



**Minutes of Western Isles District Salmon Fisheries Board and annual meeting of proprietors
5th November 2021 at 10am.
Via Zoom**

Present:

Dickon Green (Chairman)
Jason Laing (Clerk to the Board)
Innes Morrison (Amhuinnsuidhe and Uig & Hamanavay)
Laurent Hilde (Garynahine and Barvas)
Virginia Hill (Morsgail)
Angus Mackenzie (Scaliscro)
Kenny Maclennan (Carloway)
Cathra Kelliher (Borve Lodge)
Malcolm Macphail (Soval)
Donnie Whiteford (Garynahine)
Chris Macrae (Eishken)
Richard Seaman (Garynahine and Barvas)
Barry Lomas (Obbe)
Rebecca Kimber-Danger (Scaliscro)
Iain Trayner (SAA)
Richard Davies (OHFT)
Paul Hopper (OHFT)
Stuart Baird (SEPA)

Apologies

Dr Jan Abel (Stockinish)
Victor Beamish (Grimersta)
Richard Kershaw (Soval)
Michael Wilson (Morsgail)
Donnie Macdonald (Rodel)
Mark Maciver (NatureScot)

Chairman's Introduction

Dickon Green welcomed everyone and thanked all for attending. He noted that it had been a poor year for many fisheries with extreme low water. He said that while things were moving forward in regard to EMP's in the Western Isles the whole process was frustratingly slow. He then thanked the Clerk to the Board, Superintendent Donnie Whiteford and the OHFT for all their work.

Update From The Clerk to the Board

Jason Laing updated the meeting on the Boards finances and Levy payments. He said that all fisheries had either paid the 75% of the Levy invoiced for in March or arranged staged payments. He noted that some fisheries had opted to pay the full 100% of the Levy voluntarily. He told the meeting that while no new bailiffs had been appointed since the previous meeting a number of people had passed the IFM exam and were now eligible to apply for a bailiffs card. He told the meeting that Marine Scotland had refused all applications for seal licences submitted by wild salmon fisheries in Scotland. This is obviously of concern, particularly given the low water conditions and serious predation of salmon that happened around the Western Isles this year. FMS have requested a meeting with MS to discuss the matter.

Levies

Dickon noted that a decision on the remaining 25% of the Levy needed to be made. He recommended that the Board invoice for the full 100% to ensure a strong financial position going forward.

Innes Morrison put forward a counter proposal that as many fisheries had been adversely affected financially the remaining 25% not be invoiced for but that fisheries be asked to make an equivalent contribution if they felt able to do so.

After discussion it was clear that while some fisheries were happy to be invoiced for the full amount, others were in favour of Innes's proposal.

Kenny MacLennan put forward an alternative motion that rather than asking for a contribution, the Board invoice for the remaining 25% but allow fisheries who have suffered financially as a result of the pandemic during the current financial year to opt not to pay this. Kenny's proposal was agreed by all present.

It was agreed that this would be the last year that any concessions to the pandemic would be made and that it would revert to the full 100% being invoiced for in 2022.

Review of the 2020 Season

It was noted that while some fisheries managed to have a reasonable season, the general theme was one of fish being unable to run the rivers due to drought conditions, and heavy predation at sea, both by seals and a much higher number of dolphins than usual.

Chris Macrae told the meeting that the best way to deal with situations like this was dams and the ability to release water. Stuart Baird (SEPA agreed this was sensible but pointed out that all dams needed to be registered and regularly inspected to comply with the law. He said he was very happy to advise any fisheries wishing to look at dams on the best way forward.

Laurent Hilde said that he had previously been told by someone in SEPA that SEPA would not support dams for any fisheries. Stuart expressed surprise at this and once again stated that he was very happy to advise.

Richard Davies said that providing good biological reasons and making the case that Dams are sometimes needed to aid upstream migration is important. Stuart agreed with this.

Cathra Kelliher said that the Dam at Fincastle on Borve Lodge Estate is in danger of collapse and they have been struggling to find a way forward and have had no support from SEPA, who had advised that the dam should be allowed to revert to nature.

Richard Davies said they would help gather all the concerns that the fishery have and try and find a way forward. Stuart once again expressed surprise at the response Borve had had from SEPA.

Kenny MacLennan said that the Board and Trust should engage with SEPA to find a way forward.

Bailiffing and Enforcement

Donnie Whiteford briefed on the poaching situation, noting that the low water meant fish were particularly vulnerable in certain areas. He said that the response from the police over the course of the season had been mixed and often not helpful although Dickon, Donnie and Jason had met with the chief inspector who had stated the police would help where possible. Dan Sutherland, a wildlife officer based on the mainland had also been involved in assisting Island bailiffing efforts and had been over to Lewis and Harris for a joint operation.

