

Minutes of the Argyll District Salmon Fishery Board Meeting

At 1pm on Wednesday 19th October 2016, 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
Stephen Gibbs (Arran district rep) - SG
Caroline Fleming (Arran district rep)
Hugh Whittle (Nell district rep/AFT director)
David Stewart (Creran district rep/AFT director)
Tuggy Delap (Fyne district rep/AFT director)
Richard McKenzie (Salmon angling rep/LAIA)
Kenny Black (AFT director)
Jane Wright (AFT director) - JW
Robert Younger (AFT director)

Keith Miller (AFT director)
Stephen Austin (SNH)
Marina Curran-Colthart (A & B Council)
Eddie Edmonstone (Loch Lomond Trust)
John Taylor (Forestry Enterprise Scotland)
Richard Hammond
Duncan Pepper
Jeremy Hall-Smith
Patty Hall-Smith

Apologies

Hugh Nicol (fishery proprietor)
Rosie Campbell-Preston (Awe district rep)
Jimmy Middleton (Netsman rep)
Bill Duff (DDAC/Angling rep)

1. Introduction and apologies

Chairman Roger Brook thanked everyone for coming.

2. Argyll Fisheries Trust Biologist's Report

Alan Kettle-White gave a presentation of the activities of the Trust, which include: understand fisheries & provide advice; pressures of use of land and water resources; raising awareness of pressures and how other sectors can contribute to conservation and management; fishery improvement – habitat restoration, maximising spawning escapement and recruitment of new fish.

River Awe fish counter analysis – The year started very well with a good multi sea winter salmon run in spring, returning at three times the average run for this time of year. This has never happened since records began in 1964. However, we have had virtually no grilse over the summer. We will end up with a total salmon run of around 800 for the year, which is amongst the worst years ever. AKW has looked at local issues to see if there are any reasons for it, and many other rivers across Scotland have also reported reduced grilse runs. Since most rivers don't have counters they go on catch records and they could be catching the spring run salmon through the summer so they may not see such a huge reduction in numbers. KB asked whether we are sure the extra spring salmon are our fish. RB said no, and we would be keen to do some genetic studies on this. The counter is a very valuable resource and it hasn't been studied enough. AKW said climate change could be having an impact on the salmon and grilse. CM explained ICES have found a significant decrease in North Atlantic productivity since the 1960s due to climate change. AKW said salmon (which are cold blooded) can be affected by changes in temperature, such as higher winter temperatures mean they have a higher metabolic rate and use more energy to stay alive. Temperature monitoring is being done by AFT in the Awe, Add and Carradale catchments. Salmon smolt sea survival is being looked at with Marine Scotland Science (MSS). Last spring MSS/AFT caught and tagged 2600 smolts coming down the River Orchy with PIT (Passive Integrated Transponder) tags which carry a unique identification 'barcode', are retained for the life of the fish, and are read by a tag reader in the fish pass on the Awe barrage. We should get a very good idea of the survival of these smolts at sea. Acoustic tags were also put into 40 smolts, which can be picked up by acoustic readers in Loch Etive and the Sound of Mull. No results are available to date.

Conservation limits – MSS have categorised all Scottish rivers on the 'health' of their salmon populations, using catch records, counter data, egg deposition, fecundity, size of catchment, grilse error, sex ratio and river

flows. They were using Scotland-wide counter information, but have now recalculated West Coast categories just using the River Awe counter as it is more representative of West Coast rivers. RB said we think the science is completely wrong as it is overestimating the number of fish by 5 to 10 times the number in some cases. EE said there has been the same over-estimation on Loch Lomond and the Clyde. CM explained that MSS have applied exploitation rates of 1-3% over most rivers instead of 15+%, which we think is more realistic. They should have taken 5 years to get the science right and then implemented it, rather than introducing the conservation limits straight away, which they have apparently done to avoid a fine by the EU. MSS are also not willing to use Fishery Trust data from snorkel surveys and electrofishing. There is a formal biologist liaison group which includes biologists from some of the Trusts, but not all of the Trusts are unhappy because some have come out with results that suit them. Some East Coast rivers were catch and release but have now been graded 1 so anglers want to kill fish again.

