

**Fisheries Management Scotland**  
**Meeting minutes**  
**31 March 2020**



**By videoconference**

**Directors present**

Richard Sankey (Chairman)  
Alison Baker  
Roger Brook  
Chris Conroy  
Brian Doran  
Lorraine Hawkins  
Alasdair Laing  
Peter Landale  
Mary Nicholson  
David Summers  
Bill Whyte

**In attendance**

Alan Wells, Chief Executive  
Brian Davidson, Director of Communications & Administration  
Sean Dugan, Manager, SFCC

**Apologies for absence**

Douglas Dobie

**1. Welcome**

The Chairman welcomed all to the meeting and noted the apology from Douglas Dobie. A welcome was extended to Sean Dugan from SFCC.

**2. COVID-19 impacts**

**2.1. Staff Working Arrangements**

The Chairman reported that all staff are working from home for the foreseeable future. Health and safety responsibilities for home workers apply in the same way as office-based workers and the staff are working through guidelines from the Health and Safety Executive to ensure their workspace is suitable. Staff are being supported to make this transition as smooth as possible. In terms of communications, staff are keeping in regular contact through video conference, phone calls and e-mail.

**2.2. Finance and staff resources**

The Chairman reflected that this is a very difficult time for anyone involved in fisheries management, and a very uncertain time for staff across the sector. Brian and Alan have

been in regular contact with the Scottish Government, and Alan has written to the Cabinet Secretary highlighting the issues that our community is facing. **ACTION: BD**

There was a focussed discussion around the COVID-19 emergency and the significant impacts on members of Fisheries Management Scotland. A key priority is to make the case for financial support for our members. It was agreed that as a priority, Fisheries Management Scotland should highlight available emergency funding opportunities that may potentially ease the current financial difficulties for members. This should include both Government and third sector schemes. Alan and Brian are in regular discussion with Scottish Government about how the current schemes fit with the sector's immediate needs, and a briefing has been provided to demonstrate the impact on the sector. Urgent clarity is being sought, for example, on whether business rates relief and cash grants provisions might apply to the fisheries sector, and this is being actively considered within Scottish Government.

Staff will continue to circulate current advice from Government and ensure that it is tailored to the activities within the sector and identifies specific implications for organisations and staff. It is clear that members are having to take difficult decisions in relation to staff and finance, including utilising the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme. Guidance has been circulated on this and further, more detailed, guidance is being developed, at the request of some members, to support the fisheries management community in their decision-making processes.

It was noted that the annual membership subscriptions will be due during April. In the short term, it was agreed to consider an option to allow staged payments of the membership subscriptions for the subscriptions that are due to be invoiced. The Chairman would write to all members to explain this prior to the invoices being issued. As a priority, staff will explore alternative means of funding and identify any potential savings for Fisheries Management Scotland in the current financial year, in anticipation of potential cashflow issues. Where possible, these savings would be passed on to members. **ACTION: AW/BD**

### **3. Maintaining activities under the current movement restrictions**

Guidance has been issued to members, in relation to angling, and also around undertaking fisheries management activities during the lockdown, including fieldwork and enforcement activity. This guidance was shared with the Scottish Government prior to circulation, and it has been well received by members. This will be reviewed on an ongoing basis to take account of any changes to the official advice.

In terms of specific issues, the importance of ensuring that the relationship with Police Scotland is not compromised under the current restrictions was discussed, particularly in relation to core enforcement activity. It was reported that the relationship with local police seemed to be working well in many areas. There is nothing which precludes enforcement activity, providing it is done with social distancing protocols, an appropriate health and safety risk assessment and clear and ongoing communications with local police.

#### 4. Strategic review and financial review – next steps

The Chairman reported that neither review had been progressed since the last meeting. The first phase of the strategic review was complete and thought needs to be given to the next phase of the review, which relates to identifying opportunities and funding to increase capacity for Fisheries Management Scotland to deliver on behalf of our members. Whilst additional funds have been secured to employ an Aquaculture Interactions Manager, a number of other resourcing gaps were identified during the first phase of the review.

Alasdair Laing and Brian Davidson provided an update on the financial situation, including the transition to the new accountancy provider and new online financial management system. This was a much-improved system and will allow greater efficiencies of scale to be applied to staff time and financial transactions, monitoring and reporting. During 2020/21, whilst staff costs and certain office overheads are fixed, a number of savings have been identified. **ACTION: AW/BD**

It was agreed that there was merit in bringing the strategic review and financial review processes together. This will be taken forward in the coming weeks with some urgency.

**ACTION: AL/PL**

#### 5. Maintaining continuity of Fisheries Management Scotland core policy activity

##### 5.1. Aquaculture

Alan Wells and Roger Brook provided an update on the Interactions Working Group. The final two meetings were held this year, and a draft of the final report has now been completed. It is hoped that the report will be signed off for publication after Easter, but the timing of this is uncertain due to COVID-19. The proposals will reward best practice while ensuring that appropriate sanctions are available where operators fail to meet the required standards. Crucially, the new regime would put the protection of wild salmon and sea trout at the centre of regulation at a time when stocks are approaching crisis-point.

