



River Findhorn District Salmon Fishery Board

Clerk: Anthony Laing Administrator: Clare Walker

Fisheries Office, Logie Steading, Dunphail, Forres, IV36 2QN

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Minute of the FDSFB Board Meeting

Held on Monday 19th May 2025 at 10:30am in The Long Room, Logie Steading

Present:

Anthony Laing (AnL) (Chairman)
Alasdair Laing (AL)
Colin Glynn-Percy (CGP)
Murray Wilson (MW)
Campbell Ross (CR)

Michael Barron (MB)
Alex Leven (AL)
Robert Hoskin (RH)
Philip Arkell (PA)
David Paton (DP)

In attendance:

Sean Mclean (SM) (Head Bailiff)
Elle Adams (EA) (Director, FNLRT)
Clare Walker (CW) (Administrator, FNLRT)

Alister Taylor (AT) (Bailiff)
Ollie Smaje (OS) (Ecologist, FNLRT)
Guy Harris (GH) (Catchment Restoration Lead, FNLRT)

A	Item	Action
1.	Apologies: Colin Cawdor, Mark Laing and Andrew Howard AnL welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked them for attending.	
2.	Minutes of Meeting Held on 18th November 2024 The minutes were approved. CW to publish Board minutes to FNLRT website.	CW
3.	Matters Arising not Covered Below <ul style="list-style-type: none">- AL asked whether any further progress had been made with FishPal providing details of those who have booked tickets. SM confirmed that the Forres AA do pass on this information but that some estates made the decision not to pass this information on to the water bailiffs. The AA and Bailiffs would like to see FishPal implement a mechanism to ban certain people from purchasing a ticket. FishPal believe they have nearly found a suitable solution. The issue of ensuring anglers booking tickets through FishPal also submit a catch return has also been flagged with them.- FNLRT's previous Director, Robert Laughton (RL), had been a member of the Saprolegnia research steering group, AL asked whether OS would be continuing this role. OS confirmed that, while not a committee member, he is in touch with the research team and will be attending the upcoming meeting.- PA asked whether the temperature data mentioned by RL was available yet. OS is still to continue RL's analysis but hopes to have this data ready for the next Board meeting in August. He has carried out several spot checks on the river and these indicate similar results to last year.	OS

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - AnL has arranged a meeting with Tomatin Distillery to check on their progress towards reducing the temperature of the outflow into the burn. OS provided a graph of temperature data which shows that temperatures downstream have been 8° higher than upstream of the distillery outflow, with temperatures in the mixing zone even higher. 	
4.	<p>Budget and Finance</p> <p>a. <i>Draft Accounts for Year End January 2025</i> – CW highlighted some points to note within the accounts; other income to the Board was up significantly on the previous year due to income from FNLRT project work and also the trade in of the old FDSFB vehicle; there were some debtors at year end, mostly made up of outstanding assessments, these debtors have all since been settled apart from outstanding assessments for Moy. CW is in contact with the proprietor and hopes to have this settled shortly as well. Creditors and accruals at year end were as expected and in line with previous years. Overhead costs were as expected. The Accounts showed a surplus for the year of £2,556. The Board agreed to adopt the accounts. CW will arrange for them to be signed off.</p> <p>b. <i>Budget/Cashflow Update</i> – CW circulated updated budget for the year to date and an up-to-date cashflow forecast to the end of the financial year. CW has adjusted the budget slightly to reflect the decision by the LDSFB to reduce the budget for bailiff patrols from £1.5k to £1k. CW has also made some movements in the staffing costs budget; this hasn't significantly changed the overall budget but has moved the expenditure to better reflect outgoings for NIC/PAYE costs. The financial reports are currently suggesting a small surplus of £200 at year end but it is still early in the financial year so this could change.</p> <p>c. <i>Review of FDSFB Complaints Procedure</i> - CW had made a minor change to the complaints procedure to change the name of FNLRT from 'fisheries Trust' to 'Rivers Trust'. AL suggested that the timescale for review laid out in Stage 2 could mean that complainants could be waiting up to 6 months for a resolution. The Board agreed to alter the procedure to state that a meeting of the Board would be convened to facilitate the Stage 2 review. The Board approved the complaints procedure subject to the suggested amendments. CW will circulate updated version and publish on the website.</p>	<p>CW</p> <p>CW</p>
5.	<p>New Management Structure</p> <p>AnL introduced the Board to OS who has recently taken on the new role of full time Ecologist for FNLRT. OS had an intensive handover with RL and will be picking up the various biologist services previously provided for the Board by RL.</p> <p>EA circulated an organisational structure diagram to illustrate the new roles within FNLRT and the breakdown of roles and responsibilities across the two organisations. EA will provide oversight of all services provided by FNLRT for FDSFB, and line management of SM and AT. OS will increasingly lead on monitoring, scientific advice, and submitting statutory responses, while GH will contribute to discussions and tasks which related to wider catchment management and restoration opportunities. CW will circulate a digital copy to the Board for reference.</p>	<p>CW</p>
6.	River Matters	

