



MEETING OF THE DEE DISTRICT SALMON FISHERY BOARD

Deeside Rugby Pavilion and Teams, Banchory

10am, Thursday 25th September 2025

Present:

Qualified proprietors: Lawrence Ross, (LR) Chairman
Paul Adderton, (PA)
Victor Beamish, (VB)
Jeremy Clayton, (JC), by Teams
Edward Humphrey, (EH)

Co-optee: Martin Gardner, (MG), by Teams

Invitees: Ali McEwan, (AM) – Ghillies Representative
Isla Martin, (IM) – NatureScot

In attendance: Lorraine Hawkins, (LH)
Carol Mair, (CM), Clerk to the Board, by Teams
Edwin Third, (ET)
Joe Whyte, (JW)

Apologies: Andy Ford, (AF) - CNPA
Scott Rutherford, (SR)
Bob Sanguinetti, (BS)
Craig Stewart, (CS) – Aberdeenshire Council
Andrew Walker-Okeover, (AWO)

Members of public: William Foster, (WF)

The Board wished to discuss a matter it deemed to be confidential, so the Members of the Public and Invitees were asked to leave.

[Closed session]

[End of closed session].

1. Apologies

Apologies as noted above.

2. Chair's Introduction

The Chair welcomed the first full Meeting of the new Board.

The newly elected Qualified Proprietors held a meeting on 4th September to co-opt the Angling Representative. The Qualified Proprietors and the Angling Representative now constitute the Dee DSFB. A Clerk was appointed and the Board agreed to invite representatives from organisations we work closely with - CNPA, NatureScot, and Aberdeenshire Council, and the Ghillies Representative. All are unchanged faces from those invited to attend the last Board's meetings.

At that meeting on 4th September, Members were alerted to the fact that William Foster was in arrears of assessment. The normal course of action with any Proprietor in this position is to instruct solicitors to pursue payment. However, William is now not only a Proprietor but has been voted on to the Board. The other Members agreed to give William a period of two weeks in which to agree a plan to settle all of his outstanding payments by 31st March 2026. Although some of the amount in arrears has been paid no plan for clearing the remainder has been submitted. The remaining

Board Members are within their rights to suspend a Board Member who is in arrears of Assessment and this they agreed to in the preceding Closed Session. Accordingly, William was suspended from the meeting and until his arrears are settled in full. He was allowed to remain in the room in the capacity as a member of the public so he could not participate in discussion or ask questions.

All new Boards are required to undergo an induction into 'Good Governance'. However, Fisheries Management Scotland (FMS), the umbrella organisation for Boards and Trusts (where Edward Humphrey is a Board Member) is issuing updated guidance on Good Governance. Today's next session is able to incorporate the updates so all Members should pay full attention. The Board were asked if anyone had any declarable interests in the agenda items.

There were no declarations made.

3. Induction

The Board were asked to go through the online materials when they receive them in the near future, in the meantime, LH led the new Board through the induction presentation.

There was discussion with JC on the conflict of interest with the DSFIA letter to be discussed later in the meeting, as he is a DSFIA committee member and signatory to the letter. It was agreed that while he would be able to join discussion on the general topics the letter raised, he would not be permitted to frame the response from the Board.

The Board were asked to get back to LH by 10th October to submit their new, or updated, images for the website along with the short biography they want with it.

It was emphasised that all Fishery Boards must focus on good governance, not just the Dee. Otherwise, we run the risk of being dismantled by government.

4. Minutes and Matters Arising from meeting on 3rd July 2025

Minutes of the meeting 3rd July 2025

The minutes of the last meeting have been circulated, approved and published.

Matters Arising

The only action noted was the Clerk to issue revised assessments following the finalisation of appeals to the assessor. This has been actioned.

5. Finance

a. Financial Update to 31st August 2025

Income

- We are on track with the Don SLA of £55,886 and the payment from the Trust of £15,000 for the Fisheries Development Officer's time, about to be paid.
- Project income is where we would expect it to be at this stage of the year.
- StS income is where we have concern, we must raise funds here and so this is the focus now.
- Total income of £373,166.

