



**Minute of the
Annual Meeting of the Qualified Proprietors and Annual Public Meeting
Banchory Lodge Hotel, Banchory & MS Teams
Monday 27th September 2021 at 7:00pm**

Present:

Mr V Beamish – Knappach
Mr A Bremner – River Dee Trust Chairman
Mr Michael Buchan – Lower Woodend
Mr B Carter – The Moors Partnership
Mr S Christie – Middle Drum
Mr K Cromar – Park
Mr C Fleming – ADAA
Mr W Foster – Park
Mr A Hume – ADAA
Mr E Humphrey – Kinord (Dinnet)
Mr H Irvine-Fortescue – Kingcausie
Mr A Matheson - SEPA
Mrs S Mutch – Tilquhillie
Mr M Nicol - Ballogie, Carlogie, Commonty of Ballogie
Mr T Paton – Upper Drum and Lower Durris
Mr W Peake – Crathes Castle
Mr M Robson – Little Blackhall, Inchmarlo
Mr L Ross - Invery, Lower Blackhall, Kinneskie
Mr S Rutherford – SDAA
Mr J Smith - SEPA
Ms T Spiers – Tilquhillie
Mr R Strang Steel - Sluie
Mr A Thomson – Banchory
Mr B Webster – Park
Mr Mike Wilson - Banchory

In attendance;

Dr L Hawkins – River Director
Mrs Debbie Cooper, Dee DSFB
Mrs F Grigor-Taylor, Dee DSFB
Mr D Hawkins, Dee DSFB
Mrs C Mair, Clerk to the Dee DSFB
Mr A Reeve, River Dee Trust
Mr J Urquhart, Dee DSFB/River Dee Trust
Mr E Third, Dee DSFB
Mr M Walker, Dee DSFB

1. Apologies and Introductions

Apologies:

- Mr G Clark – SNH
- Mr A Ford - CNPA
- Mr D Frew – NTS
- Mr & Mrs M Campbell – Altries
- Mr J Clayton – Dess
- Mr W McCance – Feugh
- Mr I Murray – Monaltrie, Lower Invercauld, Glenmuick
- Mr C Stewart – Aberdeenshire Council
- Mr D Trembath - Little Blackhall
- Mr J Trembath - Inchmarlo
- Mr Iain Wood - Maryculter

Introduction

Lawrence Ross, Chairman Dee DSFB, welcomed all to the AGM of the proprietors and the Annual Public Meeting.

Mr Ross also welcomed Alasdair Matheson from SEPA who is giving a presentation at item six on the agenda. Mr Ross further went on to explain that at this meeting the proprietors are required to consider the Annual Report of the Board's activities which consists of what is now called the Annual Review together with Report & Financial Statements i.e. the Accounts for the year ended 31st March, 2021. The Accounts which have been approved by the Board were circulated with the notice of the meeting. The Annual Review will be presented at this meeting.

Once the Annual Report has been considered it will be sent to Scottish Government and all proprietors. It will also be posted on our web site.

The Annual Public Meeting requires the Board to explain its activities which will be done in this evening's presentation of the Annual Report.

The attendance at the meeting was confirmed by the Clerk.

2. Minutes and matters arising from meetings held on 12th November 2020

The minutes of the 2020 Annual General Meeting and Annual Public Meeting, having been circulated previously, were agreed as true minutes. There were no matters arising.

3. Chairman's Report

It is hard to comment on what is shaping up to be a relatively miserable fishing season. We had another decent grilse run although not as good as last year. We won't know the full extent of fishing effort until the returns are in after the close of the season but my guess is that this has been better than last year which will have helped catches and proprietors' income. Nonetheless, overall returns remain low and what we desperately need is a return of decent spring fishing.

