



Dee District Salmon Fishery Board

MEETING OF THE DEE DISTRICT SALMON FISHERY BOARD

Teleconference

10:00hrs, Thursday 18th March 2021

Present:	Lawrence Ross, Chairman (LR) Victor Beamish (VB) Will Boyd-Wallis (WBW) Shane Christie (SC) Gavin Clark (GC) Edward Humphrey (EH) Ian Murray (IM) Scott Rutherford (SR) Tara Spiers (TS) Craig Stewart (CS) Mike Wilson (MW) Iain Wood (IW) Keith Young (KY)
In attendance:	Lorraine Hawkins (LH) Carol Mair, Clerk to the Board (CM) Edwin Third (ET) Flora Grigor-Taylor (FGT)
Apologies:	Craig Fleming (CF) Sam Fleming (SF) Robert Harper (RH)
Public:	Sandy Bremner

The Board members 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

The fishing season commenced on time but has hardly got going. Winter's grip hampered activity in February and the coronavirus restrictions have limited affairs in March. Regardless, it seems that fish are few and far between and among the limited numbers that have been caught there has recently been a high percentage of damaged fish – seals and dolphins taking their toll. In addition, in river incursions by seals are regularly disrupting fishing activity in the lower river beats. The seal problem is being addressed albeit there is no overnight fix. Lorraine will talk about this later.

There is quite an amount of financial matter to deal with at this meeting starting with the predicted outturn for the year which will be better than budget. The assessment needs to be set and the proposal for it forms the cornerstone of the budget for the year to come. On the assessment, I can report that we have essentially cleared all of the adjustments which arose from the 2016 revaluation. There are a few beats where ownership has changed thus making collection of arrears a challenging exercise. I think that we will get full recovery in all cases bar one. Some proprietors who were due

a refund have rolled over to offset against this coming year's assessment. Although we are not short of cash, this has been helpful and is appreciated.

I sometimes feel that work done by the river office is not fully understood and that if it were then board members could help broadcast the good news. I recall that a year or so ago when the million trees campaign was launched it came as rather a surprise that we had already planted something like 200,000. Lorraine, prompted by Will, produced a map showing where the work had been done. For me this was really helpful so I thought that it was time to have another briefing on a specific activity. Page 13 of the Annual Review highlights the work done in the last three years by our Riparian Habitat Advisors – Flora and Steff. Figures are quoted such as '22km of fenced buffer strips' and '64 instream waterings'. This all sounds good but do we have sufficient grasp of the context and detail to be able to tell others all about this work? I doubt it. Accordingly, Flora is going to give a short presentation on their work after which you can ask questions.

Before asking Flora to speak, let's just deal with minutes and matters arising.

3. Minutes & Matters Arising from Meeting on 16th December 2020

The minutes of the meeting 16th December 2020 were approved.

Matters Arising

The only matter arising which I see that is not covered elsewhere concerns the promise to give more detail on the measurement system for the actions in the FMP. The document is in place and the measurement criteria have been set by the individuals responsible for the actions. However, we are behind with populating the document with the measurement data. This exercise should be completed next month.

One other small point concerns the new banking approval system – VB responded that he had received the copy bank statements and was satisfied with the content.

4. Diffuse Pollution presentation

FGT gave a presentation on diffuse pollution.

FGT left the meeting after the presentation.

5. Finance

a. Financial update to 31st January 2021 and predicted outturn

Being so close to the year end, we will just move to the predicted outturn. Lorraine will start with a detailed review of the figures.

Income

Assessments Collections on track.

Property Rent relief granted due to covid. Tenancy ended 1st November 2020.

Sundry Ythan goosander licence application.

Contracts Don SLA – payment received.
 Dee Catchment Partnership - did not go ahead this year due to covid.
 Garlogie – monies have been received but will be carried forward to next year as covid prevented any work being undertaken.
 Beltie – netted payment shown accounts for staff time

Projects	Dee Riparian Habitat – this includes donation monies to support the Riparian Officers positions from CNPA, the Wirths and the River Dee Trust. Also, monies from BCF 1 & 2 which includes purchase of trees and staff time. Further funding given by CNPA Green Recovery Fund and monies for work on River Muick.
Fisheries Development	Events - £3,000 received from DSFIA will be carried forward to next financial year due to covid restrictions this year. DFDO – it was agreed to reduce the original figure of £10,000 to £5,000 due to covid restrictions this year.