Expenditure

- The Don SLA is reviewed every 5 years. During the term it is increased each year by RPI %.
- With 3 of the leased vehicles still outstanding, we are below budget on the leasing costs. Due to this, our maintenance costs have been higher than expected. In the long run the maintenance costs of our vehicles will be dwarfed by the savings made from leasing and overall, we will end below budget.
- Total expenditure of £360,367.
- Cash in bank as of yesterday was £87,367, plus £100,000 in the instant-access cash management account.

b. Projects & Contracts

- We have 3 big projects with a combined cost of over £300,000 this year, all funded externally.
 - The Nature Restoration Fund (NRF) is funding the LWS installations in the Upper Dee, and the Leuchar restoration project.
 - The Culter Dam removal is being funded by the Open Rivers Programme.
- We have applied for an additional £34,000 to do a modelling exercise for the flooding impact around the Culter Dam removal. The decision will be made in November.
- All of these grant projects are to be completed by March 2026.
- We are applying for £85,000 from NRF for restoration work at Glenmuick relating to conifer woodland.
- We are also developing projects under Save the Spring with £100,000 of StS funding, these are:
 - Flood channel restoration on the Muick, which was completed last week.
 - Restoring fish access to the Ey Gorge, completed in August.
 - Developing riparian fencing and tree planting at Crathie.
 - Designing the removal of the flood banks and floodplain restoration at the Girnock – subject to approval by the estate.
 - Designing the restoration of the Clarack burn in Dinnet.
- The catchment audit was given funding of £145,000 by the CNPA to complete this calendar year. This is all given to the Trust under StS. £64,000 of this has already been awarded to a consultant to develop a flow model and determine the restoration measures required.
- For information, the Trust have also submitted an application to Scottish Power for £131,000, this would be for the Board to deliver restoration work in Glenmuick.
- The Trust is also awaiting the decision on the application to Marine Fund Scotland (MFS) for £18,000 to fund automatic temperature data loggers.
- IM is optimistic the funding will continue despite the current landscape. Given the Dee and the Esk are 2 pilot areas for the government, we should be in a good position to acquire more funding.
- All of these applications are competitive and by no means easy. We only get this funding due to the work the team puts in.

c. Assessment 2026-27

- LR clarified that right now we are just looking for ideas regarding the assessment, not a final decision.
- There was discussion over keeping the assessment the same, which would mean in real terms it would be falling as there would be no increase to match inflation.
- Concern was noted over avoiding an increase. We may be ‘kicking the can down the road’, and in the future we may require a substantial increase.
- It’s important to be shown to be investing in the river at a time of crisis, otherwise we will be putting out a poor image to the public.
- EH confirmed that FMS is reviewing the basis for funding Fishery Boards.
- We shall continue to look for ways to ameliorate the burden of the assessment.

6. Fisheries Management Plan (FMP)

- This new FMP would be for the period of 2026-2030. This is an opportunity to outline the Board’s priorities for the next 5 years.
- This is joint with the Trust, but it is focused on being a Fisheries plan, so it doesn’t necessarily include all of the Trust’s remit.
- The last FMP had too many actions – 112. Some of those points didn’t stand the test of time. The aim is to have this new plan as a simpler, guiding document.
- We will be contacting and canvassing all of the proprietors to get their input. Not all suggestions may be included, but all thoughts would be heard.
- We will urge proprietors to ask questions and speak to the ghillies too.
- One of the problems we face is that a number of the proprietors have little interest in engaging with the work that goes on in the river. This is why it’s important that the electrofishing and walk and talks continue, so that we can engage proprietors as well as the public where, and when, we can.

7. DSFIA Letter

- Due to JC having a conflict of interest in this agenda item, he took no part in the discussion.
- The draft response had been sent out to the Board prior to the meeting. The Board was asked for their thoughts on the response before it is sent.
- LR noted that none of the suggestions proposed in the letter's conservation strategy can be done and asks what the DSFIA want the Board to do differently from what it did after the 2 stocking reviews. The DSFIA wish to proceed in a way that isn't actually possible.
- It was suggested that the Board and DSFIA meet to try and find common ground, though the Board aren't accountable to the DSFIA and it should avoid repeatedly going over old ground.
- Most of what was written in the letter is in fact being done, just not on a timescale that the DSFIA committee accept.. Often, we are restricted by government on our ability to respond and deliver, so we have to work within their timeframe.
- If successful, the Conservation Translocation aspect of StS could be transformational for the whole country.
- Regarding the assessment, if it needs to be reviewed in the future then that's fine, but there is very little fat left to trim, we need to have the income to deliver the work we do.
- It was agreed that the response is acceptable and addresses the points made. LR/LH are able to meet with the DSFIA if requested.