Proprietors have been very supportive of the habitat improvements which feature in our 2020-2025 Fisheries Management Plan and indeed in our thoughts beyond that time frame. Long term planning which, if you will pardon the pun, seems to be in short term supply with our politicians requires patience and steadfastness of purpose. An inability to show quick results and maybe even any progress can lead to frustration, doubt and demands for a change of course. With this in mind I have been trying to conjure a picture of what we are looking to achieve. Fortunately we have a readymade example within the catchment and that is on the Dee's largest tributary, the Feugh. Apart from natural bank side trees there are sections of the river in the area known as the Forest of Birse where planting was undertaken some years ago by the local community trust. If you want an idea of what we are trying to achieve on the Gairn, Muick and other upland tributaries then take a look at upper reaches of the Feugh. This tributary features in our annual redd counts and has temperature monitoring but unfortunately rather limited electro fishing data. Accordingly, there is no hard evidence that the Feugh is more productive than other parts of the catchment but what we can say is that it has good spawning facilities, lower

water temperatures than the upper catchment and seemingly good smolt output. That last comment is based on the grilse run of the last couple of years. Judging by the catches at Banchory in July it appears that a goodly number of our grilse head up the Feugh. On a wider scale it is noticeable that the lower area of the catchment which has more tree cover also has lower water temperatures and more interestingly the linear trend of spawning activity has been flat to upward in the lower catchment in contrast to the upper tributaries where it has been flat to lower.

I am not claiming any miracles and confess that we need to do a lot more data recording to substantiate any claims of benefit from our habitat work but there are signs that we are on the right track.

Finally a note on CV19 as it affects the River Office. At the beginning of lockdown the office was closed with everyone working from home. Over time, access to and use of the office at Dinnet has increased driven by a combination of necessity, practicality and personal preference. Now that every member of staff has been 'double jabbed', the arrangements and set up are designed to accommodate 50/50 office/home working. For 'home', one can also read 'being out in the catchment' which is the minimum for field staff anyway. It is a compliment to the staff in the River Office that CV19 had virtually no detrimental impact on our operations. Well done all and thank you.

4. The Annual Report and Accounts

A presentation on the activities undertaken by the Trust and Board was given, a copy can be found at <http://www.riverdee.org.uk/f/articles/AGM-Presentation-2021-without-vid.pdf>

Q&A on the presentation

Q. With regard to the Marine Scotland (MS) review assessing the river as a whole as a category 1, what would this be if only the catchment west of Dinnet were considered?

A. Any assessment on a specific area would be purely speculative but MS could be asked if it was possible to split their data. Whilst it is good that the river has been classed as a category 1 that in itself does not mean that everything is rosy. There is also no assessment for splitting the data between spring or summer stock and all we have to work on is the knowledge through the Trust and Board's electrofishing surveys. We don't have good juvenile stock densities in the upper catchment, but we wouldn't expect that due to habitat conditions. In terms of fish catches on FishDee the numbers are okay compared to last year.

Q. Whilst there are many habitat projects being undertaken by the Board, all this work is undermined by the number of goosanders eating the smolts. These birds are non-native to Scotland so why are they being treated differently by Scottish Government in eradication controls? Pressure must be brought on Scottish Government to increase the numbers licenced each year for culling. Why has the stomach content analysis not been completed?

Why are we therefore allowed to kill the pink salmon, which are also non-native?

Moving the birds using scaring tactics simply moves them from one beat to a neighbouring beat.

A. Regarding the annual licence, the numbers allocated are based on 15% of the average bird count taken by the Board, on 6 counts, over the period September to May. The percentage is based on Scottish Government assessing this will not cause an actual decline in goosander numbers.

Scottish Government is being lobbied for support for the salmon, Scotland's iconic fish. Whilst individuals are relatively supportive, we need to change Government's opinion so that licensing is fair and does not value goosanders over salmon.

The stomach content report is late by 20 months. There is only one person in the country considered to have the skills to carry out this analysis and whilst he was in possession of the birds he was unable to carry out the work at the time as the lab was closed due to Covid. We are getting staff trained to allow us to do analysis ourselves.

Goosanders are not considered non-native, by Government definition, as they made their own way to Scotland whereas pink salmon are considered non-native as they did not make their own way from the Pacific but instead came from stock introduced into Russian rivers.

To be most effective in moving the birds the marksmen need to co-ordinate their efforts.

Q. Have other rivers reported decreased fishing on lower beats as on the Dee the fish arriving seem to go straight through to other areas of the catchment?

A, We will check with other rivers and report back.

Lawrence Ross presented the accounts for consideration by the Proprietors.

