



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 18th August 2025 at 9:30am in The Long Room, Logie Steading

Present:

Anthony Laing (AnL) (Chairman)

Alasdair Laing (AL)

Campbell Ross (CR)

Colin Cawdor (CC)

Andrew Howard (AH)

Michael Barron (MB)

Robert Hoskin (RH)

Mark Laing (ML)

In attendance:

Sean Mclean (SM) (Head Bailiff)

Elle Adams (EA) (Director, FNLRT)

Clare Walker (CW) (Administrator, FNLRT)

Pieter van West (PVW)

Alister Taylor (AT) (Bailiff)

Ollie Smaje (OS) (Ecologist, FNLRT)

Guy Harris (GH) (Catchment Restoration Lead, FNLRT)

A	Item	Action
1.	Apologies: Colin Glynne-Percy, Murray Wilson, Alex Leven, David Paton AnL welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked them for attending.	
2.	Minutes of Meeting Held on 16th May 2025 The minutes were approved. CW to publish Board minutes to FNLRT website.	CW
3.	Matters Arising not Covered Below - FishPal have begun implementing a ban on known convicted poachers being able to purchase tickets through the site. They are also in the process of developing a mechanism to require ticket holders to submit catch returns. - The temperature data from last year has not been analysed yet, this will be something the FNLRT team will follow up on during the winter months. - The outstanding assessment from last year has now been paid.	
4.	Budget and Finance <i>Budget/Cashflow Update</i> – CW circulated an updated budget for the year to date and an up-to-date cashflow forecast to the end of the financial year. There are assessments outstanding for this year which CW will chase. There are several things coming in under budget primarily vehicle related budget lines. The financial reports are currently suggesting a small surplus of £500 at year end.	CW
5.	Report on Activities <i>FNLRT Director's Report</i>	

