



MEETING OF THE DEE DISTRICT SALMON FISHERY BOARD

**Banchory Lodge Hotel & MS Teams
5pm, Monday 27th September 2021**

Present: Lawrence Ross, (LR) Chairman
Victor Beamish, (VB)
Shane Christie, (SC)
Craig Fleming, (CF)
Sam Fleming, (SF)
Edward Humphrey, (EH)
Tara Spiers, (TS)
Craig Stewart, (CS)
Mike Wilson, (MW)

In attendance: Lorraine Hawkins, (LH)
Carol Mair, (CM)
Edwin Third, (ET)

Apologies: Gavin Clark
Andy Ford
Ian Murray
Scott Rutherford
Iain Wood

The Board were reminded of their responsibilities to the Dee DSFB and to state whether they had any declarable interests in agenda items.

LR thanked everyone for attending and welcomed Andy Ford, the Director of Nature & Climate Change at the Cairngorms National Park Authority. At the previous meeting Jos Milner represented CNPA but Andy will be the CNPA representative for the Board going forward. We look forward to Andy's contribution to our affairs.

1. Apologies

As tabled above.

2. Chairman's introduction

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.

Members may have noted that there is now a consistency in the photographic presentation of catches in the weekly report. Along with biosecurity which Lorraine will cover later, we have been pushing for better fish handling. One way of getting the message across is to censor pictures so that only those which meet our handling criteria get published. The photo protocol was agreed between Lorraine, Debbie, Al and Jamie. Compliance is now quite good and any beat that sends in pictures of anglers holding their catches up to the heavens etc is quietly reminded of the rules.

When we finalised our 2020-2025 Fisheries Management Plan we made a commitment to measure outcomes. As anyone with a business or management background well knows, there is truth in the statement that 'what gets measured gets done'. Although there has not yet been any explicit reporting on this at Board meetings I can assure you that the measuring is being done and the control document referred to at the previous meeting has been populated. I am working with Lorraine to produce a simple reporting format for the Board and this will be delivered at the next meeting.

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.

3. Minutes and Matters Arising from Meeting on 23rd June 2021

The minutes of the meeting 23rd June 2021 were approved.

Matters Arising

Any matters arising will be covered under agenda items.

4. Finance

a. Financial update to 31st August 2021

Income

- Assessment monies are being received.
- Garlogie – monies being deferred to 2022/2023.
- Projects are on track. Overall income will be higher than budgeted.
- Fisheries Development will receive £3,000 from DSFIA.

Income to date £362,052.

Expenditure

- River Improvement & Protection – Large woody structure costs will be matched by income.
- Professional legal costs – slightly higher than budget due to redundancy advice given in late 2019/2020.

Expenditure to date £211,321.

Bank balance at today is £461,000, including the Garlogie monies.

b. Draft accounts 2020/21

Result:

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 this good news, there remains room for improvement. Many of you will know that the Trust along with Fisheries Management Scotland (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). 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.

The Board members asked if there was inflationary contingency built into the Garlogie monies and also why has the work been delayed? ET confirmed that SEPA had flexibility to cover any cost increase. ET also advised that this requires many assessments and reports. Everything has to be done under the appointed engineer and response times can be slow. The project is complicated and can only be undertaken within the operation window, 15th August till 10th October.

As the meeting did not have the required quorum, the Board members present provisionally approved the accounts. It was agreed that LR would email the Board to obtain approval of the accounts.

ACTION: LR

c. Assessment 2022

The Board discussed if it was time to remove reductions on the assessment due to covid. It was felt that currently the annual charge should revert to 100% but agreed that as the situation was still fluid to wait till next year, pre-March, to assess the situation at that time.

d. Projects & Contracts

The budget expected income of £67,000 for projects and contracts. Since the budget was prepared, further income streams have been accessed.

Scottish Government - An application to the Biodiversity Challenge Fund (BCF) for £192,000 this year for work on the Muick was successful. A temporary member of staff was employed, Russell Baker. This will affect the salary figures in the budget but his salary costs are met by the project income.

