

Minutes of the Argyll District Salmon Fishery Board Meeting

1pm on Wednesday 1st November 2017, at the Inveraray Inn, Inveraray

Attendees

Roger Brook (ADSFb Chair/Awe district rep) -RB
Robert Younger (Clerk/AFT Director)-RY
Maja Pepper (AFT Manager)-MP
Alan Kettle White (AFT Biologist) -AKW
Andrew Barker (AFT chair/Ruel District Rep)-AB
Alyssa Stewart (ADSFb/AFT Admin)-AS
Jonathan Brown (AFT Director/fish proprietor)-JB
Bill Duff (salmon angling rep/DDAC)
Jake Chambers (President of DDAC)
Jane Wright (AFT Director)-JW
Hugh Whittle(AFT Director)- HW
Keith Miller (AFT Director)-KM

Members of the Public

Penny Hawdon (SSC)-PH

Apologies

Rebecca Nicholson
David Stewart
Caroline Fleming
Stephen Gibbs
Richard McKenzie
Hugh Nicol
Richard McKenzie

1. Introduction and apologies

Chairman Roger Brook thanked everyone for coming. Roger introduced Bob Younger as the new clerk for the ADSFB and spoke of what a great resource Bob will be to the board due to his vast experience.

2. Argyll Fisheries Trust Biologist's report

AKW gave a presentation of the activities of the trust, which include: Awe barrage counter and fishery data showing a decrease in adult salmon abundance and changes in salmon stock composition. The electrofishing data show a response in decreasing juvenile populations. MSS smolt migration data and local marine pressures. Local funds may be used to improve habitat. A significant number of contracts have been undertaken but there has been little project funding to support outreach work with the exception of wind farm funds.

Data from River Fyne show that Sea Trout numbers have improved while grilse / salmon numbers are now very low after an improvement between 2007 and 2012 with a big decrease in 2016. It is

similar for River Etive, there is a very low number of fish returning to these rivers, and AKW is not expecting to see anything different this / next year.

Escapee farmed fish numbers have been relatively low but AKW stressed the need for the fisherman's presence on the rivers to pick up any incidents. Recent escape on Mull has impacted the River Ba.

AKW reported that the small grilse that have been returning in recent years are likely to be ineffective breeders due to their size, which is likely to be a consequence of poor feeding conditions at sea and warmer water conditions. Multi Sea Winter Salmon numbers have also decreased in 2017 following a strong year class in 2016. This low abundance may possibly be due to a changeover point from dominance of one to multi sea-winter Salmon. AKW had some positive news from the National Oceanographic Centre, which suggest sea surface temperatures are moving into a cooler phase which may improve survival rates of smolts at sea.

Between 2000 and 3000 smolts were tagged with a passive integrated transponder (PIT) during the smolt runs of 2016 and 2017. Data has not been received yet partly due to a technical fault.

Larger smolts were also tagged with acoustic tags. The information received suggest that 80% of the salmon are migrating along the west side of Mull, the remaining proportion are migrating via the Sound of Mull. This is of concern as there will be increases in the tonnage of salmon farmed in the lower Firth of Lorne where most smolts migrate.

The AFT have carried out electrofishing surveys in the River Awe to estimate the number of juvenile salmon present, AKW reported that there has been a large drop in the number of spawning fish but fry production hasn't altered significantly. Similar surveys also carried out in the River Orchy suggest that fry numbers had decreased along with adult counts, although survey conditions have not been ideal this year.

The dam removal at Galla Brega Bum has increased the number of young trout in the stream.

AKW summarised the sea lice monitoring results which show that there is a relatively high burden of sea lice, particularly for Awe and Nell. The figures indicate a bad year for lice which may be related to the production cycle of local fish farms and could be an issue for smolt migration. The lice results were particularly high in Loch Fyne, PH did not want to comment as this has already been addressed in meetings that RB has attended.

The number of fish were low for sampling in Carradale, which is a Scottish Government funded project, the fish were just not there.

Other Juvenile Surveys have salmon fry numbers have dropped in many rivers. SEPA have also been surveying in the Argyll area and have their own data to assess which will be useful in the future.

