

ARGYLL DISTRICT SALMON FISHERY BOARD

**Minutes of the meeting held on
Wednesday 3rd November 2021, 11:00am
The Loch Fyne Hotel, Inveraray**

Attendees: Andrew Barker (AB, Chairperson), Jane Wright (JW), Alan Kettle White (Senior Biologist, AKW), Roger Brook (RB), Robert Younger (RY), Stephen Austin (SA), David Stewart (DS), Charlie McGrigor (CM), Edward Campbell Preston (ECP), Richard McKenzie (RM), Raymond Doonan (RD), Andrew Wales (AW), Virginia Sumsion (VS), Jonathan Brown (JB), Alastair Reynolds (AR), Caroline Fleming (via Team, CF), Alyssa Stewart (AS Secretary), Tuggy Delap (TD)

Apologies: David Sutherland, Lucy Abel Smith, Charles Forde, David Milburn, Ian Tegner, Richard Jones, Duncan Rogers, Frans Van Bommel, Bebe Corbett, Charles Forde, Gordon Stephens, Pandora Buchanan-Jardine, Johnny Buchanan-Jardine, David Milburn, Johan Pezold, Sascha Klengel, Richard Jones, David Parker, Benedict Justin, Stephen Beale, Rebecca Nicholson, Hugh Nicol

Introduction from the Chair

RB thanked AB for all his hard work, the strength and co-operation between the Board and Trust has been very much down to the willingness from AB to work together with the Board, within the restriction of the law.

RB welcomed JW, who was Chair and Manager for the Trust previously.

Apologies

Apologies were noted.

Approval of minutes

Minutes were approved.

Biologist's Report

AKW presented the Biologists report which will be circulated with the minutes.

West Coast Salmon Tracking Project

Project to identify the migration routes of salmon smolts funded through the AST, FMS and MSS.

Rotary screw traps used to catch and tag 200 smolts in the Awe & Orchy catchments between mid-April and mid-May 2021. Tagging carried out under aseptic conditions, under home office license managed by Glasgow University and Atlantic Salmon Trust. A total 113 were tagged on the River Orchy and 87 on River Etive.

Preliminary results show some Orchy and Etive fish migrating West rather than the expected route of through the Minch, via both west of Mull and fewer in the Sound of Mull. One tagged fish was identified in the far northwest beyond the Outer Hebrides by a drone.

It is possible some of our fish are spreading out when migrating. The tags also allow for data to be collected on different smolts from different catchments and how long the fish are spending in areas, and their likelihood of picking up larvae and sea lice. Final report is expected by Mid-December which will be published on the website. RY asked if choosing big fish affects the result? Possibly as there may be some selection for larger smolts which may behave differently to smaller ones. Hopefully as tag technology improved smaller fish can be tagged in future. The battery of the tags last for 3 months maximum. The tags are small to minimise impact on the fish's survival. The batteries do not last long enough to monitor their return. This is a three-year project depending on funding.

There is a video online on the Atlantic Salmon Trust website describing the project. Smaller fish trapped were tagged and released in the River Awe by scientists from Marine Scotland, those tags will be kept for their lifetime and inform marine survival.

Habitat Improvement

Habitat improvement work on-going on the Rivers Ruel and the Goil and work projects are being developed on River Eachaig through Lomond & Trossachs National Park.

Characteristics of the Cowal rivers are sandy soils which are easily eroded, tend to get wider and shallower and fine sediment affect habitat for fish. This results in low number of Juvenile fish as the riverbed becomes compacted with finer sediment. Green revetment work started in 2015/16 on River Goil to stabilise the banks and buy time for trees and vegetation to recover through green engineering to protect the bank through use of brash, planting trees, and fencing to help the bank recover. Fish are now spawning in areas where they weren't before. More work planned 2022/23.

There has also been work carried out annually on the R. Ruel since 2018 by coppicing of large trees and using woody debris to provide fish cover and protect banks from further erosion. Further work planned in 2022/23 supported by RRIA, SSE and CWFT.

Mingury Burn Habitat Project

Biodiversity Challenge fund with supported by Nature Scotland could not be completed due to covid-19 lockdown in 2020/21, but some fencing and tree planting was completed.

Fisheries Surveys

Carradale Escapes Project – A further 36 genetic sampling sites surveyed in 2021, which will give information on the interactions between wild and farmed salmon. Temperature monitoring is carried out by AFT on local (ADRIA) and national level (Marine Scotland). Information is used to map and predict where trees should be planted, showing where water is getting too warm for the fish.

Fish stock monitoring in Awe Catchment as part of ADRIA with funding from Scottish and Southern Energy.

There is also work being completed on the River Creran which is funded by CAF America. There are restricted funds available which will be used for developing larger scale replanting projects.

GA and PC have brought new skills to the Trust, and work will be done on invertebrate sampling.

Commercial Contracts

AFT undertake contracts to inform developers and regulators of fish & fish habitat considerations.

BY asked, regarding climate work, if offset schemes could be used as there are clear stacked benefits on top of carbon benefits. TT has been approached by companies interested in tree planting and riparian work as carbon offset plans. This is an area that should be looked into further, Luke Cummings may be worth contacting.

