

Minutes of the Argyll District Salmon Fishery Board Meeting

At 11.30am on Wednesday 27th April 2016, at the Inveraray Inn, Inveraray

Attendees

Roger Brook (ADSF Chair/Awe district rep) - RB
Craig MacIntyre (Clerk/AFT Manager) - CM
Alan Kettle-White (AFT Biologist) - AKW
Helen MacIntyre (ADSF/AFT Admin)
Andrew Barker (AFT Chair/Ruel district rep) - AB
Stephen Gibbs (Arran district rep) - SG
Hugh Whittle (Nell district rep)
Tuggy Delap (Fyne district rep/AFT director)
Robert Campbell-Preston (Awe district rep)
Bill Duff (Salmon angling rep/DDAC)
Richard McKenzie (Salmon angling rep/LAIA)
Kenny Black (AFT director)
David Milburn (AFT director) - DM
Jane Wright (AFT director) - JW
Bob Younger (AFT director)
Roger Hatcher (AFT director) - RH
Hugh Nicol (fishery proprietor)
Steven Beale (fishery proprietor) - SB
Tom Turnbull (fishery proprietor)
Rebecca Smith (Forestry Commission Scotland)

Kate McIntyre (Scottish Sea Farms)
Penny Hawdon (Scottish Salmon Company) - PH
Stuart Simon (Scottish Salmon Company)
Campbell Thomson - CT
Colin Carnie - CC

Apologies

David Stewart (Creran district rep)
Rosie Campbell-Preston (Awe district rep)
Caroline Fleming (Arran district rep)
Jim Frame (SEPA)
Duncan Rogers (fishery proprietor)
David Parker (fishery proprietor)
Calum MacFarlane-Barrow (fishery proprietor)
Ian Tegner (fishery proprietor)
Jennifer Lang (fishery proprietor)
David Sutherland (fishery proprietor)
Jamie McGrigor (fishery proprietor)
Tony Huntington (fishery proprietor)
Jonathan Brown (fishery proprietor)
Michael Handley (fishery proprietor)
Johnny & Pandora Buchanan-Jardine (fishery proprietor)
Russell Buchanan (DDAC)

Members of Public

Aoife Brennan (Scottish Sea Farms)

1. Introduction and apologies

Roger Brook thanked everyone for coming.

2. Minutes of the Meeting of October 2015

Proposed by AB, seconded by DM, and accepted as accurate.

3. Declaration of Members' Interests - None

4. Matters Arising - none

5. Finance & Clerk's Annual Report

Craig MacIntyre gave a report on the activities of the Board – see 2015 Annual Report online at <http://argyll.dsfb.org.uk/publications/>. The accounts were discussed (also available online). Environmental payments from SSE for the Awe barrage are now paid directly to ADSFB rather than ADRIA, but are ring-fenced for the Awe District. Assets are £53,000 but half of this relates to SSE money. ADSFB also now has an £8,000 river habitat improvement work fund. DM proposed and SG seconded that the accounts be approved.

6. Argyll & West Coast Catch Statistics Analysis

RB described how the Awe flow was disrupted last year due to heavy rain early in the season and work on the barrage, resulting in SSE running lots of water through the barrage for several weeks. This prevented fish from finding the lift and delayed the main run of salmon by five weeks. The knock-on effect was higher catches on the Awe below the barrage, where the fish were held up, and lower catches on the Orchy

upstream. Usually around 10% of the run are caught on the Awe and 10% on the Orchy, but last year 12% were caught on the Awe and only 7% on the Orchy.

RB presented a series of graphs showing the difference in West Coast and East (& North) Coast rod catches since 1970. Total catches showed an overall 40% increase in East Coast catches but a significant decline in West Coast catches, with a particularly rapid decline after 1990, then some recovery since 2004 but only to 24% lower than the 1970 catch. From 1990 onwards, both East and West Coast catches follow a similar pattern, implying that impacts out at sea affect all the fish. When splitting the West Coast catches into three regional groups, very different trends emerge. For the North-west (Cape Wrath to Ardnamurchan), there was no divergence from East coast catches until 1990, then a rapid decline from 1990 to 2003, after 2003 catches run parallel to the East but the gap remains at 35%, and by 2014 catches have recovered to 1970 levels. For the Outer Hebrides, catches diverge rapidly from East Coast catches until 1980, and after 1980 run parallel to the East but the gap remains at 70%. For the Mid West (Ardnamurchan to Mull of Kintyre), catches remain around 1970 level until 1989 when they diverge rapidly from East Coast catches until 2000, and then follow pattern of the East after 2002 but never recover, with the gap still at the maximum 80%. The Mid West catches appear worst affected and show limited recovery, which could be due to these salmon having to pass the highest number of farms on their migration routes north.

RB concluded that: a) There is an underlying pattern followed by both coasts showing that both are affected by conditions in the North Atlantic; b) The divergence of the West from the East must be caused by the only major difference between the coasts – aquaculture; c) The effect of aquaculture is greater further south - migrating fish pass more farms; d) There are two periods of rapid divergence, 1970 - 1980 and 1990 – 2000; e) If the West coast catches had followed the East, catches would be 80% higher than today; f) Argyll is in the worst region; g) Catches would be up by 150% if we followed the trend on the East; and h) The decline may have stabilised but there is no sign of a recovery. This analysis has not yet been published.