Scottish Government – unfortunately the Nature Restoration Fund (NRF) decision for work to be undertaken on both the rivers Dee and Don, totalling £137,000, was delayed until late this year. As this did not give enough time, part of the proposed work had to be dropped. So now £36,000 of work will be undertaken on each of the rivers, resulting in 20,000 trees being planted in the upper Dee. Next year, funding should be available for a 3-year project, which we will need to prepare.

Dee Riparian Habitat Project (DRHP) – The DRHP Officers time has increased from 3 days per week to 3.5 days per week to deliver work on the River Geldie, to be reviewed at the end of December. This increase in cost has been fully funded by National Trust for Scotland.

Fisheries Development – 2 applications, totalling £10,000, have been submitted in relation to a communications project for spring fishing and to develop a new River Dee website.

CNPA- The CNPA were successful in receipt of a £12.5 million award for the Heritage Horizons project this summer. We would hope to see three or four projects delivered on the Dee catchment as part of this. Any staff time would be funded.

LR suggested that if short term contract staff were required to meet the project commitments, ET should make any relevant proposal to the Board.

5. Opening Ceremony

LH advised the Board that the opening ceremony would go ahead on 1 February 2022, but would be assessed again in relation to CV19 in January, prior to issue of invitations.

The two participants who raised the most funding for the Trust in the FishDee24 event, will take the first cast at the opening ceremony. The participants who have this honour are a teenage girl from Perthshire and a young female teacher from Deeside. This is great publicity to demonstrate angling for all.

The Trust will make their decision regarding a fundraising dinner (which has previously been held the night before the opening ceremony) later this week.

6. Biosecurity

The Board provide the disinfectant, and the requirement to disinfect is part of the Conservation Code, but the uptake is variable.

The Board discussed results from a questionnaire issued to proprietors, regarding disinfection uptake by their anglers. 40 responses were received to the questionnaire and these showed that some fishing beats do not consider it their responsibility to provide biosecurity to their anglers. Over the winter, it is planned to work on communications to press the message that we must all promote biosecurity -

- Regular communications updates on the issue.
- Information onto the websites.
- Include river users other than anglers in the communications.

In addition, a poster summarising the work of the Board and Trust and a FAQ-style document about their work will be distributed to ghillies, after being shared with the Board.

An easily accessible network of disinfection stations needs to be provided for river users.

7. Website

LH informed the Board;

- New website has been planned.
- A tender form has been prepared by Debbie Cooper and will be issued shortly.
- Current figures show that 50% of viewing of the website is on mobile phones, so the new website will be more "mobile friendly".
- A grant has been applied for to cover some of the new website costs.

8. River Office Report

The River Office Report had been issued to the Board members prior to the meeting.

An update was given on seals: Ghillies and anglers have been sending picture of seal damage and these have been shared with the Sea Mammals Research Unit (SMRU). Of the pictures assessed, 42% of damage was due to dolphins, 8% by lamprey and 50% could not be identified. We are still asking for pictures to be taken and forwarded for assessment.

Due to the change in law regarding seal licences, the Board did not apply for a seal licence this year. This would appear to have been a well-calculated decision as all licence requests in Scotland this year were rejected. This includes a licence application from an individual proprietor on the Dee. FMS has produced a joint letter requesting a meeting with Scottish Government to discuss the reasoning behind the blanket rejections.

The strategy moving forward is to put pressure on government to aid with developing non-lethal methods of deterrent.

VB suggested the licence for goosanders should be applied for earlier than currently, i.e. in September.

LH advised that this season's licence application is currently being reviewed. The application requests a start to the licence in mid-October.

Six bird counts are carried out each year – September/October/November and March/April/May. The amount covered by the licence is 15% of the average count.

The Board were reminded not to use all the licence numbers in the autumn as the application covers allowance for the spring too. However, the "shoot to scare" tactic should always be used throughout the season to stop the birds settling on the river.

9. Ghillies Representative

SC confirmed that any points raised by the ghillies had been covered in the River Office Report.

10. Next meeting

The next meeting for the Dee DSFB will be Wednesday 15th December 2021 at 10:00, venue and/or teleconference dependent on covid restrictions.

11. AOB

No further matters were raised.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'L Ross', with a stylized flourish above the name.

Signed.....

Date..... 15th December 2021

Lawrence Ross, Chairman