AFT work on barriers. A hydro developer has been persuaded to remove a barrier on Galla Breaga (tributary of the River Orchy) rather than be fined. This has opened up about a kilometre of habitat for salmon and sea trout.

Juvenile surveys – The wet summer has meant we haven't done quite as much as we would like. However, we still have covered many rivers. Numbers of fish haven't been too bad, but generally the fry have been much smaller than usual. This may be because of reduced insect life around this year. Parr have been smaller too, so they may not smolt when they should next year.

Contracts – These are work programmes paid for by developers to inform future or current developments. This year included two wind farm contracts, FCS money for looking at obstacles, SSE Water Framework Directive assessments, sub-contract work in Galloway and Forth on alleviating obstacles, also post construction surveys after hydro or wind farms go in. KB asked if the data collected reaches the public domain. AKW thinks yes after it goes to SEPA. KB suggests they could then publish it.

Farm escapes – in the last three weeks we have seen farmed fish being caught on the Fyne, Ruel, Awe and Eachaig. The fish are relatively silver so haven't been in the river long. We need to raise awareness as we don't want them spawning in our rivers. CM has been in contact with Marine Harvest and Scottish Salmon Company. We are collecting genetic samples. SA asked if conservation limits take into account catching farmed fish. CM said the regulations say if you catch a farmed fish then kill it. Catch returns have a separate column for reporting farmed fish. However, it is not always easy to identify a farmed fish. AKW explained that anglers need to use a net to allow good examination of every single fish caught to check if it is farmed. Keep it in the water so it remains in good condition. Take your time. Farmed fish usually have good body condition (fatter), fin condition will be poorer – both pectoral fins will have lumps and bumps along the leading edge and have a rounded end, spotting on gill cover will tell if it is farmed as Norwegian salmon (farmed) have more spots than wild Scottish salmon. DP explained that sometimes farmed salmon have a red injection mark on their belly. RB said we need to produce a pamphlet with this information.

3. Discussion on Aquaculture

CM described what we have been doing to hold the aquaculture industry to account. West coast trusts and boards got together to form a group to represent our interests to government and industry. We were a part of Interactions Management Pilots which were set up by the Crown Estate to get wild fish and industry talking to each other. We were trying to talk about the interaction between wild fish and farmed fish, but industry just wanted to talk about wild fish groups interacting with industry representatives, so we walked out of the talks. We would come back to talks if three conditions were met: 1. Farm sea lice level counts to be published on a farm by farm basis, 2. Monitoring programme on sea lice burdens, 3. Effective and independently

monitored measures introduced to regulate salmon farms harming wild fish populations through sea lice, escapes or other means. We have not heard anything formally from the Crown Estate since March and there has been no progress. In June, CM attended NASCO on behalf of the ASFB to hold Scottish Government to account. It was obvious that the Scottish Government has a poor record due to their lack of protection for wild salmon. The Faroe Islands are the strictest on sea lice levels on fish farms and order complete shutdown if levels get above a certain level, even though they don't have a wild run of salmon. During the meeting, 300,000 salmon were reported escaped from a farm in the Outer Hebrides. The EU representative told the Scottish government representative to go to the Faroe Islands on a fact-finding mission.

Scottish Salmon Producers Organisation figures for sea lice levels on fish farms in Argyll from July 2015 to June 2016 show that most of the average levels have been well above the Code of Good Practice treatment level for sea lice since October 2015. The Fyne levels have been low but are now rising. New levels have been set where management changes are recommended, but they are only to protect the welfare of the farmed fish. ICES released advice in 2016 reporting that on average sea lice from fish farms mean 20% of salmon do not return to their river (up to 40% in some areas). AB asked about resistance to sea lice treatment chemicals. KB said yes there has been some resistance in Scotland so other methods are being looked at, including scrubbing devices, wrasse and lumpfish in cages, and hot water treatments. Scottish Salmon Company invested in a mechanical scrubbing machine but they have only one machine for the whole of Scotland.

