



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 Board Meeting

Held on Monday 13th November 2023 at 10.30am
 In The Long Room at Logie Steading.

Present:

Anthony Laing -AnL (Chairman)
 Alasdair Laing - AL
 Colin Cawdor - CC
 Campbell Ross – CR

Colin Glynn-Percy - CGP
 Michael Barron – MB

In attendance:

Alister Taylor (AT) (Bailiff)
 Sean Mclean (SM) (Head Bailiff)
 Robert Laughton (RL) – Director, FNLRT

Clare Walker (CW) (Administrator)
 Elle Adams (EA) (Living Alive)

A	Item	Action
1.	<p>Apologies: Mark Laing, Alex Leven, Andrew Howard, Murray Wilson, David Paton</p> <p>AnL opened the meeting and thanked everyone for attending.</p>	
2.	<p>Bailiff Pay Review: AnL asked SM and AT to step out of the meeting for this item.</p> <p>It was agreed to review the 2024-25 budget and assessment levy alongside consideration of the bailiff pay review. The draft budget includes a proposed rise in the assessment levy to £0.55 to the pound. Discussions amongst the Board concluded that costs continue to rise but it is not sustainable to increase the levy beyond what is affordable for proprietors. It was acknowledged that the budget needs to be carefully scrutinised to identify where cost saving could be made and thought needs to be given to alternative revenue streams that the Board may be able to take advantage of to supplement the assessment levy. These include a proposal to add a 40% surcharge onto the hourly rate currently charged to the FNLRT for time spent on Trust projects by Findhorn Bailiffs. It was agreed to defer a decision on Bailiff Pay review, budget and levy until a dedicated finance meeting could be arranged to discuss it in more depth. It was agreed that, due to the close working relationship and service level agreement in place with the FNLRT, that this meeting should include representatives from both Boards. AnL, MB and CC expressed an interest in taking part in the finance meeting and AnL will ask Andrew Howard to attend and will liaise with the FNLRT to schedule a meeting.</p>	AnL
3.	<p>Minutes of Meeting held on 14th August 2023</p> <p>The minutes were approved. CW to publish minutes to the FNLRT website.</p>	CW
4.	<p>Matters Arising not Covered Below</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> AnL had asked Rob Hoskin whether he would like to join the FDSFB, he declined but suggested that Katherine Brodie may like to join. The Board approved the appointment of Katherine Brodie to the Board. MB confirmed that the Forres Angling Association contacted the Assessors Office in order to appeal the outcome of last year’s valuation role which saw the rateable value of the FAA fishing increase significantly. Unfortunately, due to the data which is used by the 	CW

	Assessor to calculate the rateable value, there was no recourse for appeal.	
5.	<p>Budget and Finance</p> <p>a. <i>Budget/Cashflow Update</i> – This was covered in item 2.</p> <p>b. <i>Budget for 2023-24 – set levy</i> – This was covered in item 2.</p> <p>c. <i>Investment Portfolio</i> – The value of investments is slightly down, this is consistent with performance across the sector.</p> <p>d. <i>Review of SLA between FDSFB and FNLRT</i> – It was proposed in item 1 to include this in the Finance meeting to be arranged.</p>	
6.	<p>River Matters</p> <p>a. <i>Conservation Code 2024</i> – It was agreed at the Board meeting on 14/08/2023 that an introductory sentence be added to the Conservation Code to state that the FDSFB highly encourage 100% catch and release. It was felt that the draft wording would have a detrimental effect on the local Angling Clubs membership and some suggested edits were noted. The Board Agreed to approve the Conservation Code subject to the introductory paragraph being changed to; ‘In view of the current scarcity of Atlantic Salmon in our Scottish rivers, the Board would encourage anglers to release as many fish as possible. The conservation code below is an absolute minimum that should be achieved.’ AnL will action the amendments. CW will publish the 2024 Conservation Code on the website.</p> <p>b. <i>Biosecurity</i> – Pieter van West of Aberdeen University has been commissioned to undertake a PhD research study into Saprolegnia infections in Scottish rivers. RL highlighted the importance of drying or disinfecting angling gear to prevent the spread of pathogens. It was acknowledged that dedicated disinfecting stations along the river were impractical but that there is a collective responsibility to raise awareness about the importance of cleaning gear thoroughly. CW will re-issue current biosecurity advice and guidelines across relevant platforms.</p> <p>c. <i>Health and Safety</i> – There have been no Health and Safety incidents to report. CR enquired whether the Health and Safety Policy has been reviewed and RL confirmed that it was reviewed by an external expert three years ago and was regularly reviewed internally.</p> <p>d. <i>Hatchery</i> – A document produced by the Tweed Foundation was circulated prior to the Board meeting. It was agreed that this was a very informative document and MB confirmed plans to circulate it to Association members. CR has also been conducting research into the viability of hatcheries and a report of his findings is almost complete. CR gave permission for his report to be circulated to the wider Board once it is complete, but the research indicates that there is not enough evidence to support the opening of a hatchery.</p>	<p>AnL/CW</p> <p>CW</p>
7.	<p>Head Bailiff Report</p> <p>Catch data for the 2023 season shows a total of 819 salmon and grilse caught, down on 873 the previous year.</p> <p>Several incidents along the river were recorded this year, including a recent incident at Moy whereby a police warning was issued to a repeat offender.</p>	
8.	<p>FNLRT Director’s Report</p> <p><i>Temperature Monitoring</i> – RL is in discussions with Metasphere, also used by the Tweed, for developing a system for continuous real time temperature monitoring along the river, a quote is expected in January. A few of the</p>	

