



Minute of Findhorn Nairn & Lossie Rivers Trust Board Meeting

Venue: Edinkillie Hall, Dunphail

Date: 26th August 2025 5:30pm

Attending: Mark Laing (ML), Alasdair Laing (AL), Roy Dennis (RD).

In Attendance: Elle Adams (Director)(EA), Clare Walker (Administrator)(CW)

		ACTION
1	Welcome and Apologies ML opened the meeting and expressed his disappointment with the turnout of Trustees, although acknowledged that it was a difficult time of year. Apologies were received from Alex Leven, Fiona Strachan, Alec Rose, Charlie Black, Jamie Whittle, Campbell Ross, Andrew Wallace and Crinan Dunbar.	
2	Minutes of Meeting of 17th March 2025 CW noticed that a minor word substitution was required at Item 7, paragraph 4. The draft minutes were approved subject to this amendment. CW to publish them on the website.	CW
4	Matters Arising None	
5	Director's Report EA provided a progress report which was circulated to the Board prior to the meeting which included the following updates: General Operational Updates <ul style="list-style-type: none">- The Just Transition Fund grant came to an end in March; we were able to mostly maximise the remaining grant available and successfully submitted our final reporting requirements mid-April.- There have been several staffing changes, Helen Nasrat's contract came to an end in March; Ollie Smaje (OS) took up post as Ecologist in February and has settled in well; Leah Reinfranck (LR), Bioregional Finance Officer, started in June and recruitment is currently ongoing for a Catchment Restoration Assistant.- FNLRT has officially become a member of the UK Rivers Trust network, whilst still maintaining its membership to Fisheries Management Scotland. The Rivers Trust team have provided a range of valuable resources already.- The Findhorn Watershed Initiative (FWI) has been included on a shortlist of projects highlighted for their contribution to the Scottish Government Biodiversity Strategy.- EA has implemented a number of new systems to help support staff including time tracking, staff appraisals, team meetings and team outings.- See confidential minute.- Office renovations are nearly complete.- The electric Skoda has been sold, a lack of off-road capability meant that it was not proving to be a suitable fleet vehicle. Update on Project Activities <i>Habitat Restoration and Climate Mitigation</i>	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Riparian and ancient woodland schemes on Balnespick and Kyllachy Burn are complete, with further schemes on the Mazeran Burn due for installation in Autumn. Funding has been agreed with Chivas Brothers Ltd (CBL) for a scheme on the Divie. - Scoping on the Moy Burn was carried out in 2024 thanks to funding from CBL. The plan is to pick up with Estate to explore feasibility of delivery. It would be a significant and highly visible re-meandering and river restoration scheme. - We still are eager to explore expansion and scale up of peatland restoration opportunities with the landowner at Coignafearn and will continue to promote the hydrological, biodiversity and carbon sequestration benefits of large-scale peatland restoration in the headwaters. - The next whole Deer Forum meeting is due in late September, hosted at Altyre Clubroom. Several other CPD and community engagement events are also planned. - There hasn't been any capacity so far this year to re-engage with the Findhorn Bay coastal habitat development work. Next steps would be investigating water quality issues further and establishing regular monitoring. - We were successful in securing a £105k grant from NatureScot's Nature Restoration Fund for scoping work in the Lower Findhorn catchment, we were then offered an uplift by NatureScot for a further £110k. <p><i>Invasive Non-Native Species Management</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Elise Cox has continued her work with the SISI project this season, making good progress despite not having the assistance of a Seasonal Project Officer this year. Discussions are progressing with offshore windfarms to fund the SISI programme as a planning compliance/bird strike offset measure over the next 30+ years. <p><i>Freshwater and Catchment Science</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Over the last months responses have been developed and submitted on behalf of FDSFB for Clune, Balnespick, Lynemore, Kellas Drum and Highland wind farms. In the May FDSFB meeting FNLRT agreed with Board members that a critical mass of development in the Findhorn catchment has been reached and that we should object based on the precautionary principle going forward. - The A9 dualling is underway and we have a contract with Balfour Beatty (BB) to deliver fish rescues for the various waterway crossings. We are concerned about BB's lack of planning and communication regarding mitigation measures for impact on the fish and freshwater environment as part of the Dalmagarry burn realignment in particular, and have been pressing the BB Environmental team to develop a plan. The work involves diverting a large section of significant spawning burn just before the spawning season and the fish rescue will be a serious undertaking requiring multiple teams and, weather dependent, the risk of adult fish entering the section. - It has come to our attention that a number of chicken and egg production units have been consented on the lower Nairn, very close to the river. The spreading of manure and associated run off from such units has been the cause of huge environmental damage to the rivers Wye, Severn and Kennet down south, and we are concerned about similar issues developing on the Nairn. EA is in touch with the NDSFB and plans to pick up these concerns with Highland Council planning department and SEPA to encourage consideration of cumulative impacts and tightening of waste management plans. Some baseline monitoring, including upstream of the proposed sites, would help to evidence any freshwater impacts. - The Findhorn Spring salmon run was hit hard with Saprolegnia again this year. FNLRT have been in close liaison with the FDSFB about the issues and the river closure recommendation. The Aberdeen University PhD study is ongoing, so hopefully we will learn more soon. 	EA
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RESEARCH

