



MEETING OF THE DEE DISTRICT SALMON FISHERY BOARD
Deeside Rugby Club Pavilion at Woodend Playing Fields & MS Teams
10:00, Wednesday 15th December 2021

Present: Lawrence Ross, (LR) Chairman
Victor Beamish, (VB)
Gavin Clark, (GC)
Craig Fleming, (CF)
Sam Fleming, (SF)
Andy Ford, (AF)
Scott Rutherford, (SR)
Tara Spiers, (TS)
Mike Wilson, (MW)
Iain Wood, (IW)
Keith Young, (KY)

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

Apologies: Shane Christie
Edward Humphrey
Ian Murray
Craig Stewart

Members of public: Sandy Bremner

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

1. Apologies

As tabled above.

2. Chairman's introduction

There is nothing much to report on fishing activity since the last meeting. The season closed in unspectacular fashion reflecting the year as a whole. Spawning activity seems to have been sound – at about the same decent levels as last year although high water has hampered observation over the past few weeks.

There are two big themes running through today's proceedings – communication and habitat. In the former category this is both internal and external. Internally I would highlight reporting. The content of the River Office Report has been well developed in the past year such that it is clearly aligned to the goals of the Fisheries Management Plan and, as promised, we now have a report showing progress against the FMP itself. Externally, you will see that there has been and continues to be a lot of activity regarding the web site, education, ghillies and proprietors meetings, publicity and promotion of events and even old fashioned leaflets for anglers to explain what we do and why we do it.

On the habitat front, there is similarly a lot of activity. An ever increasing public and consequently political interest in the environment has created a situation where further funds are available to support the type of work that the Board and Trust are already engaged in. No doubt there will be many things done in the name of improving the environment and not all will be good. Nonetheless, we should make the most of this opportunity but remain true to the principles that we have established for restoration of the fishery and its environment.

3. Minutes and Matters Arising from Meeting on 27th September 2021

The minutes of the meeting 27th September 2021 were approved.

Matters Arising

Any matters arising will be covered under agenda items.

LR advised there was an action on him to gain Board approval for the accounts but actually we got the approval at the last meeting. The accounts are being signed today.

LR asked LH for an update on the Board's biosecurity message.

LH informed the Board that the biosecurity message will be in line with next years' biosecurity plan on the website. Signage will be accessible through the SISI project. We are currently taking stock of the proprietor's completed questionnaires.

4. Finance

a. Financial update to 31st October 2021

The financial update had been issued to the Board members prior to the meeting.

LH stated the income to 31st October of £497,546 was on track. Project income at the end of the financial year will be greater than budget due to new projects.

LH highlighted differences from the budget on expenditure to 31st October of £376,371.

- River Improvement & Protection
 - Garlogie, work deferred to next financial year
 - Dee Riparian Habitat, currently overspent but grant income will fully cover this
- Administration & Office
 - Computer/IT, costs greater than budget due to supplying equipment to accommodate home working and for the IT security report
 - Legal, increased cost due to redundancy advice (which fell into last year's budget but was billed late)

Balance of bank account as at today £333,887.

b. Projects & Contracts

LH advised we had been successful with the application to Business Gateway for website funding. All spend and paperwork requires to be completed before the end of the calendar year. We were not successful with the Visit Scotland Destination Grant.

Funding will be received from Palladium for small tree planting enclosures. Further funding will be received in years two and three.

Currently, shovel ready projects are being prepared to apply for Scottish Government Nature Restoration Funding once the fund re-opens. There is £55 million allocated to this fund over 5 years.

Board members asked if the tree planting can be used to provide the facility for people to offset their carbon footprint.

LH explained this had been looked into;

- Not our land used so not our carbon credit to sell
- Trees in the upper catchment grow slow and costs to plant are high, so our tree planting is not ideal for carbon offsetting – can offset more carbon through intensive planting in the lowlands.
- However, we are working with Riverwoods, a UK-wide support group to investigate options for carbon offsetting on Scottish rivers

c. Assessment

LR suggested that while there will undoubtedly be some objectors, there wasn't any great reaction at the AGM when it was mentioned that 22/23 would likely see a restoration of the full assessment – therefore this is the proposal.