<p>current temperature loggers have been lost in spates and these will be replaced.</p> <p><i>Tomatin Distillery</i> – Despite improvements to their cooling system, the water being discharged into the burn is still far too high. Electrofishing surveys in the burn produced just a handful of fish compared to a nearby burn which was far more highly populated. There is a meeting with the distillery scheduled for January.</p> <p><i>Juvenile Surveys</i> – There were fifteen survey sites on the Findhorn as part of NEPs. There was a good spread of juveniles including some highlights:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Salmon present in the very uppermost reaches of the Cro Clach at Coignafearn, - The tiny Allt Cosach burn, near Tomatin, produced more than 200 fish in 100m². - An excellent resident trout population was present in the Dunearn Burn above the waterfalls. <p>A survey of the upper Findhorn and its tributaries was also planned for September/October and although seven sites were completed the persistent rain and high-water levels led to the survey being cancelled. The survey was funded through the LNER fund and the remaining funds will be used to test an upper smolt trap site in 2024.</p> <p>The data from last year’s survey of the Findhorn mainstem is still being analysed. RL gave thanks to Alister and Sean for their help with the surveys, along with FNLRT’s intern, Sarah, and other volunteers.</p> <p><i>Smolt Tagging Project</i> – There has been a lack of information back from the Atlantic Salmon Trust regarding the data gathered during the smolt tagging project. RL and AL met with Melanie Smith who is directing AST’s research programme. The meeting was encouraging and Melanie indicated that there is new staff on the project, and it is hoped that the data will be published in the New Year and a meeting to review the data arranged with representatives of the participating Moray rivers.</p> <p><i>Smolt Trap</i> – A potential deployment site upstream from Tomatin is being scouted to ensure it remains suitable during different flows. If it does, a test will be done in the Spring of 2024.</p> <p><i>Predators</i> – A bird license was awarded for 2 goosanders, 9 mergansers, 1 cormorant. Bird counts have been organised and this information is fed back to NatureScot. RL offered to train any Association members who were keen to take part in bird counts. RL confirmed that Herons were being counted, however, as a native species, it is unlikely that any license to control would be awarded at this time. RL has a meeting scheduled with Roger Knight and Alan Wells to discuss seal licensing.</p> <p><i>S/Sl</i> – Elise Cox remains the Project Officer for S/Sl, her focus during the project’s second phase is developing landowner agreements to secure the continuation of INNS control after the project comes to an end. Good progress continues to be made on Giant Hogweed and Japanese Knotweed control. The addition of a pressurised spray tank hired from Kellas enabled the team to cover more ground, quickly.</p> <p><i>FWI</i> – There is a question mark over the format of the current funding from Just Transition Fund. A change request was submitted in June to request that the grant award be amended to allow funding to be carried forward into the next financial year, and FNLRT are still waiting for a decision, the next step for the project is to lobby local ministers to leverage a response. Other funding sources for the next financial year are also being explored to run alongside funding already gained towards the FWI.</p>	<p>RL</p>
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	EA gave a project update for the FWI highlighting the work done so far, including the completion of baselines surveys, the development of landowner Memorandum of Understanding (MOU's) and the launch of a large community engagement program with local partner organisations.	
9.	<p>Catchment Developments</p> <p><i>Clashgour Windfarm</i> – RL has developed a monitoring plan in collaboration with the Hutton Institute and it is expected that this will begin in January.</p> <p><i>Dava Station Bridge</i> – emergency repairs to the bridge are due to start this week. The bailiffs will observe the works and report on progress.</p>	SM/AT
10.	<p>AOCB</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - SM informed that Board that he has been in discussions with the producers of the BBC television programme, Landward, about an episode featuring the Findhorn catchment. 	
11.	<p>Dates of 2024 Meetings</p> <p>May 20th 2024 – FDSFB Board Meeting</p> <p>August 19th 2024 – FDSFB Board Meeting and AGM</p> <p>November 18th – FDSFB Board Meeting</p>	