

Minutes of the Argyll District Salmon Fishery Board AGM

At 11am on Tuesday 25th April 2017, at the Loch Fyne Hotel, Inveraray

Attendees

Roger Brook (ADSFb Chair/Awe district rep) – RB
Craig MacIntyre (Clerk/AFT Manager) – CM
Alan Kettle-White (AFT Biologist) – AKW
Helen MacIntyre (ADSFb/AFT Admin)
Andrew Barker (AFT Chair/Ruel district rep) – AB
Hugh Whittle (Nell district rep) – HW
Tuggy Delap (Fyne district rep/AFT director)
David Stewart (Cieran district rep) – DS
Bill Duff (Salmon angling rep/DDAC) – BD
Jane Wright (AFT director) – JW
Bob Younger (AFT director) – BY
Keith Miller (AFT director) – KM
Hugh Nicol (fishery proprietor)
Tom Turnbull (fishery proprietor)
David Sumsion (fishery proprietor)
Jonathan Brown (fishery proprietor)
Rebecca Smith (Forestry Commission Scotland)

Members of Public

Aoife Brennan (Scottish Sea Farms)
Kate McIntyre (Scottish Sea Farms)
Penny Hawdon (Scottish Salmon Company) - PH
Campbell Thomson - CT

Apologies

Caroline Fleming (Arran district rep)
Stephen Gibbs (Arran district rep)
Richard McKenzie (LAIA)
Elaine Jamieson (FCS)
Steven Beale (fishery proprietor)
Duncan Byatt (fishery proprietor)
Duncan Rogers (fishery proprietor)
Ian Tegner (fishery proprietor)
Vladimir Micko (fishery proprietor)

1. Introduction and apologies

Roger Brook thanked everyone for coming. He had expected this to be the last ever ADSFB meeting but now that Wild Fisheries Reform is not happening we will be carrying on as a DSFB. Craig and Helen MacIntyre are also moving to the East Coast, so there will be plenty of unanswered questions for the future.

2. Minutes of the Meeting of October 2016

Proposed by DS, seconded by JW, and accepted as accurate.

3. Matters Arising – none

4. Declaration of Members' Interests – David Sumsion declared an interest with a lease to Scottish Salmon Company.

5. Finance & Clerk's Annual Report

Craig MacIntyre gave a report on the activities of the Board – see 2016 Annual Report online at <http://argyll.dsfb.org.uk/publications/>. The accounts were discussed (also available online). Income was £66,500 from levies, £22,000 from SSE. Part of the levy was distributed to RIAs and part kept by the Board in a river improvement fund for those areas without RIAs. There was a net surplus of £9,200, with approx £63,000 in the Board account. Some of this is ringfenced for work in specific areas: £21,000 for Awe district, £8,000 for areas outside Awe. TT proposed and AB seconded that the accounts be approved.

6. 2017 Salmon Fishing Rights Revaluation and Levy

All fishing rights have been revalued. The total rateable value has reduced from £33,500 to £29,500. We have a levy rate in the £ designed to recover the costs of running the Board. For Ruel and Awe we collect a further supplement to pay for bailiffs. We need a new Clerk, but don't know how much this would cost. RB proposes to keep the basic rate at £1 in the £, then reassess next year and see how things are. All agreed. To cover the bailiff we will need to raise the Awe/Ruel levy to £3.10 in £. However, since most rateable values have fallen, there will only be three fisheries whose levies will rise. A £3.10 rate for Awe & Ruel district was proposed and all agreed. Arran fishings are in Ayrshire, and their rateable values are calculated much higher. What we did

last valuation is calculate them using the Argyll calculation formula. It was agreed to continue doing this.