The predicted income will be £506,873

Expenditure

Staff costs	Salaries – expected cost for life assurance benefit will not be notified till next financial year. Recruitment costs – Refer to Development Officers position
Property	Maintenance contract not yet signed over to Mackinnons.
Policing & Predator	Purchase of drone and bodycams.
Research & Monitoring	Garlogie – as detailed in income. Dee Riparian Habitat and Large Woody Structures (LWS) – costs increased due to work now undertaken under BCF2.
Fisheries Development	Due to covid nothing could be achieved this year for events. Legacy money of £4,000 to be carried forward to the next financial year.
Admin & Office costs	Health & Safety – medicals postponed. Budget to be carried forward. Vehicles – costs slightly lower due to less use under covid restrictions. Office – overall costs reduced from those budgeted due to less use under covid restrictions. Meetings – not permissible under covid restrictions. Professional costs are on track. Public Relations photography costs reduced due to covid restrictions. Training – courses cancelled due to covid regulations.

The predicted expenditure will be £632,886

There is a predicted deficit of £126,000 which is reduced from the budget figure of £158,000

Two vans were replaced this year and a new 4 x 4 will be required next year and will be covered under section c).

The bank balance this week is £258K. £125K of this belongs to the Garlogie Dam removal project. The cash deficit for the year is expected to be £108K which is £42K better than budget. We have attracted almost £90K more habitat work than expected and in the process gained a little more cost recovery in executing it. Flora and Steff are now employed on permanent contracts, albeit part time, to have them in a stable position and help us get more work. This has paid dividends. It was never the plan that the board would give their time freely but rather try to recover their cost by charging time within the project or seeking pure donations of financial support. The payroll of Flora and Steff will have been recovered in full this year – mostly through donations and here in particular we should thank the CNPA for its regular contribution. Because of the Board's commitment, the river stands a better chance of attracting funded work and the third party funders get that work delivered more cheaply than if they were to go to the open market where a commercial enterprise would charge labour hours at a multiple of cost.

EH asked what the £5,000 outturn under River Office property was for.

LH confirmed this mostly referred to a loft ladder, hand dryer in the toilet and replacement desk chairs.

b. Assessment

Some reserves have been used to provide lower assessment and thus relieve proprietors of pain caused by poor catches and more recently coronavirus. The Dee is fortunate in having been able to do this. Some other rivers have given some relief but at nothing like the level that we have. With coronavirus restrictions eating into another season we can offer one more round of relief but then we should stop. That money ought to be spent on the river.

LR proposed that for 2021/22 we offer a 20% discount which is a cost of £83K to the board. The assessment income would be £333K and this is the basis upon which the 21/22 budget is built. We should complete the sale of the rental property at 25 Charlton Crescent, Aboyne. This was advertised only last week at an asking price of £160K and already has fourteen viewing appointments and three notes of interest.

Looking further ahead, LR suggested that the Board restore the assessment to the full level (£416K) and add 5% so that in 2022/23 the income would be £437K. In inflationary terms this would still be well below the peak year of 1990.

The Board members discussed the proposal for a 20% reduction for 2021/21 and this was approved by all.

The Board members discussed the proposal to increase the current full level assessment (£426K) by 5% in the year 2022/23.

- Proprietors need to be aware of the work undertaken on the river by the Board. Information is sent to them, but do they read and understand it. Disseminating this information would fall to the wider remit of the Development and Promotions Officer.
- Rod selling will not have increased.
- Many appeals were made at the previous revaluation.
- An increase of 5% would need to be discussed closer to any proposed implementation.

It was agreed that the proposed increase of 5% would need to be discussed.

c. Draft Budget 2021-22

The draft budget had been issued to the Board members prior to the meeting.

LH presented the draft budget Highlighting main areas of income and expenditure.

Income

Assessments	The 20% discount assumed in the budgeted figure.
Property	All rents are aligned to current market rates.
Contract	Don SLA increased by inflation rate. Dee Catchment Partnership will not take place this year. Garlogie will be delivered in this financial year
Projects	The Dee Riparian Habitat budget includes regular contributions from CNPA and the River Dee Trust. The first year of the Woodland Trust project is also included which is £40,000 – split £10,000 for staff costs and £30,000 for trees and infrastructure. Further funding has been applied for under BCF and Peatland Action Programme but is currently not included in the budget figure. The Pearls in Peril land management agreements are now finished. No income is guaranteed for the LWS but an application has been made under the BCF3 phase for 30 structures.
Fisheries Development	FishDee £10,000 has been budgeted but this may reduce.