We budgeted to make a cash deficit of £145,300 which would be covered by the proceeds of sale of the rental property at 25, Charlton Crescent, Aboyne. The outcome was a cash deficit of £63,792, an improvement of £81,508. This improvement arose in four main areas.

Firstly, project income was again bigger than budget producing a net result of £95K against a budget of £37K – an extra £58K. This extra funding is the unused amount of AWPR compensation money that was given for habitat improvement. This is ours to keep and in keeping with the spirit in which it was given we are using it to continue support for our two Riparian Habitat Advisers, Flora & Steff, who are a critical element in our ability to keep winning and delivering third party funded habitat projects. The outlook on this front remains good. We have won more projects for delivery in the remainder of this financial year and the next and there are more on the horizon that we can bid for. Notwithstanding all of this good news, there remains room for improvement. Many of you will know that the Trust along with FMS and other bodies has been lobbying for an improvement in the way that government funding is calculated. There are shortcomings in the process with an example being funds for tree planting. Current funding awards do not fully cover the true cost of upland tree planting.

Secondly, although we didn't furlough any staff, CV19 led to £31K of overhead savings. A third area of lower spend was Fishing Development (net £6K) where CV19 had a severe impact on activity. Offsetting these three was £13K less income from contracts as yet again the removal of the Garlogie dam was postponed.

Balance Sheet:

There was little movement in the value of fixed assets as the sale of 25 Charlton Crescent did not complete until after the year end – 7th May to be precise. The sale price was £181,253 which compares to a value of £185,000 in the books at 31st March, 2021. Other Creditors remains a large figure with the bulk of this being the money received but not yet spent for the removal of the Garlogie Dam (£132K) and some £60K of advanced assessment payments arising from proprietors leaving refunds with the Board to be set against their 2021/22 assessment.

There were no questions on the accounts.

The accounts were noted as being duly considered by the proprietors.

5. 2022 Season

a. Assessment 2022

The presentation shows the assessment history. The Board has been fortunate in its ability to accommodate a discount on the assessment in the past couple of years giving proprietors some relief in the hard economic times occasioned by CV19. Looking ahead to a return to normality the discount will be removed. The onset of inflation means our costs are likely to rise but we have sufficient funds to cope with this for the time being so the assessment rate should, subject to review in the New Year, remain unchanged.

b. Conservation Code

The Conservation Code produced by the committee had agreed there should be no changes to last year's code but the order in which it was laid out had been changed.

If a copy of the Code is required it can be downloaded from the website -
<http://www.riverdee.org.uk/f/articles/Dee-Conservation-Code-2022.pdf>

6. Understanding river processes and the effects of river engineering

Alasdair Matheson, Senior Hydromorphologist from SEPA, gave a presentation on understanding river processes and the effects of river engineering to the meeting.

<http://www.riverdee.org.uk/f/articles/AGM-Presentation-2021-without-vid.pdf>

Q&A

Q. What is the timescale to hit the upper temperature range?

A. Up until 2080 to achieve the 4°C increase.

Q. Regarding the erosion caused by Storm Frank, what repairs can be done.

A. Storm Frank was a really significant event. Events like this have happened in the past and then gone through a period of settling down back to normal conditions. However, with the combination of Storm Frank and climate change it is tricky to give a trajectory.

If you consider climate change as energy then with large woody structures and bank tree planting this is a good mechanism to work through this energy.

Q. Since Storm Frank a massive amount of shingle has shifted materially changing pools and areas of fishing. It is tempting to want to remove the gravel. Are you saying it would be better to leave and let the river sort itself out? Who would give consent to remove the gravel?

A. From a morphologist's point of view there is no simple answer as there is a balance to be struck but yes, leave it to the river.

If you were to look into removing the gravel then SEPA would be the regulatory body, covering sediment management. There is an application process to remove although in general this is discouraged.

Q. After Storm Frank some areas are lacking boulders. If boulders were to be placed how would they affect the pools?

A. They will create scour but you need to be aware of the knock on effect. If you are looking for permission to place boulders you will need to apply through SEPA.

Q. Do wet summer days bring down river temperature?

A. Apologies, but this is not my field.

7. Agenda items from members of the Public

No agenda items had been received.

8. AOB

There was no other business.

Signed:



Carol Mair
Clerk to the Dee District Salmon Fishery Board

Date: 15th December 2021