	<p>a. <i>FMS Catch and Release (C&R) Policy Update</i> – A discussion was held regarding whether the FDSFB would adopt the recommended 100% catch and release policy suggested by FMS. Several points were raised:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The membership of the Findhorn Angling Association (FAA) would potentially be significantly affected by the proposal. As the largest contributor to the levy, financial implications of loss of revenue for the FAA would directly impact the Board's income. - The current C&R rate on the Findhorn is 96% - FMS have concerns that the optics of lobbying for conservation efforts including funnelling of funding towards fishery protection while the membership continue to catch and retain fish make it difficult to submit a strong case for support. - On balance, the Board agreed that it was not able to adopt the proposed 100% catch & release guidance at this time. <p>b. <i>Health & Safety</i> – No incidents to report. SM is working with CW to review risk assessments and ensure they are up to date.</p> <p>c. <i>Windfarm Development Responses</i> – CW had circulated the most recent consultation response on a windfarm development drafted by FNLRT on behalf of the FDSFB as an example, with particular emphasis drawn to the potential cumulative impact of windfarm developments in the catchment. The number of windfarms at different stages of development within the catchment has grown considerably in recent years and it is important that the Board, as a statutory consultee, is clear on how it wishes to respond.</p> <p>AL praised the FNLRT team on how well the example response was put together. Given that some Board members have themselves financial interests in some of the windfarms in question it was agreed to make sure that the register of financial interests is up to date and that any conflicts of interests are handled appropriately. The Board agreed that any Board member with an interest could take part in discussions, particularly as they could provide helpful insight and experience, but that a conflict of interest should be declared and that member be excluded from any applicable voting of the Board. CW will circulate register of financial interest forms to the Board before the next meeting in August.</p> <p>EA confirmed that FNLRT feel it is important to continue to put together these consultation responses on the Board's behalf but did want to flag that it is a lot of work given the number of developments currently in the pipeline and volume of documents required to review for each. The Board agreed that the responses are objective and have a clear basis in fact, unfortunately there is not evidence available to say definitively what the cumulative effect of multiple developments within the same catchment will be and, therefore, what stance the FDSFB should take regarding it. The FNLRT team highlighted that, given the scale of developments being discussed, including all the associated infrastructure, the cumulative effect could become significant and therefore the precautionary principle should be adopted and that we should seek to ensure that freshwater fisheries should be considered as part of the cumulative ecological</p>	<p>CW</p>
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	<p>assessment to fulfil obligations under the National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4), Policy 3. d.</p> <p>The Board acknowledged that, based on how the NPF4 is currently laid out, developers are not evidencing that sufficient consideration is being taken to potential environmental impacts to the river system, making an objection on this ground a reasonable default position. However, this is with a view that this will open the door to discussion with developers on how to work on including greater protections for the freshwater environment, including the potential for returns to the Board and Trust that could be channelled into catchment restoration and fishery management.</p> <p>MB raised concerns that the Board have limited resources, and the costs involved in time and effort needed to submit so many responses could have an impact on capacity. As a statutory consultee the Board has an obligation to respond, however, it is a resource heavy exercise so GH will investigate potential funding which may be available to help statutory consultees with these costs, there is also precedent for developers to resource some of this work.</p> <p>On balance it was agreed that the potential returns to the catchment from this approach were worth the expenditure in resources.</p> <p>CGP asked whether there was the staff time to conduct monitoring etc. and SM confirmed that the bailiffs time can be managed to fit in this work as it comes up.</p>	GH
7.	<p>Head Bailiff Report</p> <p><i>Spring Catch Returns</i> - The spring catch for 2025 has been extremely poor, 34 from Drynachan downriver, compared to over 200 in 2024. The conditions on the river have been very poor, with very low water and minimal rainfall. There is a severe ongoing outbreak of saprolegnia with significant numbers of dead fish.</p> <p>SM, AT, along with Prof. Pieter van West of Aberdeen University, have taken several samples, including some from the Bay. DNA samples from Sea Trout have also been submitted.</p> <p><i>Poaching</i> – one incident has been heard by the court which has resulted in a charge and fine. The Board agreed that SM could write to FishPal to request that this perpetrator be banned from purchasing angling tickets for the river. SM has also received communication from the procurator fiscal that another pending case will be heard within the next eight weeks.</p> <p><i>Other Work</i> - The bailiffs have also been working with FNLRT on the Schools Go to Fish project which culminates in June with a trip to Kellas Trout Fishery with three local primary schools.</p>	SM
8.	<p>FNLRT Director Report</p> <p>Biologist report provided by OS:</p> <p><i>Saprolegnia</i> – CR had spoken to Prof. Pieter van West about previous research he had carried out which suggested that Brown Trout have some immunity which he attempted to pass on to Sea Trout through gene replacement, but this was unsuccessful. Further study was required but</p>	