	- EA has taken over line management of FDSFB employees which includes regular contact and meetings. - FishPal have been asked to ban named convicted poachers and liaison with them on these issues is ongoing. - EA had a visit from FMS, during this visit EA passed on feedback from the FDSFB on the decision not to adopt FMS's 100% catch and release policy. - Several other Boards and Trusts have been in touch and EA has gained valuable context of the wider fisheries network and will continue to build on these relationships. - FNLRT hosted a visit from the Blue Marine Foundation who are exploring opportunities for marine protected areas (MPAs) within the Moray Firth for migrating fish, with a focus on protection from man-made impacts such as offshore windfarms, dredging, commercial fishing etc. - FMS have drafted a response to Scottish Government to encourage them to require windfarm developers to consider the impact of developments on migrating fish. - <i>A9 Dualling, Balfour Beatty (BB)</i> - EA is keen to make the Board aware of a number of issues which have been encountered on the A9 dualling development, where the FNLRT team feel consideration of the fishery and freshwater environment has not been prioritised when carrying out works, and timely communication about planned works and fish rescue requirements has not been forthcoming. The FNLRT and FDSFB teams have concerns about the designs of the new Dalmagarry Burn realignment channel but unfortunately, having had very little input in the planning and design process, it is difficult to get change retrospectively. OS to elaborate. <i>FNLRT Biologist's Report</i> - Improvements to the temperature of the outflow at Tomatin Distillery require major infrastructure changes, OS will continue to pressure them to make improvements - There are works planned to change to drainage on the A96 road bridge over the Findhorn. OS has ensured they are using a filter to prevent particulate from the road from entering the river. AH queried whether petrol interceptors had been included in the plans, as contaminated runoff containing fuel is likely to have a polluting effect. OS will consult the developers about including this. - <i>A9 Dualling</i> – there are lots of new culverts being installed as part of the development and FNLRT have been providing fish rescues for these and other in channel works. Some issues with the site have been raised with BB, mainly around silt ingress prevention measures, and there is a sense that the freshwater ecology has been overlooked during BB's environmental considerations. BB had previously requested the FDSFB's clearance to extend works in the Dalmagarry Burn beyond the end of their CAR licence which applies until 30th September 2025. This would encroach on key spawning time and the FDSFB had refused permission for this extension. The burn will be permanently diverted along an approximately 670m stretch. The burn contains large fish populations and is good habitat. The design of the new channel is not sufficiently fish friendly but has been approved by SEPA and there is no recourse	OS
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	to alter it at this stage. Over time, sediment deposits should improve the habitat. BB do aim to carry out the channel diversion within their CAR licence and the FNLRT/FDSFB team is primed to carry out a large-scale fish rescue operation. This is currently scheduled for week commencing 8th September, but, as far as OS is aware, BB do not have a contingency plan in place in the event that weather prevents the channel diversion taking place during this final month of their licence. EA suggested that preparing a press release or appeals to local MSPs on behalf of FSDFB highlighting the conflict between economic and environmental impacts might be worthwhile in the event that BB pursue a change to their licence to allow the channel works during spawning. AH pointed out that this may cause negative press for the FDSFB if we are seen to delay critical works to such a visible development. MB suggested that it may be helpful to appraise local MSPs of the situation and potential impacts so that they have this context if a request to extend works passes across their desks. CC asked whether we could mitigate the impact an extension to works into October. OS believes the main hurdle would be how to protect adult fish within the burn that will be waiting to spawn at that point in the season. An operation to move them would need careful planning and this would not protect spawning grounds which may already contain eggs, which would be destroyed once the channel was diverted. He is also unclear on the legal implications given that the Freshwater Fisheries Act protects spawn from destruction so would be at odds with the issue of a CAR licence to carry out works which would lead to the destruction of spawn. - AH asked whether OS was aware of any monitoring planned to assess the environmental impact of the recent wildfire on the Dava moor, they have had requests from a university to gather data. OS is not aware of any plans at the moment, but the James Hutton Institute do operate a couple of water monitoring stations in the Divie that might provide useful data. - Holding objections have been submitted for Balnespick, Lynemore and Highland windfarms (WF) as it is felt that the developers have not sufficiently assessed the cumulative impact on the downstream environment which is contrary to planning guidance. The Lynemore WF also proposes carrying out peatland restoration to include the use of novel methods – it is felt that not enough evidence has been provided that these methods are appropriate for this development and the response requests examples of how these methods have succeeded elsewhere. - Scottish Ministers are currently considering the Clune, Balnespick, Lynemore and Highland WF developments. - <i>Fish Passage</i> – OS has met with the Sanquhar Dam Restoration Group to discuss low-cost improvements to fish passage. In the long term it would be worth conducting an overall scoping of fish passage along the Mosset Burn. - A member of the community in Tomatin had been looking for funding opportunities to carry out removal of a partial barrier to the Alt na Craithe road bridge but has been unsuccessful. OS noted that the barrier is only partial and upstream is not major habitat for salmon.	
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	On the Muckle Burn, multipipe culverts appear to be preventing fish passage, habitat upstream is good but there are no juveniles getting through. OS plans to gather further electrofishing data to support a case for lobbying the local Council to consider improvements. - <i>Predators</i> – OS has submitted a licence application to NatureScot for predatory bird control. Last year's licence was filled. - <i>Research and Monitoring</i> – a few more temperature loggers have been installed and the data from these will be worked up over the winter period. - Saprolegnia was significant on the Findhorn again this Spring which saw below average flows, lack of snow melts and high temperatures. OS stressed the importance of using the FMS disease reporting app to record sightings so that a bigger picture can be developed of the scale of the problem. There is still a lot that isn't understood about the disease. - Juvenile electrofishing surveys on the Findhorn are planned with a focus on fully quantitative sites and looking at specific pressures. Head Bailiff Report - There have been 15-16 incidents this month. - SM and AT have been called to attend court in relation to a poaching case on 30th September 2025. - There have been good numbers of fish sighted at the bottom of the river, however, very few fish are appearing above Cawdor. It has been noted that the Divie is full of fish waiting for favourable conditions to move up to spawning grounds. - High numbers of grilse have been seen but fewer Spring salmon. MB asked whether spawning has been getting noticeably earlier, SM confirmed that their observations suggest that it is.	
5.	Health & Safety No incidents to report. SM has been reviewing and updating risk assessments. And developing a program of toolbox talks.	
6.	Complaints Procedure A further draft of the Complaints Procedure was produced following suggestions by AH on how to improve the procedure to reduce potential waiting times for complainants. The Board approved the proposed changes. CW will publish on the website and send to Scottish Government.	CW
7.	AOCB - EA asked whether the Board would like to subscribe to Fish Legal, membership is £123 a year and would provide the Board with access to expert legal advice which may be beneficial. The Board agreed. - EA made the Board aware that she has been in communication with Ian Neale, fishing tenant at Altyre, who has raised concerns following the Forres Gazette article covering the river closure earlier in the year. The reopening was advertised through both the FDSFB and FNLRT social media platforms as well as notice to proprietors.	EA

	- CC also raised concerns over the handling of the river closure in a response to the saprolegnia outbreak, feeling that a blanket recommendation to cease fishing was an overreach of the Board's powers and caused significant loss of earnings to some proprietors while simultaneously raising a levy against the same to support Board activity. A number of counterpoints were raised by other members, notably that: ○ It is the Board's responsibility to look after the fish and fishery and as a known stressor it was reasonable to remove that stressor during the outbreak however the Board was unable to provide a measure of how many fish had been saved by the closure. ○ It was a recommendation only and not legally binding, proprietors could have decided to continue fishing. ○ The response received by the Board to the closure from proprietors, anglers and the public was overwhelmingly positive. ○ The decision was taken as a Board with each member given an opportunity to feed into the decision and all feedback considered as part of that process although CC questioned whether sufficient account of the negative economic impact to some proprietors had been taken before the decision was made. The Board agreed that the convening of an emergency Board meeting would be more appropriate in future, to facilitate a full discussion, rather than using email/phone calls. It was agreed that having a crisis policy in place to provide guidance on how to navigate similar situations in the future should be drafted. - The FDSFB service level agreement with FNLRT is due to run out at the end of the year. EA will work alongside both parties to draft a new agreement.	CW/EA EA
8.	Dates of 2025 Meetings - Board Meeting 17th November 2025 at 10:30am, The Long Room, Logie Steading	

The meeting closed at 11:00am.