7. Wild Fisheries Reform and Future of the Argyll DSFB

As you all know, after spending weeks and years on this issue, the Government has abandoned the whole thing because they could not bear to find £3 million. We are in a worse position than we were, because we have not been preparing for the future in terms of organisation or finance. The only way Scottish Government could have generated income would be through a rod licence, but they thought they would lose some votes. The future of Argyll is that we carry on as before. RB is keen to work closer with AFT, but will have to continue to have separate meetings from a legal standpoint. The big opportunity in Wild Fisheries Reform was to combine with the wild trout fishery in Loch Awe. RB would like to see if we could still co-operate with them. The immediate issue is to find a Clerk for the Board. TT asked how much time the Clerking takes up. CM estimated it was around one day a week. If you strip it down, perhaps half a day a week. Alan is capable of responding to the consultations, but this would take away from the biology work. The Board is also actively looking for someone to replace Helen doing admin. AB explained that Maja Pepper may be able to take on some of the Clerking once she is back, but she may not be back until 1st Oct (she is currently on maternity leave). DS asked about Eddie Edmonstone at Loch Lomond, and RB said Eddie has been unseated from Loch Lomond Anglers Association, as was their Chair. We do not intend to reopen negotiations with Loch Lomond. RB and CM are meeting with Simon Dryden, Recreational Fisheries civil servant, and he has a hope that the Boards will still combine into fewer boards. They would need to change the legislation to do this. We will explain all the difficulties that the Government has created for us. There are still some aspects from Wild Fisheries Reform that they are taking forward, but nothing substantial, such as training and better use of science, but nothing that will make a huge difference to how things run in Argyll. We would like to merge with Eachaig DSFB, but legislation makes it a nightmare and it would cost a fortune.

8. Small Rivers/Fisheries Issue

Small burns that nobody fishes have a £50 minimum rateable value so we have to levy them. The law allows us to tell the assessor to take them off the role. If they are not fished, will not be fished, and therefore nothing is caught, we propose to offer that people to sign a declaration that they will not exercise their fishing rights and we will not charge them a levy. With every revaluation we would send out another declaration to be signed. In addition, if the river or catchment is a fishery then they cannot be taken off the role. 20 rivers would be removed, so £1000 lower income. We would still have a duty to respond to consultations even if the fisheries do not pay levies. All agreed with the proposal.

9. Conservation of Salmon Regulations (Scotland) Act 2016

All rivers have been categorised by Marine Scotland according to the health of their salmon populations. Out of 41 rivers in Argyll, only 5 rivers are Cat 2, the rest are Cat 3. The science behind this is extremely poor. It uses averages from catch statistics and fish counters from around the country. Marine Scotland is consulting with Fishery Trusts to try to improve the science. HW asked if they have admitted they are wrong. CM said they thought they were in the same ballpark even though they were a factor of 10 out! AKW suggested the Board writes to the Govt regarding the categorisations in Argyll.

The Government is bringing in a requirement for fishery management plans which will be compulsory for every river in Scotland, and looks like they will want the Boards/Trusts to write them. This will not mean much work for proprietors. The Government are doing it to show NASCO they are managing salmon properly. TT said maybe we should just say no to them. RB said the Government do not fund us so we could make a stand. Plans have to be approved by the Government, and if plans say fish farms are having a big impact on salmon populations and the plans are accepted then are they admitting that fish farms are having an impact? RB said the Board will need to pay the Trust to do this.

10. Aquaculture Update and Discussion

Current regulation for fish farms includes SEPA monitoring impacts on seabed and on the water column. They don't have a specific remit for wild fish. The Fish Health Inspectorate regulate the health of fish on farms, but

do not have a remit for the health of wild fish. However, they do have a remit for sea lice in cages. We do not think that this gives adequate protection for wild fish. Discussions between wild fish and fish farmers did not produce any results, so wild fish walked away from these management pilots. No discussions are currently going on. We are looking to reinvigorate new discussions and for Government to change regulations, but Government says go to the industry to change behaviour. This is a bit unfair on the industry as they would not voluntarily do something to protect wild fish if it costs them money. The local planning authority look at wild fish interests when considering planning applications. Wild fish are saying one thing, industry saying another, and Marine Scotland say it might or might not have an impact. Currently, all fish farm companies in Argyll are wanting to expand, mainly expansion of existing sites and a few new sites. There is one new application at Dounie (Kames Fish Farm), south of Loch Crinan and Loch Craignish. If the farm has a problem with sea lice the lice will get washed into the Add and Barbreck catchments. Applications for increases in biomass go through SEPA, who don't consider wild fish impacts. The Government and Crown Estate looked at consenting last year, and have handed over to the industry to consider but haven't asked the wild fish sector. We don't think we will ever come to a consensus with industry unless the regulations are changed.