PH commented that it would be interesting to see catch and release rates alongside these catch statistics. RB believes the increase in catch and release dampens the effects shown on these graphs because fish put back are available to be caught again, so catch statistics do not reflect population size so closely. CT asked if taking catch effort into account would affect the data. RB said there would be a time lag as anglers keep fishing after the fish numbers drop, but it would mirror catch data eventually.

7. Aquaculture Update and Discussion

CM described work that AFT has done monitoring sea lice levels on sea trout for many years. Inland Fisheries Ireland analysed the AFT data and the results show that the closer the fish were to fish farms the more sea lice they had and the smaller the individual fish were. This has implications at a population level as bigger sea trout produce many more eggs. The data also showed a saw tooth effect for some sites, which could be linked to fish farms' two year production cycles, with more lice found on the sea trout in year two. The data are due to be published this year. AKW commented that in areas where fish farms are successfully controlling lice levels then lessons should be shared with sites with worse lice problems. RB agreed, but since the Scottish Salmon Producers Organisation (SSPO) will not admit the link between aquaculture and lice levels then it is very difficult to have discussions about management techniques. JW asked if ADSFB have discussions with fish farm companies. CM said they had two years of unproductive talks as part of the Crown Estate Interactions Management Pilots but decided to walk out of talks last month. There are many activities that impact on wild fish, such as forestry and hydro schemes which are regulated, however the impact of sea lice from aquaculture is not regulated. Marine Scotland Science have now started a 10 year project looking at marine survival rates of salmon. PH asked for CM's thoughts on using sea lice results when considering planning applications rather than using the MIAP modelling software that RAFTS developed. CM replied that all information is taken into account when deciding on the appropriate response to a planning application. AB said we mustn't forget about the impact that escaped farmed fish have on wild populations. RB agreed, saying that some analysis had shown that 25% of our fish had some genes from farmed fish.

8. Wild Fisheries Bill Consultation – DSFB Response

The current consultation ends on Monday, but it contains nothing contentious, it just gives enabling powers to the Government. The new Bill will make it illegal to fish for any fish species without written permission. One question from the consultation is whether all areas in Scotland should be covered by Fishery Management Organisations (FMOs). For Argyll, this affects Mull, Jura and Isla, which are not currently covered by a District Salmon Fishery Board (DSFB). CC pointed out that if they are not covered then there is a weakness in the chain. JW agreed, and that there should be adequate funding for these areas that are costly to manage due to distance and using ferries. Loch Lomond also has no DSFB, but no areas are volunteering to take them into their area. PH said Scottish Salmon Company would support that there be no gaps in coverage.

Another question covers funding suggestions. Options include: a management and development levy (paid by anglers, such as a rod licence); tax on sale of fishing permits; tax on sale of fishing tackle; central Scotland funding. ADSFB suggests a tax on those who impact on wild fish, such as forestry, hydro schemes and aquaculture. CC believes a rod licence would give the Government a good link to anglers. RB pointed out the Government are wary of discussing a rod licence before the election. Coarse fishermen are in favour of it since it would give them more rights. The Salmon levy will continue as it is now.

One question asks whether FMOs should remain as statutory consultees for aquaculture – all agreed yes. Should they become statutory consultees for other planning applications, such as hydro schemes and wind farms? CM believes not, since they would then be obliged to respond to all consultations and they do not have the resources to do this. Currently ADSFB is consulted on these planning applications but is not a statutory consultee, so CM would want this to continue.

With regards to bailiffs, it is likely that more training and development will be required and this may mean that volunteer bailiffs would not be able to continue, so they may become wardens instead. Argyll has one full-time and three part-time paid water bailiffs and eight volunteer warranted water bailiffs.

9. Conservation of Salmon Regulations (Scotland) Act 2016

All wild salmon must now be returned in Argyll, even if bleeding or dead. It is illegal to retain them. However, this does not apply to farmed salmon or wild sea trout. All rivers in Argyll have been classed as Category Grade 3, which means mandatory catch and release. The classification is based on catch returns and estimated area of river, looking at the number of fish needed for spawning. RB points out that the science is flawed but we won't hold our breath to have it updated. SB asked if there is an 'idiot's guide' to identifying farmed salmon that he can give to anglers and put on his website. RB said not yet, and we will try to help with this but ADSFB need to be careful that we don't become liable if the wording we use is not right. ADSFB have asked Scottish Government to provide suitable help for identifying farmed salmon. RH asked who did the burden of proof lie with as to whether a fish was farmed or not. RB believed if it went to court then they would look at the genetics of a fish, but many wild fish have some farmed fish genes anyway.

JW asked where the Argyll Fisheries Trust would be in the new FMO. RB explained there is uncertainty over whether FMOs would be charities, but then bailiffing would be an issue since charities are not allowed to do policing. It may be that the FMO would have an allied charity, with the FMO doing the work and the charity just used for financial purposes. This is more like the way that East Coast Boards and Trusts work just now.

10. Argyll Fisheries Trust presentation

AKW gave this presentation, which is available at <http://argyll.dsfb.org.uk/publications/>

11. Any Other Business - None

12. Date of next meeting: Wed 19th October 2016 was proposed.