear strategy developed, the project is in a better position to explore these natural capital finance opportunities.</p> <p>GH updated the Board on progress on some of the ongoing works:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Balnespick</i> – Area 1 is now complete, and Area 2 is underway 	

RESEARCH

RESTORE

EDUCATE

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Glenmazeran</i> – work has had to be postponed temporarily due to the proximity of an eagle nest to the site. Delivery will hopefully commence in August. The team will soon submit a funding request to The River Within for Area 2, which will be an area of woodland creation downstream of the ancient woodland size and represents 17 hectares of riparian restoration. - <i>Moy</i> - A feasibility study has been completed, and the team will now aim to take this to the estate for consideration. - <i>Divie</i> – stalled while the estate considers proposals and best timing for implementation further, to align with succession planning. 	
8.	Policy and Procedure Review Discussed under Item 4	
9.	AOCB None	
10.	Dates of 2025 Meetings Board Meeting 26th August 2025 at 5:30pm, venue tbc Board Meeting and AGM 24th November 2025 at 5:30pm, The Long Room, Logie Steading	

ML closed the meeting at 6:40pm.