	<p>funding for the project ran out. It was noted that the current research program is in its last year of funding, and it would be prudent to ask FMS what action is being taken to secure funding beyond this period.</p> <p>The Spey are running a trial where diseased fish are removed from the river and placed in saltwater tanks to see if it is possible for the infected fish to recover.</p> <p>OS stressed the importance of reporting diseased fish on the FMS app as this information is passed on to the fish inspectorate and could be critical to securing future funding. At the moment there is a reliance on anecdotal information on the scale and prevalence of the disease, and it would be useful to implement some kind of annual survey possibly using drones, to collect more quantitative data. OS will propose some monitoring ideas.</p> <p>Prof. Pieter van West has agreed to attend the AGM in August to give another presentation on the disease.</p> <p>OS pointed out that, if any fish are observed to be recovering from the disease, these fish could be genetically significant to studying immunity. If these fish could be caught and blood samples taken this could be valuable for further research, however, this would need to be weighed against the increase in stress to the fish of being subjected to the sampling process as this could result in the fish failing to spawn and the subsequent loss of eggs.</p> <p>OS reported that conditions on the river this year do seem to be historically low, with minimal rainfall and little snow during the mild winter. Temperatures are like last year.</p> <p><i>Fish Passage</i> – A member of the community is independently seeking funding from Balfour Beatty as part of their A9 dualling community benefit funding for carrying out a minor repair to a bridge footing over the Allt Neacrathe burn. If they are successful, it would be worth getting involved to assist them.</p> <p><i>Electrofishing</i> – there is no NEPs this year but OS plans to repeat some of RL's routine sites to get a handle on the situation on the river.</p> <p><i>Invertebrates</i> – FNLRT are still running a successful volunteer program of invertebrate monitoring as part of Buglife's Guardians of Our Rivers programme. A more in-depth program as part of Wild Fish's Smart Rivers approach will be starting shortly; this will help with monitoring water quality.</p> <p><i>Schools Go to Fish</i> – RL visited three local primary schools earlier in the year, along with SM and AT, to deliver education sessions as part of a grant FNLRT received from Helden windfarm community fund. OS has picked this up to deliver the final part at the beginning of June.</p> <p>AL proposed that the Board discuss the cessation of fishing - The week prior to the meeting, the Board made the decision over email to recommend that proprietors close angling on the river for a period of three weeks from Monday 19th May, to prevent further stress to the salmon considering the current disease outbreak. The recommendation included the proposal to review the situation after two weeks. This announcement has been met with an overwhelmingly positive response both on social media and in direct communications, but the Board are sensitive to the economic impact such a recommendation has on proprietors.</p>	<p>OS</p> <p>OS</p>
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	<p>OS pointed out that, because most evidence for the severity of the outbreak is anecdotal, it is difficult to pick a suitable metric to use to gauge when to resume fishing.</p> <p>Several factors will need to be considered including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - River levels – it was noted that the Nairn have ceased fishing on low water alone - Rainfall/spate – it is expected that a spate would wash the river out - Presence of diseased dead or dying fish – if the numbers of infected fish sharply decline this could indicate the outbreak is waning - Economic and administrative burden on proprietors of a rolling ban - Reputational damage to the river – it is already thought that the Findhorn is becoming known for these disease incidents and river closures will only compound this - Reputational damage to the Board – resuming angling while the outbreak is still ongoing could look bad for the Board when the angling community itself is supportive of a closure - Potential erosion of property rights for proprietors of continued or frequent closure <p>The Board agreed that there was no clear set of metrics that can be used to judge when the recommendation to cease fishing should be lifted but that it will be a matter of judgement based on conditions.</p>	
9.	<p>AGM and Triennial Elections</p> <p>CW reminded the Board that the next triennial elections will be held along with the AGM in August. The Board agreed to elect 1 Lower Proprietor and 9 Upper Proprietors and to have 2 co-optees, this is the same as previous elections.</p> <p>Relevant paperwork will go out to all proprietors before the election, including mandate forms which will need to be renewed for those planning to re-stand for election.</p>	
10	<p>AOCB</p> <p><i>Catch Returns by Beat in Annual Return</i> – CW wanted to confirm with the Board that there was no specific reason why catch returns broken down by beat could not be included in the annual report going forward. CW will work with SM to create a spreadsheet to show this which can then be included in the annual report for 2025.</p> <p><i>BBC Radio Interview</i> – AnL has been asked to provide an interview to BBC Radio to discuss the recommendation to close the river and has agreed to give a brief statement.</p>	CW/SM
11	<p>Dates of 2025 Meetings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Board Meeting followed by AGM and Triennial Elections 18th August 2025 at 9:30am, The Long Room, Logie Steading - Board Meeting 17th November 2025 at 10:30am, The Long Room, Logie Steading 	

The meeting closed at 12:20pm.