



Western Isles District salmon Fisheries Board – Report 2020/21

2020 proved a unique and challenging year for the WIDSFB as for all Fisheries Boards around Scotland. The challenges brought about by the uncertainties of a global pandemic and subsequent lockdowns were unique and wide ranging. The Board held its last meeting of the 2019/20 year on the 20th February prior to the Covid restrictions coming in and before the full implications of these had become clear. At this meeting it was agreed that the Levy rate per pound be increased from 100p per £1 of the rateable value to 101p per £1 of the rateable value and that the Board would continue to provide core funding for the Outer Hebrides Fisheries Trust (OHFT) to the amount of £57,000.

As the situation progressed and it became obvious that the lockdowns would have a significant impact on fisheries incomes it was decided to initially invoice for 50% of the normal Levy amount. This was again reviewed at the next Board meeting on the 3rd September once the situation regarding the season and Covid had become clearer. It was agreed at this meeting that a further 25% would be invoiced for to ensure continued financial support for OHFT.

Therefore fisheries were invoiced for, and paid 75% of the normal total Levy based on 101p per £1 of the rateable value for the 2020/21 financial year.

Annual Catches

Although some very early season Spring fishing was carried out by locals, the Lockdown in March stopped all angling until the 29th May at which point angling was once again opened up for locals. This presented a unique opportunity for local anglers to fish some rivers that would normally be fully booked by visiting anglers. Good water levels and a very good early run of grilse in many fisheries meant some excellent fishing with some reporting their best June and early July for nearly twenty years.

The island once again opened up to visiting anglers in mid July, albeit with many restrictions still in place, particularly with regard to hospitality. The fishing remained reasonable and 2020 catches were very encouraging, particularly as angling effort in most places was much reduced due to the Covid impacts.

Catches for the Outer Hebrides for 2020 below (Source: Marine Scotland, the data submitted to WIDSFB by fisheries for 2020 is incomplete)

Salmon: **163**

Grilse: **1337**

Sea Trout: **1102**

Finnock: **1340**

Total Salmon and Grilse: 1500

For reference these are the Salmon and Grilse catches as recorded by Marine Scotland for the Outer Hebrides for the past ten years:

2019 - 1071

2018 – 617

2017 – 1104

2016 – 1327

2015 – 1086

2014 – 1184

2013 – 1746

2012 – 2686

2011 – 2330

2010 – 2422

Bailiffs

Since the formation of the board the Clerk has appointed 21 water bailiffs. Two of these have recently moved away from the area to start new jobs. There are a further three people who have recently passed the IFM exam and are now eligible to apply for a warrant card subject to an appropriate disclosure certificate being produced.

Donnie Whiteford is now superintendant to the Board and main point of contact for bailiffing and enforcement issues.

In 2020/21 Western Isles bailiffs confiscated 17 illegally set gill nets and a fairly high number of poaching incidents were reported. One case was taken forward with police and is ongoing.

Survey Work / Tagging

Most of OHFT's proposed survey work for the 2020 season had to be postponed due to the Covid restrictions. In addition the first stage of the Atlantic Salmon Trust West Coast Tagging programme had to be postponed. This will take place in 2021 instead and will include the deployment of two rotary screw traps, one on the Laxay river which forms part of the wider West Coast tracking programme, and one on the Grimersta River to assess the size / weight of smolts with a view to a more localised tagging programme for Loch Roag in 2022.

Planning

WIDSFB have responded to 5 planning applications, including an objection to an increase in biomass at the SSC Plocrapool site. Permission was subsequently given and WIDSFB have been in discussion regarding an EMP for this site, as well as in discussion with MOWI about an EMP for Loch Erisort. While the board recognises that EMP's are imperfect they remain the best mechanism we have for protecting wild fish interests at the moment. We continue to press for reform of the aquaculture regulatory system.

Meetings

There was a Meeting of the WIDSFB held on 3rd September 2020 via Zoom.
The annual meeting of qualified proprietors was also held on 3rd September 2020 via Zoom.
The Board met again on the 18th March 2021 for the annual public meeting, via Zoom.
These meetings were publicised by means of email to proprietors, Board website, social media and a copy of the notice was sent to the Scottish Government.
The minutes from this meeting can be viewed at www.widsfb.org
In addition the Board's steering group has met at regular intervals over the course of the year,

Annual Report and Accounts

This report and a set of accounts for 2020/21 have been produced and will be approved at the next Annual Meeting of Proprietors on the 5th November 2021 and submitted to DSFBGoodGovernance@gov.scot

Proposed activities for the next year

As the first aquaculture EMP's are finalised the WIDSFB will be an active stakeholder and before signing will ensure the plans are as robust as possible to protect the local wild fish populations

Continue to develop and improve the WIDSFB website

Encourage participation in events like the FMS annual conference

Look to provide any additional training for water bailiffs that may be required

Continue to keep members updated with any news from FMS that may be relevant

Hold two WIDSFB meetings and one proprietors meeting.

Complaints

The Board has set up and maintains a complaints procedure which can be viewed at www.widsfb.org The procedure was reviewed at 12/02/2019 and remains unaltered.
No complaints have been received this year.

Members' interests

The register of members' interests can be viewed at www.widsfb.org We have now included a standing item at each Board meeting inviting Board members to declare new/amend existing interests and all such instances are recorded in the minutes of these meetings.