8. Conservation Code 2026

- The Conservation Code group met recently to discuss the 2026 code. The members of this group are:
 - Scott Rutherford
 - Martin Gardner
 - Jamie Trembath
 - Jordan Sinclair
 - Andrew Walker-Okeover
 - Al Reeve
- The focus of this discussion was the length of the fishing season and the fact that it differs above and below the Aboyne bridge.
- The group agreed that this difference was effectively a 2-tier system, when the whole river can legally fish from 1st February to 15th October. The group restricted its advice purely to conservation while acknowledging there would also be an economic impact to consider.
- Due to the spawning season expanding, running from earlier in the year to later in the year, there are concerns for gravid fish being handled in October throughout the river, especially as fish could remain in the river longer due to low flows in the summer.
- Given the risks of harm that come from handling close to spawning, the group agreed the fishing season could be brought back to a finish on 30th September. The fishing season start could also begin on 1st February for the whole river, as there was no conservation value to avoiding February and water temperatures would be better for fish handling.
- Due to the economic impact this would have on beats, the Board agreed to leave the Code as it stands but reduce the promoting from the office of fishing in October by lowering the number of media posts made and pictures uploaded in that time.

9. FishDee

- Currently the number of fish reported through FishDee is a third of what we had last year.
- In terms of bookings through FishDee, we had a stronger start than last year, however our bookings from April onward slowed massively.
- For the year to 21st September, we have 807 bookings and 1,542 rods booked. Last year, we had 921 bookings and 1,712 rods booked. This amounts to around a 10% decrease over last year and given the season we have had, is not as bad as expected.
- FishDee has given beats incredible visibility with 235,000 sessions on Dee-related pages this year.
- FishDee have also partnered with a Scandinavian company, Elveguden, the largest booking platform in Scandinavia. The website will be gradually rebranding and improved to give a better functionality for fisheries to manage listings.
- Regarding the marketing aspect, FishPal have offered content packages to beats on the Dee to update their listings with professional photography and video content.

- FishPal are also updating the reporting system to give more accurate catch data. This might help improve how the data is transferred to the Marine Directorate.

10. Save the Spring (StS)

- The maturing fish at Machrihanish are being returned to the river Muick over the next few weeks. Over 70 of the 80 fish there are maturing this year as grilse, though they are smaller than usual (ranges between 1-4lbs), as typical of captive rearing.
 - They will be returned in 2 batches to avoid risk, by a professional transporter.
 - The health checks have already been completed.
 - Once returned, they will be held in cages in the River Muick for a couple of days, then radio tagged and monitored before being released from the cages. We will be tracking them over October and November and we hope to locate the fish in spawning grounds.
 - We will be visited by Claire Speedie, the head of Salmon & Recreational Fisheries Team at Scottish Government, in early October to talk about StS.
 - John Armstrong will also be visiting again to see the tracking of the fish.
 - As all eyes are on this work for the implications it could have across river catchments, we can be confident our approach to getting government and agencies supportive of this trial is the correct one.
 - While we thought it would be interesting to keep a couple of fish back to grow them on further for another year, we agreed that from a fish welfare point of view this shouldn't be done and this was the position of the University of Stirling.
 - JC requested LH calculate what effect the smaller size of fish has on the egg production and survival rate.
- Action: LH**
- The low water levels have affected our choice of release site for these fish, they will now be held in the mainstem of the Muick.
 - Our second batch of fish have had 100% survival to date (100 fish).