The Scottish Government pay AFT for monitoring of sea lice levels on sea trout in Argyll. Surveys have shown that in Loch Fyne, mostly levels have been below the harmful level of 13 sea lice per fish. In Loch Riddon, few sea trout were caught and there were high levels of sea lice on them. At Dunstaffnage, there were few fish again but lower levels of sea lice. JW asked what the wild fish sector are doing about this. RB said CM is co-ordinating West Coast trusts. CM has been successful in getting monitoring of wild fish included in planning permission for the fish farm at Carradale. Salmon and Trout Conservation are taking the most aggressive stance, and we are working with them. CM pointed out we still need to keep some dialogue going with the Government. TD asked why they don't tag all farmed fish, like they do with all land-based farmed animals. CM said it would be too expensive. A new Marine Harvest farm is planned for Saddell Water (Kintyre) and we will be objecting based on the risk to wild salmon and sea trout. South of Loch Crinan, Kames is also planning a new fish farm. SA asked if MPAs would allow regulation of fish farms. CM explained that MPAs are species or habitat specific so they wouldn't cover this.

4. Wild Fisheries Reform

a) General discussion. A discussion paper was circulated prior to the meeting. We are still in limbo waiting for Fisheries Management Organisations (FMOs) to be decided on. The situation is confused as the bill wasn't included in the 2016/17 list of forthcoming bills, but was included under another paper as planned for introduction in the coming year. The Scottish Government want fewer than 20 Fishery Management Areas (FMAs), each with an FMO. Currently there are 41 DSFBs and 26 fishery trusts operating in Scotland.

b) Argyll-Loch Lomond discussion. It has been suggested that Argyll and Loch Lomond should join together as one FMO. Argyll has a bigger land mass but Loch Lomond has more members. Argyll is run on a federal basis with River Improvement Associations (RIAs) running under the support of the Board. If there were a merger with Loch Lomond, we could expect a similar system to be put in place. The Government might want to run some pilot FMOs, and RB thinks it would be a good idea for us to get involved so that we don't just end up with big East Coast boards setting the style of FMOs. However, it would cost money to be a pilot FMO, so if the money was there then RB would be in favour of Argyll/Loch Lomond being a pilot. EE commented that Loch Lomond is not actually part of a Fishery Board. LLAIA want to keep their independence otherwise all the volunteers would leave and poaching would become rife. The possibility of Loch Lomond going in with the

Clyde is not popular, who also do not have a Fishery Board, so they believe a federal system with Argyll would work. RB explained that Loch Awe Improvement Association (LAIA) would also come under the FMO. We don't need to make a decision until the Government comes forward to ask for pilot areas. CM would want firm guarantees from the government that fisheries reform is going ahead before we commit to being a pilot FMO. RB asked if we should continue dialogue, and all agreed. When the opportunity arises, we would work out a detailed proposal for everyone to look at. RY said the Eachaig DSFB would want to know details before they engaged. The Government haven't faced up to the financial implications of FMOs supporting all species management, as salmon anglers cannot fund all species. The finance group has not met to discuss anything yet. RY asked about the composition of FMOs needing to include local authorities, conservation groups, and even aquaculture. RB said we wouldn't support having aquaculture involved in an FMO in any scope.

c) ASFB/RAFTS future. RB explained that RAFTS's funding has almost dried up. It cannot fund itself from subscriptions. With a future of FMOs, there needs to be some kind of association of FMOs. An EGM a few weeks ago between Boards and Trusts went badly and no agreement was reached. However, there will be another attempt to bring Boards and Trusts together. At the ASFB AGM on 17th Nov a constitution will be put forward to allow Scottish Fishery Trusts to join. If this doesn't work, RB has talked about an Association of Fishery Trusts. Alan Wells (previously of ASFB) would be the director of the 'new' organisation as his secondment to government ends soon.

5. **Minutes of the Meeting of April 2016** – These were accepted as accurate.
6. **Matters Arising** – None
7. **Clerk's report** – circulated separately with the minutes
8. **Any Other Business** - None
9. **Date of next meeting:** TBC in April 2017