5. Opening Ceremony

LH explained that currently the Opening Ceremony is still going ahead but will defer to Government guidelines in January for final decision. Invitations will be issued in the 2nd week of January.

The first cast will be taken by the two FishDee24 winners – Naomi Bell and Camryn Stewart.

Whisky expert Charles MacLean will launch the limited-edition whisky casks, which is a fundraising initiative between Burn O' Bennie Distillery and the Trust. Casks will sell for £10,000 and a significant donation will be made to the Trust from each cask.

The Trust's fundraising dinner – usually held before the Opening Ceremony - has been postponed until 2023.

LR informed the Board that there will be the first public performance of a Strathspey for the Dee, composed by Fergus Mutch.

6. FishDee24 - 2022

LH explained this had been launched at the end of last week. There was a press release announcing that Robson Green and Jim Murray will be taking part, and this will be filmed for their ITV fishing programme. Robson and Jim will make up a team of three with TS. The programme is keen to emphasize the mental health and wellbeing benefits of fishing.

We are looking to involve more fishing beats in this year's event and Debbie Cooper is working on this currently. Each participant has to raise a minimum of £500 which will be donated to the River Dee Trust. Participants will need to complete an expression of interest form saying why they want to be involved/fundraising capabilities/experience of fishing on the Dee, as we expect the event will be oversubscribed, and those chosen will be announced after the opening ceremony.

LR suggested that ways to compensate those not chosen could be by offering free or reduced fishing.

7. Communications

LH covered aspects of work to improve communications.

Ghillies	A meeting was held in November for them to voice concerns and ask questions. This will become an annual event. The feedback concerning communications means that the River Report will now be shared with them. A FAQ sheet will be handed out to them at the beginning of the fishing season and they were reminded that they could contact the River Office at any time with questions.
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Proprietors	Meetings for Lower, Middle and Upper proprietors are hoped to restart in January, depending on covid rules. Proprietors already receive the River Report.
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Website The new website will have a much bigger angling section for the Board and will also provide better access to information for supporters of the Trust.

The Annual Report is currently being prepared.

The Board acknowledged that with the poor fishing season, ghillies were concerned about jobs, so they need confidence in what the Board is doing for the river.

LR reminded the Board that although a suggestion of looking at ways to reduce the percentage of assessment on the overall income should be made, in real terms the percentage contribution has been decreasing over the previous 25 years, as detailed each year at the AGM/APM.

8. River Office Report

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

LH updated on water quality.

There is a general feeling of dissatisfaction on how pollution incidents and breaches in General Binding Rules are dealt with once they have been reported to SEPA. Three incidents were highlighted to Scottish Government to demonstrate the frustration. Government reverted to SEPA. Through FMS it is clear there is a lack of enforcement regarding pollution control and GBR breaches throughout Scotland. We intend to draw attention to any such issues in future with social media.

There is also concern regarding levels of pharmaceuticals in rivers. A study by researchers at the James Hutton Institute shows that some pharmaceuticals are at significant levels in the Dee. It also indicates that pharmaceuticals are in all our river systems. This is being highlighted as an emerging issue. In the Dee, these come primarily from water treatment plants and septic tanks. We have been in touch with the James Hutton Institute to offer fish monitoring if their current funding bid is successful. There is currently nothing in place for levels to be checked on a regulatory basis but it is expected that this will come in the future.

ET confirmed that Glen Muick had been completed on time and on budget. Currently now concentrating on developing future projects.

SR asked if there were plans to expand the education programme to a wider audience.

LH confirmed that visits to community groups would be undertaken, as well as hosting public meetings for wider audiences. The primary target is to involve 35 classes each year which we are exceeding and we are still trying to expand into secondary schools and academies.

9. FMP Progress

The FMP progress had been issued to the Board members prior to the meeting.

LH explained this was the first time this report has been produced to assess delivery of the management plan, thanks to LR for helping devise the format, and hopefully this is a fair summary and was happy to explain further detail to anyone.

LR stated the eventual outcome was the delivery of 156 objectives. Internally this would be produced quarterly and produced twice per year to the Board.