AKW discussed the option of hatchery and stocking intervention. Although there has been a reduced number in smolts, juveniles and adult pawning adult AKW suggested that stocking is not necessarily the answer. There is concern that interference may produce unfit offspring and undermine natural selection to a degree. Another option would be to avoid handling and selection of brooding fish, allowing the natural selection to take place, thereafter electrofishing the emergent fry and redistributing them at lower density to minimise competition and increase overall survival to

the parr stage. RB asked where this would be proposed to be carried out, AKW acknowledged that this is an area for future development which need to be undertaken in combination with redd counts.

The AFT has been encouraging landowners to take up replanting schemes however it is a conflict of interest for some landowners as it may not be a priority where deer stalking and other farming or other management options are favoured over tree planting.

AKW talked through contracts that have taken place: 2016 including 8 Hydro, 3 wind farm developments, 5 barriers assessments and in 2017 13 hydro developments, 1 wind farm development, 1 FWPM assessments. It is essential that AFT takes on commercial contract to keep afloat, however these had to be prioritised over other work as the weather has been bad over the last two summers, reducing the number of field-work days.

Awe Fish counter analysis

One is that Marine Harvest are working towards improving their work practice and standards to gain accreditation from the Aquaculture Stewardship Council. This would result in smolt farms being taken out of fresh water and the reduction of number of lice per fish. However, Marine Harvest are in discussion with the ASC and FMS to negotiate the standards.

A discussion took place as to whether SSC would also be interested in gaining accreditation from ASC, PH commented that Marine Harvest have more resources than SSC and presently it is not something that SSC are ready for. PH spoke of closed containment trials in Norway, there are teething problems and some systems work in Norway waters but not in Scotland.

The Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, which is government run, have agreed to an enquiry into aquaculture challenges and are beginning to collect information.

Salmon and Trout Conservation UK have pressurised the government to release information on the farms that do not meet the minimum lice standards, which will be useful.

RB reported that the East Coast fish catches have increased and the West Coast have decreased, if the South West Highlands had kept pace with the East Coast, they would be catching 3 times the number of fish we catch today. Differences in west and east coast fish numbers may be related to west coast aquaculture development. There are 260 fish farms in the west coast, approximately 200 between the west and the north Atlantic, which migratory smolts must pass.

There had been an incident of escaped rainbow trout from Dawnfresh, it is still unknown how many trout escaped but over 200 were caught in the River Awe. Also, there is the possibility of escaped salmon in Mull from SSC.

There was an independent consenting review, as a result the government want to take consenting process from the planning authority to Marine Scotland. Their decisions may be political and concerns were made known as to Marine Scotland conflict of interest in the marine environment and politics.

A discussion was had regarding environmental management plans (EMP). There is an opportunity to develop a policy that is fit for purpose, with a rational fair process. BY, RB and PH discussed the need for a concrete and clear role for the boards and fish-farm consultations / planning consents.

BY spoke of the potential move of the responsibility of managing assets from the Crown Estate to the local authorities, would be positive if some of the funding could be invested in river development.

HW asked PH about the use of wrasse in cages at SSC and questioned whether they can escape and what happens to the wrasse eventually. PH explained that they cannot escape and that regrettably Marine Scotland want the wrasse culled at end of season however SSC would be happy to continue using wrasse. There is still a lot unknown about farmed wrasse and PM explained that using wrasse reduced the need to use chemicals for the treatment of lice.

JW asked what proportion of wild wrasse to farmed wrasse are used, PH stated that SSC use wild wrasse however she didn't know the percentage over the industry.

3. Discussion of Aquaculture

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4. Wild Fisheries Reform

Not covered.

5. Minutes of the meeting from April 2017

These were accepted as accurate.

6. Matters Arising

Small Rivers that had been on the role and received minimum levies have been given the opportunity to sign a netting or rod exemption form to declare that they won't fish. AS reported that some forms had been returned but others are yet to respond.

Local rivers have been given a conservation grade 3.

7. Clerks Report

Circulated separately with the minutes.

8. Any other business

None.

9 Date of next meeting:

TO BE SET