11. Predation

- There has been a lot of seal communications recently including emails and discussions over social media. We are wary of the push to get public interest on this issue with newspaper articles and magazines. Even more so when we aren't warned in advance.
- We have tried seal scaring tactics for years, but they are ineffective depending on the individual seal. These tactics include catapults, paintballs and loud noises. We have also invested in Acoustic Deterrent Devices (ADD), with up to 4 in the river at a time used in conjunction with canoes and jet skis, which again was proven ineffective.
- We have been recording seal sightings, including identifying and recording individual resident seals, and what actions were taken.
- Feedback from an application this year showed that NatureScot sees seal control as unnecessary. This has been flagged to the Marine Directorate and FMS as a major misconception, but this issue won't be resolved quickly.
- A detect and deter system has been trialled on the Esk over the last two winters. This uses a sonar to detect the seals, which triggers a noise when the seal gets close. This is different from previous ADDs as the noise only triggers when the seal is close enough to fully hear it, so the seals shouldn't habituate to the detect and deter system.
- We are working with the SMRU on developing a funding application for developing a similar system on the Dee. This would require 2 sonars given the width of the Dee which will need to work in tandem with each other.
- We submitted this application in July and are still awaiting a decision. If successful then trials will begin in October, December and January at Waterside Farm and the focus of these trials will be to develop the 2 sonars working together.
- We aren't expecting 100% effectiveness, but any significant improvement will be huge given where we are currently.
- There have been suggestions about a physical barrier in the lower river. Whilst this option isn't ruled out, we see it as difficult due to the potential risks around it acting as a barrier to fish, leading to an increase in fish being subject to predation. There is no effective seal barrier developed, worldwide.
- Going forward, it will be communicated clearly what is being done. Any comments claiming we are ignoring the problem is simply unfounded. If we are successful with our funding application, we will make a public announcement to anglers and the general public. This would be done with caution and care.

- There was question on how far down the river would the seals be moved after hearing the ADD, this is unknown. It remains to be tested if one of the most habituated seals will be affected by the deterrent.
- LR informed the Board that if we find a working solution, funding would be sought and potentially could fund it ourselves through the potential sale of assets.

12. River Report

The River Report was distributed to the Board members and invitees prior to the meeting.

- The installation of the Large Woody Structures (LWS) was completed on 22nd August. We have looked for other conservation projects and quotes since then.
- The work to restore the flood channel at Sterin on the Muick was completed as of last Friday.
- We are finishing the removal of the Garlogie Dam project which started on 22nd September, with the aim to have it finished by 15th October.

13. Ghillies Representative

- AM had looked at other UK conservation projects that used captive-bred stock for release and asked what the difference is between the genetics of salmon and the other conservation projects being promoted that explains the differing viewpoint on its efficacy. Other projects promote the use of captive-bred stock. The main difference would be retaining as many aspects of growing in the wild as possible, but we are also at a place where we don't have another option.
- AM referenced previous statements by LR that we are selling fishing, not catching. AM questioned LR on his understanding of a fishery, as the definition of one is "a place where fish are caught in large quantities". The Dee is failing on fish numbers and has a decreasing customer base due to this. AM emphasised as a Board there is a duty to protect the Dee fishery as part of its remit, and we are failing to do so.
- AM requested LR take back previous libellous claims made by email sent to the Board, in response to a complaint letter from the Ghillies Group, that AM was trying to sabotage StS. AM said this had no basis and would not be accepted and suggested it was said to try and blacken his name. LR declined to retract the statements.

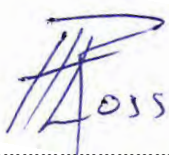
14. AOB

- Regarding the property in Aboyne, we are still getting quotes for work that we might want to do if we were to keep the property for let. It is basically in good condition and there is little property for rent in the locality so it should find a tenant quickly. However, the Board may wish to take cash from a sale if it has things it wishes to do with that money. EH suggested keeping the property for now. This was agreed to by VB, MG and PA. A final decision will be made once we have all of the work quotes.
- An update was asked for on the Girnock trap. There was no update to give, but it is still considered to be an impediment for fish.
- EH met with the CEO of FMS, who has offered to speak at the AGM on 29th October.
- The ADAA has done 4 press releases, which have been good PR for the river.
- The ADAA bothy is also getting upgraded, now it would be a good location for the Trust's education work or Board meetings. ET was invited to give his presentation on the beginnings of the Dee at this new bothy.

The meeting concluded at 12:36pm.

The next meeting is the AGM at 19:00 on 29th October.

The next board meeting will be at 10:00am on 11th December.



Signed.....
Lawrence Ross, Chairman

Date..... 15/10/25