



River Findhorn District Salmon Fishery Board

Clerk: Anthony Laing Administrator: Clare Walker

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

07501 767801 admin@fnlrt.org.uk www.fnlrt.org.uk/river-findhorn

Minute of the Annual General Meeting (Annual Public Meeting)

Held on Monday 14th August 2023 at 11am at Coulmony House

Present:

Anthony Laing -AnL (Chairman)

Alasdair Laing - AL

Mark Laing – ML

Alex Leven – AIL

Edward Usborne

Colin Glynn-Percy - CGP

Andrew Howard – AH

Michael Barron – MB

Philip Arkell – PA

Robert Hoskin

Catherine Brodie

Duncan Kerr

In attendance:

Alister Taylor (AT) (Bailiff)

Sean Mclean (SM) (Head Bailiff)

Robert Loughton (RL) – Director, FNLRT

Clare Walker (CW) (Administrator)

Elle Adams (EA) (Living Alive)

Guy Harris (GH) (FWI Project Officer)

Peiter van West (PvW) (Guest Speaker)

A	Item	Action
1.	<p>Apologies: Lord Cawdor, Campbell Ross, Edward Crookes, Dowager Countess Cawdor, Andrew Fleming</p> <p>AnL welcomed Peiter van West to the meeting and thanked him for attending.</p>	
2.	<p>Minutes of AGM held on 8th August 2022</p> <p>Minutes were approved.</p>	
3.	<p>Matters Arising</p> <p>There were no matters arising not covered in other items.</p>	
4.	<p>2022 Summary and Annual Report</p> <p>There were 853 salmon and grilse caught last year. This is the first time these numbers have dipped below one thousand since 1981. The Board expressed its concern over this decline and is hopeful that the outcomes of the FNLRT Findhorn Watershed Initiative will be taking measures to try to counteract this decline.</p> <p>The 2022 season was characterised by low water throughout the summer and a significant Saprolegnia outbreak in the Spring with an estimated loss of 300-400 spring salmon. The 2023 season saw another outbreak with significant losses.</p> <p>The Board have pledged £10k over three years from the reserve fund, alongside many other DSFBS to fund vital research into apparent new strains of Saprolegnia.</p> <p>Following a request from some proprietors that the FDSFB consider an extension to the season, AnL and RL met with Scottish Government representatives who confirmed that they will be undertaking a review of all closed seasons this year, so it is logical to wait until this review is published before deciding on next steps.</p> <p>AnL gave his thanks to the Findhorn Bailiffs for their work to protect the river and expressed his disappointment at the recent result of a poaching incident from last season being brought to the Procurator Fiscal which only resulted in a warning, this was deemed to be too lenient given the evidence provided. A</p>	

	letter to this effect was sent to the Procurator Fiscal but, as yet, there has not been a response. SM highlighted this as an issue affecting other DSFBs in Scotland; at a recent Riverwatch meeting hosted by FNLRT, Bailiffs attending from other rivers have had similar experiences.	
5.	Consideration of Accounts for Financial Year to 31st January 2023 The draft accounts were circulated prior to the meeting and published on the website. The accounts were approved.	
6.	<p>FNLRT Directors Report</p> <p>2023 Season – Poor spring catches punctuated by outbreaks of disease amongst salmon, representing a significant egg loss. Samples were collected and sent away for testing.</p> <p>Juvenile Surveys – Juvenile surveys are underway. Numbers at Tomatin were much higher than anticipated. The NEP surveys so far show good numbers of salmon and trout.</p> <p>FWI – A temperature monitoring network has been established in the upper catchment as part of the Findhorn Watershed Initiative. RL is looking into using real-time monitors which will help anglers and estates to properly assess conditions on the river.</p> <p>Predator Control – RL thanked everyone for contributing to reports of Sawbills. A control licence application for this coming winter has been applied for and we await a decision.</p> <p>RL confirmed that no seal licences had been approved again this year, this includes the ability to scare. This has been the situation for the past few years, and it is expected that this trend will continue going forward. RL applied, and was turned down last year, but did not apply this year as the application process is lengthy and it was likely to result in a refusal, however, other local rivers did apply, and they have been refused. DK asked whether it was worth applying anyway, if all of the DSFBs continued to apply each year then it could add weight to the argument that some form of control is needed. RL can apply again if the Board wish him to do so.</p> <p>The Findhorn Angling Association are arranging drone footage of Findhorn Bay to facilitate seal counts in the area.</p> <p>Rivers works – work on the Mosset Burn bridge for access to Forres waste water treatment works is still to be completed.</p> <p>INNS – The SISI project has been granted funding for a further three years. Elise Cox remains in post as Project Officer. This season Giant Hogweed control on the Findhorn was expanded below the A96 bridge. Network Rail contracted Giant Hogweed control along the railway after lobbying from the Trust and Boards and the initial results have been excellent.</p> <p>AH asked whether there was any data available on historic cycles of salmon numbers which might highlight factors which may contribute to the rise and fall in numbers. AL commented that the removal of nets in 1985 caused the grilse catch to shoot up and it is considered that marine survival rates were also higher. RL will look to see what data is available.</p> <p>Presentation by Peiter van West – Peiter van West, from the University of Aberdeen, gave an informative presentation on the Saprolegnia pathogen, outlining the lifecycle, different strains, and favoured conditions and how this directly impacts salmon and the implications of the recent outbreaks of disease.</p>	<p>RL</p> <p>RL</p> <p>RL</p>
7.	Findhorn Watershed Initiative Presentation and Project Update	

	<p>EA and GH gave a short presentation on the FWI and the progress that has been made towards the project so far. The main discussion points following the presentation were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - There is a much longer lead time to get trees planted in the ground than originally anticipated due to the need for Environmental Impact Assessments and timescales associated with Forestry Grant Scheme (FGS) applications. - The FGS is keen to take a collaborative approach to the outcomes of the FWI as this enables the best use of public funding while also facilitating them to meet their own project outcomes. This allows the FWI to leverage all currently available funds. - The area of natural capital is a rapidly evolving field which the FWI has found itself at the forefront of and the project is acutely aware of the need to navigate this issue with integrity. 	
8.	<p>Proposals for 2023/24 This was covered in item 4.</p>	
9.	<p>AOCB Hatchery – The angling associations operating on the river Findhorn receive regular feedback from anglers on how the fish population could benefit from the operation of a hatchery. The general feeling is that the investment by the FDSFB would be worth it. RL explained that the reasons against operating a hatchery on the Findhorn include current research data which suggests that marine survival for wild fish stands at between 2 and 5%, however, for fish taken from the wild and harvested in the hatchery environment, the marine survival rate drops to 1 to 2%. The removal of fit and healthy hen fish to stock a hatchery is likely to ultimately lead to a decrease in the number of salmon returning to the river due to the higher mortality rates suffered by hatchery reared fish. RL acknowledged that, in certain circumstances a hatchery is a useful tool in efforts to increase salmon stocks, such as on the river Conan where access to the spawning grounds is blocked by hydro dams. The angling associations feel that it would be useful for the FDSFB to draft a statement which explains these reasons so that this information can be more easily disseminated to local anglers and other concerned stakeholders. AnL suggested that it would be useful to review any data on this at the next Board meeting so that the Board were fully informed before releasing anything.</p>	RL
	<p>AnL thanked everyone for their attendance and closed the meeting at 13:10.</p>	