AKW stated that the temperature monitoring work shows that the uplands are the ones needing focused on.

RB suggested that habitat work is critical. Co-operation of landowners is key, and often an obstacle. TT thinks this is changing, and landowners are becoming more interested.

Analysis of Awe Fish Counter

Discussion and update on aquaculture

AKW's presentation will be circulated with minutes.

The government's response to Interactions Working Group is to appoint SEPA as the regulator for aquaculture, rather than the planning department. It is an interesting new area. BY agreed that there has been a technical argument, and they will be taking this forward.

Sea Lice on wild fish will be part of this process, the timing for the framework has not been published.

EMP's are in place to collect information on wild fish and on farm management. If the Interactions group are enacted, EMPS's will not be required in the future, but will move into a CAR licence scenario. We don't know when the government will enact this. The EMP may be absorbed into the CAR licence, rather than a voluntary agreement.

Farm Sea Lice Counts

The Norwegian Aquaculture risk assessment process means that AFT can estimate the impact of sea lice on the sea trout being monitored.

Loch Fyne & Loch Riddon- the lice-related risk is estimated to be quite low for smaller fish risk in 2021, but moderate risk for larger fish. Second year of salmon farm production shows an increase in lice-related risk but appears to be reduced over recent years. This year, fish were caught that had few lice but some did have the appearance of a lice burden that had been cleared.

Firth of Lorn- Again, sea lice numbers were higher than code of good practice when harvesting sites in spring 2021. Subsequently, high lice-related risk found on sea trout at Dunstaffnage- no improvement in recent years, with high mortality rate.

Sea Trout remain in inshore waters for most of their lives, whereas salmon are passing through, possibly reducing their risk.

Sound of Shuna- Mowi trialling a new snorkel cage where fish were farmed in a lower point of the column. The high on-farm lice numbers suggest that the experiment has not worked to date.

West Mull- are in a different cycle, numbers are relatively low.

Loch Etive- Lice numbers increased exponentially from July, with an average number of 19 lice per fish by October. Numbers may drop with more freshwater now in Loch Etive. If this had happened in the spring, every smolt may have been lost. There has been an underlying health issue for farm fish preventing effective lice treatment and Dawnfresh lost control of the situation. FHI were contacted.

Loch Linnhe- Lice numbers were high, but SSF were harvesting fish around this time, there are some gaps in the data and will take up with FMS to see why there are gaps in data.

Sound of Mull- crowded area for fish farms, higher numbers of lice than we would like.

Escapes - No reported escape this year although last year was horrendous with nearly 145k fish escaping. There has been one report of potential escaped rainbow trout in Loch Etive. Any RT caught to be recorded and reported to FHI.

A national assessment of the influence of farmed salmon escapes on the genetic integrity of wild Scottish salmon population was carried out on 22 sites in Argyll in 2018/19. There was evidence on integration at 27% of sites. The River Awe was very poor, but there were only two samples tested.

AFT & ADSFB have always highlighted this issue to the government, so the integration report is important. Mowi have paid out for work done on the Carradale escapes project which has cost Mowi over £200k.

The consultation responses to regulators of fish farming by ADSFB is now coordinated through FMS and the standard of representation has been improved significantly.

The Trust has applied for and received grant money from WSSF which is a fund coming from Fish Farmers, the tracking project has substantial funding from fish farmers, RB asked if there are objections to the Trust taking this money. CF commented that the tracking project is fascinating and can only be done with the funding and this may be the way forward. RB is in favour of it. JB added that it was discussed at ADRIA and the general view was that money should be taken but will not stop criticism of the industry, RY agreed as it is directed at science, and allows us to hold them accountable. Support was given.

Loch Long salmon farm

This is a new company called the Loch Long Salmon Company which is semi contained, water is injected back into the tanks. They are seeking support from the Board. It will not replace farms around Scotland, they may operate with a 1-year cycle to sell onto other farms for their second cycle, the second cycle is what causes the most harm.

Generally speaking, RB is not in favour of this. TT is of the opinion that preventing improvements may hinder the future and progress in the right direction. AR does not think we should be supporting this, and suggested there may be a less vulnerable site available. Loch Long and Loch Goil have no fish farms and opens opportunity for farms further down the Clyde.

AKW added that the win for wild fish would be the 1-year cycle, which is the best way to control sea lice over the industry. This is only one site in one area and could supply only one farm, on its own is not the answer but has some of the answers. The Canadian project has been halted as it has run into significant problems, the farm does not have any funding. TK stated the difficulty is it will open the door for fish farms in a pristine site, he can't see it going on beyond one or two farms. RB suggested that a response is made with the positives and negatives, and a conclusion of against the proposal is noted. Deadline is the 5th of December for the planning consent. JW agrees.

Draft response will be circulated to the Executive committee. AR will confirm dates and further details.

Clerks report

The clerk's report was discussed and will be circulated with the minutes.

Levy 2022

Will be approved at spring AGM; the Board did not apply a levy in this calendar year and would expect it to return in the next calendar year.

Any other business

SA is retiring, and this is his last official meeting. SA thanked the Trust and Board for all for their good work. RB asked if he would be available as a Director for the Board of the AFT, SA added not in the immediate future, but maybe in 12 months' time.