The budgeted income is £615,000

Expenditure

Staff costs	Figure includes redundancy support and payment for the DFDO position.
Property	Takes account of Mackinnons factoring fees.
Policing & Predator	Includes camera costs.
River Improvement	Garlogie – SEPA is covering staff time cost, £7,000. Dee Riparian Habitat spend is the Woodland Trust and River Dee Trust tree monies. LWS – committed to 30 LWS each year, £20,000. General costs increased to £5,000 for weather affected repairs.
Fisheries Development	Opening ceremony budgeted and hope this will be able to go ahead.
Admin & Office costs	Mobile phones – due to be replaced this year. Health & Safety – previously cancelled trainings to be undertaken this year. Motor costs are standard. Office costs lower for phone and meetings. Professional costs are higher to allow for redundancy assistance. Public Relations show the cost of a new website, which is shared equally with the River Dee Trust.
Depreciation	£13,600

The budgeted expenditure is £755,000.

The budget for next year shows a cash deficit of £137K. As noted, we can fund this from the property sale but thereafter we need to stop operating at a cash loss (and indeed an absolute loss after depreciation), hence the need to restore the assessment to normal levels for 2022/23. Doing that would eliminate most of the deficit but to get to a balanced budget we would need to either cut some costs or attract more income. Our current guess is that we could achieve the latter.

SR asked if the website costs would be put out to tender. This was confirmed and the Board members were asked for any further recommendations.

EH asked for the FishDee contribution to be reduced to £5,000 for 2021/22. This was agreed.

The budget presented, reduced by £5,000 income re FishDee, was approved.

6. Staffing

LH informed the Board that Debbie Cooper had been recruited for the Development and Promotions position and will start on 1st April. She has had many years of experience and we are delighted to have her on board.

Redundancy consultation has been started with Ross McDonald, considering redundancy as a last resort. Ross was informed on 16th March. Ross has remained engaged throughout the process. He has been with us for seven years and has contributed a lot to angling development on the river.

LR formally thanked Ross and the Dee is trying to find other areas of employment for him. If anyone has any ideas could they please let LH know.

There will be a replacement system for the weekly reports till Debbie starts with us.

7. Covid-19 impacts

LH informed the Board members that lack of Government support has been disappointing.

Fisheries Management Scotland (FMS) has written to the Cabinet Secretary and raised questions. Scottish Government does not regard fishing as a priority during covid.

Unfortunately, our two key government representatives have been unavailable due to illness.

FMS understand that 2021 will be challenging and are working with Scottish Government to secure a financial package but it is unclear if this will be successful.

EH left the meeting, due to other commitments, at this point.

8. River Office Report

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

LH highlighted the report and asked the Board members for questions.

SR asked what the Board can put in place to minimise the risk of fish disease by providing disinfection facilities if there is no ghillie on a beat to ensure this is done. Are anglers expected to go to disinfections stations?

ET confirmed that the Board provide all the necessary equipment but cannot oversee how it is used.

LH informed the Board that Jamie Urquhart is conducting a survey with the Fishery Officers to see what is being undertaken by the beats.

WBW thanked the River Office for the amazing amount of work undertaken.

9. Ghillies Representative

SC asked the Board if smolt tracking studies on other rivers have similar results?

LH informed that in 2019 average in river losses on other rivers, conducted by the Atlantic Salmon Trust (AST), were 50%, not dissimilar to our own findings. Funding for tagging was stopped in 2020 due to covid and may be deferred till next year.

If the goosander results showed they are not eating smolts then what are they eating?

LH confirmed that on the Dee the goosander is our most significant predator so the results will need to be clarified.

LH informed the Board members that the AST were giving good information at a national level and government recognise that salmon is under threat. Twelve areas of concern were highlighted by Scottish Government, with one being predation. Support needs to be provided.

10. Next meeting

The next Dee DSFB meeting will take place on Wednesday 23rd June at 10:00, by teleconference.

11. AOB

IM asked, with the flood at the end of February, Ballater, should the Board be more pro-active as the river is moving back to its original course. Good spawning areas have been lost. The Storm Frank bunding has failed. This needs to be resolved before the situation gets worse.

ET responded;

- He has walked the river to see, since it changed its course.
- He has supplied the estate concerned with the name of a flood consultant.
- He has given written comments to the Ballater Flood Scheme.
- The river has moved to its original channel.
- Extra pressure is required for pressure flood protection.
- He has been involved and is happy to meet on site with anyone to give the view of the Fishery Board.

CF asked if the trees will take water away from the river in times of low flow?

ET confirmed there are not enough trees planted to have that effect.

SB stated communication with public and politicians is needed to make them care about salmon. We are working with AST and the Missing Salmon Alliance. The trees campaign created a bridge to get people to understand.

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

Signed.....

23rd June 2021

Date.....

Lawrence Ross, Chairman