There is one poaching case from this season being taken forward by police.

Sea patrols were discussed and a number of gaps identified as still not being covered. Chris Macrae suggested that a meeting with fisheries protection could be beneficial as they are often able to assist.

AP: Donnie/Dickon/Jason to arrange a meeting with fisheries protection

A number of options to improve bailiffing efforts were discussed including greater use of technology and it was agreed to hold a bailiffs meeting in early 2022.

Members Interests

Innes Morrison highlighted the need for transparency with regard to Board members interests and said members should be open with regard to possible conflict of interests.

This was noted and it was stressed that any change in circumstances or possible conflicts should be brought to the clerks attention for inclusion on the register of members interests.

AP Members interests to be a standing item on meeting agenda's going forward.

Update from Richard Davies and Paul Hopper on OHFT

Paul Hopper briefed the meeting about staffing changes at OHFT. Colin Flower has taken over from Carolyn Ferguson as admin assistant and they were able to recruit David Spray for three months over the summer as assistant biologist which had been a great help.

He briefed on the role OHFT had played in the West Coast tracking project which saw rotary smolt traps used on the Laxay and Grimersta rivers. The Laxay smolts were tagged as part of the wider west Coast Tracking programme while the Grimersta smolts were measured and weighed to ensure suitability for tagging next season with a view to seeing how long the smolts stay within Loch Roag.

He noted that the smolts trapped were the biggest in Scotland (of those trapped as part of the project) which bodes well for sea survival. Sweep netting also took place this year, on two sites at Eishken and Steinish for which OHFT received £6000 funding.

A coastal Fyke net was trialled in Little Loch Roag which caught sea trout and some smolts.

He briefed on the isotope study which is ongoing and seeks to establish the origins of sea lice on wild fish.

The full sample of 30 needed for this study was achieved at Eishken and these are now being processed.

He then told the meeting that negotiations with MOWI over the EMP for Loch Erisort were almost complete and the EMP was now as good as we could get it. Once signed off this EMP will be a template for other sites where EMP's are required.

He said that other survey work had taken place over the summer on various fisheries including some as part of the National Electrofishing Programme (NEPS)

Richard Davies then thanked the Trust staff for all their hard work, and thanked estates for their support.

He noted that the skills learnt through the tracking programme will be very useful in other areas going forward.

He mentioned that while the results from the Laxay tagging programme and wider West Coast programme are important the tagging at Grimersta next year could be even more important and this will show how long smolts stay within the Loch Roag area – he noted that it has been found that in some areas smolts can hang around a sea loch for up to 5 weeks.

He said that the collection of data is crucial. He also agreed that the EMP's that are being introduced are not perfect but the best option in the current situation.

He mentioned the recommendations of the SIWG (Salmon Interactions Working Group) which are currently going through the Scottish Parliament and will introduce major reforms for the regulation of aquaculture.

Stuart Baird said that it was looking like SEPA would be the overseeing body once the SIWG

recommendations are implemented. He said the new regulations would initially be for new sites with a delay before existing sites also fall under the new system. There would be a traffic light system depending on the sensitivity of the site with red areas (areas with higher interactions with wild fish) receiving greater scrutiny. He said the consultation on this would be out soon.

It was agreed it was important for the Board to respond once the consultation is open.

AOB

There was no AOB

Date of Next Meeting

The provisional date for the next meeting of the WIDSFB was set for Friday 25th 2022 February at 10am,

Venue TBC but it was agreed that meeting in person with options for virtual attendance was the preferred option.

Annual Meeting of Qualified Proprietors

Following on from the WIDSFB meeting Dickon the opened the annual meeting of proprietors.

Activities of the board for the year to date

It was agreed that this had been covered during the preceding Board meeting.

proposed activities for the next year

As also discussed in the preceding meeting this is to include the following:

Hold two Board meetings and one meeting of qualified Proprietors

Continue to improve anti-poaching measures in the Western Isles

Continue to support OHFT

Continue to work towards the best possible protection for wild fish possible under the current aquaculture regulatory system.

Consideration of annual report and accounts

The annual report and audited accounts for 2020/21 were unanimously approved and will now be submitted to the Scottish Government's good governance email address.

Date and time of next meeting of proprietors

This is to be decided at the next meeting of the WIDSFB in February 2022.

These minutes were approved and have been signed by:

Dickon Green

Date 10/01/2022

Jason Laing

Date 10/01/2022