Alan highlighted the fact that local monitoring projects would not be possible under social distancing and therefore alternative projects were being discussed with Marine Scotland and Crown Estate Scotland. **ACTION: AW**

##### 5.2. Atlantic salmon pressures tool

Sean Dugan provided a progress report. The product of the project is a Geographic Information Systems web-based tool and will be available for viewing in a few weeks. This has collated an enormous amount of data provided by members, which have been themed into 12 key pressures for Atlantic salmon and mapped and prioritised by fisheries district. This will, for the first time, bring information on key pressures onto a common and easily understood platform and will contribute to informing national decision making. Due to the huge quantity of data collected in a short time period, significant quality checks have been necessary and are still underway. The final stage, which has been delayed by

the COVID-19 emergency, is the development, by Marine Scotland, of an app to support the tool. This will be included on the Fisheries Management Scotland website.

### 5.3. River Basin Management Plan 3

Alan explained that a consultation exercise is underway which will underpin the development of the next round of river basin management plans. The consultation will close in June. It was agreed to convene a small specialist group to inform the consultation response. Alison Baker, David Summers, Lorraine Hawkins and Chris Conroy agreed to assist and input from others would be invited. **ACTION: AW**

### 5.4. Salmon strategy

The timeline for this process (initially to be launched in September 2020) may suffer due to COVID-19 priorities within Scottish Government. Fisheries Management Scotland will be involved in process to develop this strategy and Alan will keep the Board apprised of developments. **ACTION: AW**

### 5.5. Enforcement

Brian provided an update. Brian and Alan have been in detailed discussions with Scottish Government about how the Animals and Wildlife (Penalties, Protections and Powers) (Scotland) Bill might be used enhance penalties for fish poaching. They also met with Mairi Gougeon, the Minister for Rural Affairs and the Natural Environment to discuss this in February. Discussions have also taken place with Claudia Beamish MSP, who raised the importance of fish conservation in the Stage 1 Parliamentary debate on 12 March. Following the debate, the Minister wrote to Fisheries Management Scotland and has committed to taking forward a separate review of criminal activity on our rivers and lochs, and to consider more appropriate penalties for offenders. This will be a joint process between Marine Scotland and Fisheries Management Scotland. Brian and Alan will keep the Board updated on this matter. **ACTION: BD/AW**

## 6. Communications

### 6.1. Annual Conference and Review

An early decision was taken to postpone our conference, and due to the current logistical difficulties of distributing the annual review, a decision was taken to distribute the review electronically in the first instance. This will also help reduce some of the production costs.

As part of the strategic review, it was suggested that the annual conference and review should be considered as part of the strategic review. The planning and delivery of the conference and review is very resource intensive and absorbs a significant proportion of staff time during the first quarter of the calendar year. Key points were:

- 2020 will give a good indication as to how the absence of the conference will be viewed;
- In assessing the role of the conference and review, the views of key audiences will be important – these are different for the review and conference;

- Further consideration of the format of both the review and conference in terms of audience expectation should be given to what is practical to produce;
- Consideration of more 'in house' input to design and production of the review;
- Whether a change to the timing/recurrence of the conference might be appropriate – i.e. bi-annual event.

These points will be considered further as part of the strategic review and the views of the membership will be sought.

## 6.2. International Year of the Salmon (IYS)

Prior to the COVID-19 emergency, Fisheries Management Scotland secured funding from IYS to support a series of films to highlight the key challenges facing Atlantic salmon and to profile the work of members in addressing these challenges. Brian provided an update on this project. Castabroad Media (Craig Somerville) has been commissioned to deliver the filming and post-production work and a brief and story board is being developed. This will provide a framework for the work and set out the key messages for both the overall project and individual films. Sandy Bremner (River Dee Trust Chair) is providing invaluable communications input to the project. Delivery of the project will be kept under review in light of potential risks arising from COVID-19 restrictions. The funders for the project have indicated that extensions and amendments to projects will be allowed under the current circumstances, and we will extend the project into 2021, which will allow filming to occur during the spring.

## 7. AOB

7.1. **Angling guidance – COVID-19** Lorraine Hawkins expressed the need to keep the guidance on angling under review. This was agreed and it will reflect revised official advice as and when that changes. It was agreed that once restrictions were eased, angling should be considered a low-risk activity that could be undertaken in a manner consistent with social distancing – this would be discussed with Marine Scotland. **ACTION: AW/BD**

7.2. **National Electrofishing Programme Scotland (NEPS)** Chris Conroy raised the potential for COVID-19 compromising the delivery of NEPS in 2020. It was recognised that delivery will be subject to COVID-19 and clarification from Marine Scotland was expected soon. Alison Baker added that some trusts had furloughed staff, and that this might make delivery of NEPS challenging. **ACTION: AW**

## 8. Dates of remaining meetings

Board 25 June

Board 9 September

AGM 4 November