11. Argyll Fisheries Trust presentation

AKW gave this presentation, which is available at <http://argyll.dsfb.org.uk/publications/>. The Awe counter last year showed a higher number of returning multi sea winter fish, but very few one sea winter grilse. Historical River Tweed data shows cyclical shifts between salmon and grilse domination. It's possible that we are moving into a phase where we have more salmon and fewer grilse. This is not such a problem for the larger rivers which have both, but worse for those that usually only have grilse. AFT snorkel counts in the River Fyne and River Etive last year showed that there were very few grilse, but also few multi sea winter fish. Multi sea winter fish carry more eggs, so these fish are more important in repopulating rivers. When changeovers happen between salmon and grilse, there is a pinchpoint where you get few fish of both ages.

Marine Scotland Science and AFT have a project looking at salmon smolt sea survival. Over 2500 pit tags were inserted last year in River Orchy smolts. A tag reader on the fish pass on the Awe barrage will record all tagged fish coming back up the Awe. 40 Acoustic tags were also attached to Orchy smolts and this will give us a good idea of the movement of these fish. Data has already showed that the majority of fish head south west around Mull but some head up the Sound of Mull. The Lochy smolts tagged showed that most of them head through Sound of Mull and only a few head south west around Mull.

Sea trout netting to monitor sea lice is being done at sites in Carradale, Loch Fyne, Dunstaffnage and Loch Riddon. The average intensity of lice infection was only at worrying levels in Loch Riddon. The max number of lice levels were highest in Loch Fyne, with up to 80 lice per fish.

Juvenile fish surveys were done in 2016 in the River Awe, several Loch Fyne rivers, River Etive, River Creran and some others. The Orchy showed direct correlation between returning fish the year before and the number of juveniles that year.

Water temperature monitoring is being carried out in relation to forecasts of increases in temperature due to climate change. At higher water temperatures the fish stop feeding, which affects their growth. The highest temperatures and greatest variation in temperatures were found at treeless upland sites. The lowest temperatures were in low altitude sites with trees. This has future implications for land use management and using trees for shading rivers.

CM asked why we have lower fry per square metre than east coast rivers. AKW explained that we have less food in the river, different geology generally, and lower pH. However, Euchar and Laggan have higher fry density as their geology is more similar to the east coast. CM asked whether we should consider fertilisation as we plant trees. AKW said planting trees is always a good idea, not sure about fertilisation.

JW asked about salmon smolt migration and lice data from fish farms. CM reported he met with the fish

farmers for that area (Scottish Sea Farms) and he saw the lice data for all those farms, and in general terms it was not a significant problem for wild migrating salmon smolts.

TD asked about opening the hatchery again. AKW said the hatchery would be an idea if there was a disastrous situation, such as only 12 fish in the river. He would be reluctant just now as if the salmon are going through a transition then natural selection will mean the best suitable fish will survive. If we intervene we could do more harm than good. When we started the hatchery before, it was because there were no juveniles in the river, but there are juveniles now. We will keep a very close eye on the vulnerable rivers. TT asked if weather had an impact on destruction of redds etc. AKW explained we think it is climatic changes out at sea as the reduction in grilse last year was Scotland-wide. He thinks some of the smaller rivers may lose their salmon populations, but once stocks recover locally then they will repopulate the rivers.

12. Any Other Business

JW asked why the Add didn't make a catch return in 2016. CM said we don't know why. RB pointed out that it is compulsory by law. The Government has plans for one central catch return depository.

13. Date of next meeting: 1st November 2017 was proposed.