10. Habitat Restoration

The report outlining how the Board would upscale its habitat restoration had been issued to the Board members prior to the meeting. It described the need to increase the Riparian Habitat Advisers' working time to full-time to develop further habitat restoration projects and on the basis that the extra grant funding achieved would cover these extra costs. It also outlined the need for an extra staff member to assist with the monitoring and maintenance of the work.

LR asked the Board for any questions or observations.

- Public money for habitat restoration is key
 - Get ghillies involved
 - The Dee has been successful in attracting funds
- to replace the biodiversity fund
 - approach estates for work to be undertaken in the off season
 - funders might go elsewhere – but Dee has reputation for high quality work completed on time

VB will pass a report on water quality in England from Salmon & Trout Conservation to LH. A similar report is needed in Scotland.

LR asked if the Board were happy to proceed with the habitat restoration proposal as presented – to increase the Riparian Habitat Advisers working times, and to seek external funding so a Habitat Assistant could be employed.

There were no objections, and this was approved.

11. Ghillies Representative

SC was not present at the meeting.

12. Dates of 2022 meetings

Dee DSFB dates

21st March 2022

22nd June 2022

28th September 2022

14th December 2022

Meetings will be held at 10:00, venue and/or teleconference to be decided nearer the time.

AGM and APM

28th September 2022 at 19:00, venue and/or teleconference to be decided nearer the time.

Triennial

1st September 2022, venue and/or teleconference to be decided nearer the time.

13. AOB

LR informed the Board that the FishPal migration of online activities has taken place over the last couple of days. The email notification has to be fixed.

SF explained that SEPA had concerns over the Board's call to people to report incidents directly to the Board. SEPA have specially trained staff to take down the information and there is a real risk that SEPA won't get the proper information to give the outcome the Board is looking for. This will interfere in the pollution reporting progress. SEPA appreciates the Board's concerns but cannot prioritise a low risk on the Dee over a high risk elsewhere. Creating an emotional public response does not help SEPA do its job.

The Board responded that they want people to report to SEPA but to inform the Board as well so it can follow up to check on what action is taken. This feeling is not just from the Dee but is part of an initiative through FMS with other Boards as incidents do not appear to be dealt with in any particular timeframe and often there appears to be no outcome.

SF explained that SEPA is still working under covid restrictions and still suffering from the cyber attack problems. SEPA would prefer to work with the Board constructively. There needs to be a degree of acceptance that at the current time SEPA is not able to give full assistance.

The Board explained that this is not a criticism of the local officers, with whom we have a good relationship, but is instead aimed at a higher level within SEPA to show them that we require more local officers to attend incidents. The message in effect is really for Government to deal with this situation.

LH asked for information on the announcement from Scottish Government on beavers.

GC, although not directly involved in this programme, stated there would be a national beaver strategy in place before any translocations were approved. Workshops are planned for February/March. FMS is closely involved, representing the angling view. There is an existing process for translocation and this will be expanded to include beavers. Population modelling will be done re the spread/habitat/dam effect on fish migration.

AF explained that an assessment on beaver arrival in an area by natural means had been started a year ago. This looks at suitable habitat and mitigation of bank erosion and effect on species. The assessment is nearly finished, but it looks like natural spread is unlikely due to hostile terrain. The recent government announcement is regarding translocation so the CNPA are now looking at the report from a different angle but this will serve as a body of evidence for any applications. Dam modifications and removal are already under mitigation in the existing process. Consultations will be made on applications. Beavers are herbivores therefore they do not eat salmon.

KY updated the Board on the harbour works:

The south breakwater is complete, this was started in April. Work is now mainly a land-based operation with very little still to do in the marine environment.

The works are on programme for substantial completion by the end of October next year, with only small jobs to finalise after this. It is hoped to have boats in by then.

KY reminded the Board that the Harbour Board have a statutory obligation to dredge and are aware of the Board's concerns of the effect on smolt migration. They have to deal with bathing water restrictions too, regarding the potential of anything being dredged being detrimental to bathing. The Harbour Board have good talks with SEPA and the Dee Board. The effect of storm conditions drops materials into the channel which the Harbour Board need to manage as quickly as possible. This cannot be done over winter.



Signed.....

21/03/22
Date.....

Lawrence Ross, Chairman