RESTORE

EDUCATE

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - With the uptick in development related workload associated with the wind farms and A9, the last months have seen a significant amount of time across the team spent working on DSFB related duties. These feel like important issues to ensure we put effort into responding to, but it does feel like a significant addition on top of existing workloads. - Citizen science invertebrate monitoring continues, with OS picking up this remit. <p><i>Attracting & blending regenerative finance</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Watershed Nature Finance Strategy is in its final draft; the aim of the strategy is to outline the ethos and values which will underpin FNLRT's approach to nature finance. LR's role will be to support EA to operationalise this strategy. ML, AW and AL have volunteered to read and review the final draft. - Liaison with SSEN Transmission has been ongoing, with the aim of entering into a partnership agreement to develop restoration schemes aligned with SSEN's biodiversity offset requirements. The agreement has not yet been finalised and any final decision about signing the partnership agreement will be brought to the FNLRT Steering Group for sign off. In the interim it was agreed to enter a one year partnership to provide capacity and remuneration to continue negotiations. <p><i>Storytelling, advocacy & policy influencing</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - FNLRT and our work on the FWI are much less visible online than they could be and the issue is getting more urgent, both from a community awareness perspective, but also to attract attention from potential funders. It was decided at the recent FWI Steering Group meeting that EA could develop a role description that feels fitting and advertise. <p>Upcoming</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - EA will be organising a strategy workshop for Trustees to include a visit to one of our completed schemes and a professionally facilitated session on governance and Board skills. This will take place in October with details to be confirmed. - The DSFB service agreement review will be due at the beginning of 2026. EA and ML will carry out an initial review. - The end of FNLRT's Management Plan 2021-2026 is approaching. ML suggested it would be realistic to aim to have a new plan drafted by the end of the financial year in 2027 due to capacity for such an undertaking at present. - There is a big commercial contract on the horizon with RSKBiocensus, who are a framework contractor for the Beaulieu to Peterhead overhead transmission line. They are looking for local Trusts to undertake freshwater habitat and species surveys on all waterway's crossings near to the power line route. 	<p>ML/AW/AL</p> <p>EA</p> <p>EA</p> <p>EA/ML</p>
5	<p>Financial Update</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Budget and Cashflow Update – CW circulated financial reports prior to the Board meeting. The budget has been updated with additional confirmed contract income. Expenditure against budget is currently as expected. CW noted that the auditors have suggested this year's fee would increase significantly. It was agreed that, as is best practice, we would tender for accountancy and audit services next financial year. CW will draft a tender for approval at the Board meeting in November. b) Funding and Fundraising – a summary of secured funding along with pending applications and upcoming opportunities was circulated to the Board. c) Draft Accounts for 2024-2025 inc. Trustee's Report – CW provided some explanatory notes to accompany the draft accounts; these mostly relate to the three years of CBL 	<p>CW</p>

	<p>management fee which was accounted for in full in 2023-2024 and consequently affects subsequent accounting periods.</p> <p>CW flagged that, when considering future reserves, the Board may need to think about financing of a replacement vehicle as the current one is showing signs of wear and tear.</p> <p>The Board approved the draft Trustees Report. The draft accounts, including Trustees Report, will now be passed to the audit team.</p>	
6	<p>Policy and Procedure Review</p> <p>CW circulated the following policies for ratification by the Board:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Trustee Declaration and Consent Form</i> – due to changes in legislation, the list of exclusions relating to whether someone can be a charity Trustee has increased. The new form incorporates these changes. The Board approved the new form, and CW will circulate to all Trustees for completion. - <i>Recruiting with Convictions Policy</i> – The Board approved. - <i>AI Usage Policy</i> – The Board approved. - <i>Fair Work First Policy</i> – ML felt that the commitments delivering the fair work first framework outlined in the Action Plan were not realistic given the size and capacity of FNLRT and asked that these be scaled back. CW will redraft for the next Board meeting. 	<p>CW</p> <p>CW</p>
7.	<p>Governance Review Proposal</p> <p>EA delivered a proposal to improve some of FNLRT's governance systems. These included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Making changes to FNLRT's Articles of Association to remove the stipulation that a proportion of the Board be made up of representatives of local DSFBs and angling associations. It was agreed that this no longer felt proportionate and appropriate given the movement of the Trust to have a more holistic approach to catchment restoration and follows on from the decision in 2018 to change the Company name from 'Fisheries Trust' to 'Rivers Trust'. Removal of this proportional representation will also enable the Trust to recruit Trustees based on their skills and experience. The Board agreed to remove this from the Articles of Association. - The Memorandum of Association does not currently include the power of the Company to setup a trading subsidiary. The Board agreed to add an additional power to change this. - It was decided that other proposed changes be postponed, enabling a professional review of the Memorandum and Articles of Association to be carried out, including revision of the charity objects and membership of the Board. <p>CW will work with EA and JW to draft a written resolution proposing these changes to be circulated to the Board for approval.</p>	<p>CW/EA/ JW</p>
8.	<p>Trading Subsidiary Proposal</p> <p>EA submitted a proposal to the Board to outline the process involved in setting up a trading subsidiary and highlighting the volume of trading income predicted for the coming year which may put FNLRT outside of the small trading tax exemption. It is important that the process is started in plenty of time to prevent FNLRT incurring a tax liability.</p> <p>JW has suggested a local company who specialise in this area and would be able to assist in the initial set up of a new company. EA will get in touch with them for a consultation.</p>	<p>EA</p>
9.	AOCB	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - RD asked whether FNLRT would be able to act as a fiscal host to the Findhorn Bay Local Nature Reserve (FBLNR) Committee who have difficulty sourcing funds due to not being an incorporated association. The committee would like to make improvements to the saltmarsh habitat in Findhorn, including installations and bird hides and creating lagoon areas. The Board agreed that they would consider a formal proposal from the committee but that capacity for this is not available at the moment, although it could compliment current ambitions to develop coastal restoration projects. <p>ML expressed his admiration and thanks for all the work the FNLRT staff have managed to achieve to date.</p>	
10.	Dates of 2025 Meetings Board Meeting and AGM 24th November 2025 at 5:30pm, The Long Room, Logie Steading	

ML closed the meeting at 6:35pm.